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ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE STAP ROSTER OF EXPERTS

(JULY 2000 – JUNE 2001)

(Prepared by the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel)

**ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE
STAP ROSTER OF EXPERTS, FY01
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*Prepared by the STAP Secretariat
October 2001*

**STAP Secretariat
United Nations Environment Programme**

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PREFACE

It gives me great pleasure to present the *Annual Review of the STAP Roster of Experts*. This report constitutes a review of the use and management of the STAP Roster of Experts which became operational in April, 1996. The Annual Review is being undertaken consistent with the Operational Guidelines governing the use and management of the Roster.

This report was prepared by the STAP Secretariat with inputs from STAP members.

Prof. Madhav Gadgil
STAP Chairman

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The *Terms of Reference of STAP, Mandate, Composition and Role* approved by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council at its Fourth meeting in October 1995, state that “*STAP shall develop and maintain a Roster of Experts, consisting of a wide range of internationally-recognized specialists in the scientific and technical areas relevant to the GEF operations . . .*”. In establishing the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) Roster of Experts, a comprehensive participatory process was put in place to facilitate the widest possible inputs from GEF Secretariat, GEF Implementing Agencies and the wider scientific and technical community. This process culminated in 1996 with the finalization of Generic Terms of Reference (GTOR) for undertaking the Technical Review of GEF projects and Operational Guidelines for the Use and Management of the STAP Roster of Experts.

1.2 Background and Context for Annual Review FY01

The end of FY01 (June 2001) marked five years of operation of the GEF-STAP Roster of Experts which became fully operational in October 1996¹. As a part of an ongoing effort by STAP to update the Roster, an addendum was published in October 1997, bringing the total number of experts on the Roster to 423, 40 percent of whom are from developing countries. Box 1 outlines some of the main milestones in the development and enhancement of the STAP Roster of Experts since 1994.

Over its five years of operations systematic efforts have been made to develop the roster and to improve both the quality control as well as the overall management. Two significant developments in this context include the establishment of an internet website with dynamic web pages for accessing the STAP Roster data, launched in October 1999 and the Annotations² to the GTOR³ for undertaking reviews which were finalized in September 2000 and subsequently became operational.

The web site offered a wide range of new features including the possibility for experts to update the data in the CVs online, for users to conduct database searches, as well as the submission of new entries online, whereas the annotation to the generic terms of reference were a guidance tool for roster reviewers to stimulate more comprehensive reviews

¹ See GEF: STAP Roster of Experts, Version 1, Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) of the Global Environment Facility, October 1996

² The Annotation to the Generic Terms of Reference and contained in . . .

³ The Generic Terms of Reference for Technical Review of Project Proposals can be found in “GEF/STAP, STAP Roster of Experts, Version 1, October 1996 pg.5

<i>MARCH 1994</i>	<i>Endorsement of the Instrument for the Restructured GEF</i>
<i>OCTOBER 1995</i>	<i>Adoption by the GEF Council in the TOR for STAP and the Guideline for the establishment of the STAP Roster of Experts</i>
<i>NOVEMBER 1995</i>	<i>Compilation of Experts for Inclusion of the Roster building on the work of the STAP during the Pilot Phase</i>
<i>JUNE – AUGUST 1996</i>	<i>STAP approves – experts to be included in the STAP Roster of Experts</i>
<i>AUGUST 1996</i>	<i>Corporate agreement on the Operational Guidelines Governing the Use of the STAP Roster of Experts</i>
<i>OCTOBER 1996</i>	<i>STAP Roster of Experts becomes fully operational with clear TOR for undertaking Technical Reviews and Operational Guideline</i>
<i>OCTOBER 1997</i>	<i>Addendum 1 of the Roster of Experts containing 55 experts published brings the total of experts in the database to 423</i>
<i>NOVEMBER 1999</i>	<i>Establishment of internet web site with dynamic web pages for accessing the roster including search and update features. All STAP roster experts are invited to update their CV on the web site. Gaps in expertise in the current roster are identified in consultation with the users.</i>
<i>SEPTEMBER 2000</i>	<i>Annotations to the original Terms of Reference for undertaking Technical Reviews of GEF projects prepared by the STAP Secretariat are finalized. They are also available on the web site.</i> <i>The system of updating the CVs by the roster experts is made more user friendly. Updating continues. The performance evaluation questionnaire is made available on the web site.</i> <i>Ongoing process of identifying new experts through STAP's and GEF's networks.</i>
<i>MARCH 2001</i>	<i>STAP approves additional experts to be added to the Roster while at the same time deleting 71 experts in the updating process to be effective in FY02 (July 2001 – June 2002)</i>
<i>JUNE 2001</i>	<i>Five years of operation of the STAP Roster of Experts Comprehensive Evaluation by STAP on the Use of the Roster and the Review process in general</i>

Figure 1.1: Milestones in the development of the Roster

Drawing on the experiences of the last five years, STAP decided to review the use of the Roster during FY01 (June 2000 – July 2001) with the objective of streamlining and updating it. A critical component of this review is an examination of the role played by the STAP Roster of Experts in the review process and the exploration of ways and means to strengthen the process and enhance the contribution of the STAP roster reviews in the project cycle.

The process of filling the gaps in the current roster commenced in FY00 and in March 2001 the STAP reviewed the nominations received for inclusion into the Roster of Experts and approved 86 additional experts. During FY01, the STAP continued the process of streamlining the Roster of Experts as an integral part of its management. The records of STAP roster experts who deceased; who became staff members of the United Nations; who, due to retirement and/or their current workload, no longer wished to be on the roster and those whom STAP failed to contact, were removed from the roster database. With the recent addition of new experts, the current roster now contains 434 experts, and is thus slightly larger than previously. The updated and upgraded roster will also be made available in hard copy to the Implementing Agencies and GEF Secretariat.

1.3 Outline of the Annual Review for FY01

This annual review covering the period July 2000 – June 2001 analyses the use of the roster for FY01 as well as the use of the Roster of Experts by the Implementing Agencies for the last five years. It also reports on the quality of the reviews, as evaluated by the Implementing Agencies and the STAP. We also draw lessons and make a number of observations and recommendations.

The annual review also examines the review process for the review of GEF projects by the STAP Roster of Experts, consistent with its mandate as outlined in the *‘Terms of Reference of STAP – Role Mandate and Composition’* which states that *“STAP shall also advise the GEF Council on GEF technical review procedures”*. Further more, STAP is in the process of soliciting the views of the roster experts themselves on the review process, their role, and on how the use of Roster experts could be enhanced to strengthen the scientific and technical soundness of the GEF projects. To facilitate this, questionnaires have been sent to the roster experts, particularly those who have reviewed GEF projects over the past five years. The results of this survey will be reflected in a paper entitled *“Priority Activities Which STAP Should Address in Phase III of the GEF”* which is currently under preparation by STAP. The report also touches briefly on the decision of the GEF Council at its meeting in November 2000 of the need for training and orientation for new and unused experts, the response of STAP thus far and the implications of this policy decision, if it is to be effectively implemented and therefore have the necessary impact on GEF operations.

SECTION 2: ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF THE ROSTER BY THE IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES

2.1 Introduction

In accordance with the guidance provided by the GEF Council⁴, the selection of the roster expert for the mandatory review of GEF full-sized projects is undertaken by the Implementing Agencies as part of their operational responsibilities in the GEF project cycle. STAP's role lies in ensuring the scientific soundness and technical quality of GEF projects through independent reviews and objective scientific and technical advice. The analysis of the use of the roster for FY01 was greatly facilitated by the availability of electronic versions of the project documents, roster reviews and performance evaluation questionnaire.

2.2 Use of the Roster during FY01

In FY01, 50 projects were reviewed by 51 STAP roster experts⁵. These projects were divided over the four focal areas as follows: 17 in Biodiversity, 23 in Climate Change, 9 in International Waters, and 1 in OP#12. Thirteen (13) of the projects originated from the Latin American and Caribbean area, 13 from Asia, 7 from Africa, and 10 from countries with economies in transition. Five projects were global or multi-country in scope.

Thirty per cent (30%) of the reviewers used in FY01 came from developing countries, which is a slightly higher figure than in FY00 (28%). It should be noted that there were significant differences between the Implementing Agencies with respect to the use of experts from developing countries in the period under review. The ratio developing/developed countries experts ranged from 16% to 38%.

For the purpose of the review, the officially designated UN groupings were used to classify the different groups by nationality. The WEOG group which comprises Western Europe, USA and Canada accounted for 66% of experts used, compared with 16% from Asia (which includes Australia and New Zealand), 10% from Latin America and the Caribbean, and 6% from countries with economies in transition, and 2% from Africa. More experts came from Asia this year compared to previous years, and from the LAC region.

As in previous years, the trend of repeat use of Roster Experts continued in FY01. Seventy-five per cent (75%) of the experts selected to undertake reviews during FY01 were used previously by the Implementing Agencies, a figure that is considerably higher than that of 55% in previous years.

⁴ Global Environment Facility: Terms of Reference of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), Mandate, Composition and Role; GEF/C.6/Inf7, October 6, 1995, Washington, D.C.

⁵ All the figures regarding the roster use are based on the information provided by the Implementing Agencies to the STAP Secretariat.

2.3 Analysis of the Use of the Roster over the last five financial years

An analysis of the use of the STAP Roster of Experts for project reviews over the last five financial years (July 1996 – June 2001) indicates that a total of 97 experts of the 423 originally on the roster (14 were removed between 1998 and 2000, and a further 57 in 2001) reviewed 267 projects submitted to bilateral meetings. This means that approximately 76 per cent of experts have never reviewed a GEF project, when using the baseline of 409 (423 minus 14). Of the 97 roster experts used by the Implementing Agencies, 31% came from developing countries (as follows: 9 experts from the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region, 17 from Asia, 8 from Africa, and 2 from Eastern Europe and CIS countries), and 69% from the Western Europe and other Group.

The large number of unused experts should be placed in the context of the small number of projects to be reviewed annually (an average of 50) and the fact that many experts on the roster possess highly specialised skills and lack operational experience relevant to the GEF which makes them less likely candidates for project reviews.

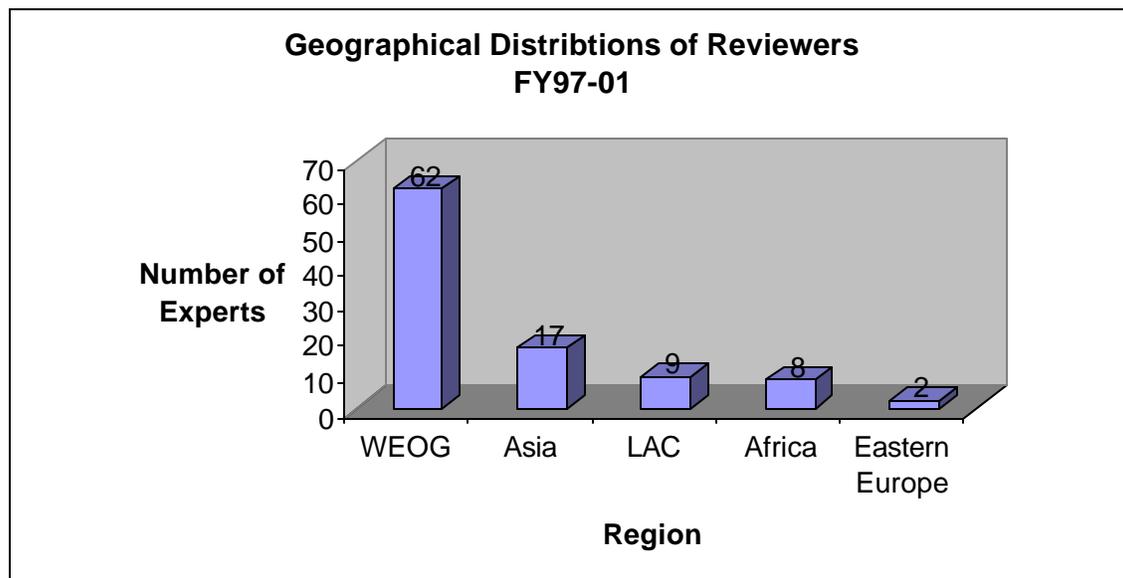


Fig. 2.2: Geographical Distribution of the Roster Reviewers (FY97- FY01)

The pattern of use of the roster experts over the past five years of operation differs between the focal areas. On an average, an expert in the Climate Change focal area is used 3.5 times (i.e. 26 experts reviewed 91 projects), in Biodiversity 2.9 times, and in International Waters 1.7 times. From the cross-cutting section of the roster only five roster experts were used over the five year period.

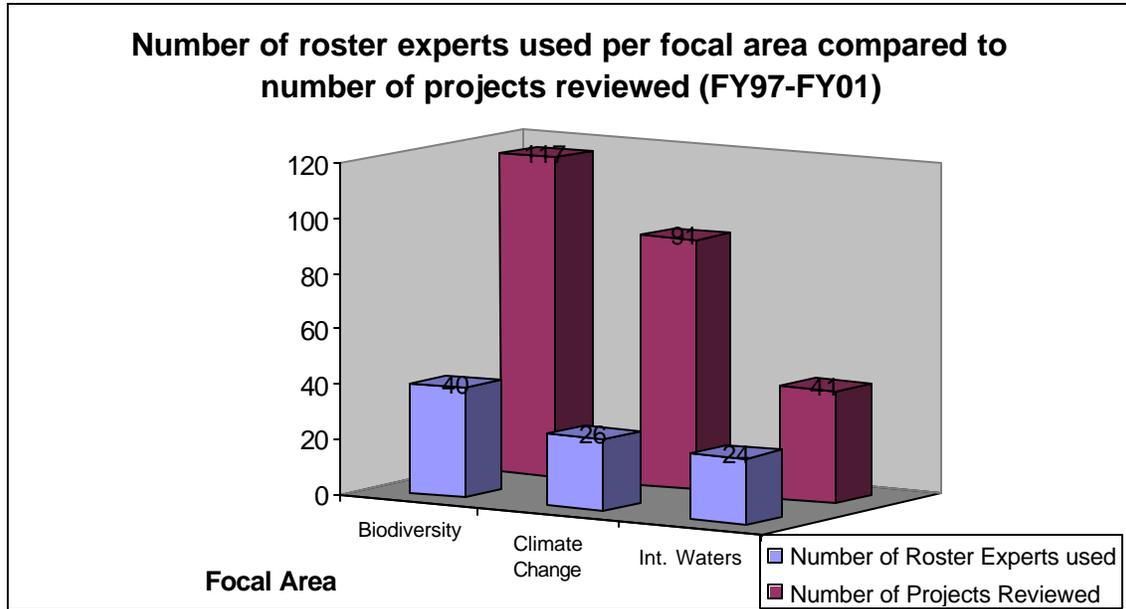


Fig. 2.3. Number of roster experts used compared to number of projects reviewed in four financial years (FY97-FY00)

Although a majority of reviews are of good to excellent quality, concerns have been expressed by STAP that the repeated use of the same experts may affect a more optional use whereby a project is reviewed by the best available expert in terms of substantive operational and geographical expertise. As spelled out in previous Annual Reviews, the unsatisfactory quality of a review is often rooted in lack of “on the ground” knowledge and lack of the necessary expertise to cover all aspects of a project. This concern is further addressed under Section 3 of the report.

SECTION 3: QUALITY ASSURANCES AND MANAGEMENT OF THE STAP ROSTER OF EXPERTS

3.1 Introduction

A quality assessment of the reviews is undertaken by both the Task Manager from the IAs and STAP members. Standard evaluation questionnaires are completed by the Task Managers and submitted to the STAP Secretariat for analysis. In addition, a review of the reviewers is undertaken by STAP members on an annual basis: they rate the reviews and make project and portfolio specific comments.

3.2 Review of the Reviewers: Issues in Relation to the Added Value and Quality of the Reviews

Many of the issues raised by STAP in FY01 have come up in previous years as well. STAP members believe it important that at least minimal detail be provided in the final project brief on how proposed models will work and how complex activities will be accomplished. Reviewers have also stressed that this information is very important to give them an opportunity to assess the potential strengths and weaknesses of the proposal. They have requested for more than general statements like “community participation will be ensured”, “local institutions will be strengthened”, or “a monitoring system will be put in place”, particularly in the case of biodiversity and IW projects. Unless some detail of the “how” is provided, and substantive technical aspects are described, the depth of a technical review is limited. STAP realizes however, that the limit set on number of pages in the project brief, and the early stage of project development are constraining the ability of the IAs to give full detail at the time of its review.

STAP also observed that in the reviews comments on the contributions and impacts made by the science and technology elements in the proposal are not necessarily adequately addressed, presumably because projects generally include little information on the science underpinning the project

Another major point raised relates to the need for the selected experts, to have, whenever possible, intimate knowledge of and familiarity with the actual ground-level situation, as well as the cultural and socio-economic realities of the specific locale and/or the geographical area where the project is being implemented. In the absence of that *in situ* knowledge and familiarity, the review is likely to lack an appreciation of the application of proposed model or technology in that specific geographical and societal context. As a consequence, recommendations and/or suggestions aimed at strengthening the project are likely to remain generic. Although the reviewers generally possess the necessary specialized technical knowledge to give an opinion on the scientific and technical aspects of a project, their knowledge of the local context is often insufficient.

STAP assessment suggests that the STAP roster reviews are performing a valuable role in the GEF project cycle. Reviews often contribute to strengthening the long-term strategy

by suggesting key changes in the approach and objectives. Overall, the quality of the reviews is rated high.

The most relevant and best reviews systematically assess the various institutional structures and tools that the project envisages and determine their suitability based on both national, regional and international experiences. They evaluate the participation of key stakeholders in detail and outline possible barriers to the proposed approaches and suggest alternative strategies that can lead to increased project impact. STAP is of the view that a review should systematically examine each of the project's planned activities to determine its relevance. The data and cost estimates should be assessed in detail and underlying assumptions examined, particularly in the climate change focal area. It is also considered important that a reviewer considers the proposed GEF intervention in the context of regional development as well as from a technical and environmental perspective. Another quality that is much valued by IAs and STAP alike is the evaluation of a project not only from an academic standpoint but also on the basis of actual experience in the field.

Other observations by STAP pertaining to the shortcomings of some of the reviews include: a lack of critical evaluation with the reviewer confining himself or herself to endorsing and complementing the project, without offering any new suggestions; not dealing properly with project risks; not investing efforts in going through a detailed analysis of the several items of the TOR; not examining the assumptions; not asking for clarifications when important ideas or plans are unclear; indulging in purely textual comments that trivialize the review.

In the biodiversity focal area STAP is concerned about the multiplicity of issues one roster expert has to deal with in these projects. This places a high demand on the one expert in covering all the aspects of the proposal ranging from the natural to the social sciences. Some projects might have benefited from a second more social-science informed review, while a few reviews had no comments on the scientific and technical aspects. Other comments related to the lack of evidence of an in-depth understanding of the ground level realities. Although a reviewer can be very familiar with problems and shortcomings of projects of this type, unfamiliarity with the particularities of the area and the populations can result in a too generic review. In the case of projects with a significant scientific and research component, a reviewer could have discharged his or her task better by pointing to results of some of the on-going scientific work that should be taken into consideration and an evaluation of the research hypotheses to ensure that they are testable.

In the climate change focal area, STAP is concerned that the reviewers do not necessarily evaluate critically enough the underlying assumptions made by the project designers. These may relate to weaknesses in project design or a lack of an adequate analysis of the economic and institutional context of the project. As emphasized in previous annual reviews, STAP also deems it important that climate change project reviewers examine the projections made in the proposal and evaluate the estimates used. A review should provide additional assessment of the underlying assumptions of the projected greenhouse

gas savings as well as the viability of proposed activities. It was felt that projects that focus on new energy technologies in particular, should be reviewed in much greater detail, and should scrutinize all technical issues. These projects tend to be complex and occasionally controversial (as in the case of the fuel cell projects) providing a good example of why a single reviewer is often not in a position to provide a sufficiently informed evaluation. It is desirable that the reviewer be given more time to review a complex project, thus allowing for consultation with his or her networks to substantiate a prospective analysis of alternative technologies and of the technology transfer mechanisms.

In order to do a thorough evaluation of a technologically innovative project proposal, the STAP recommends that the first step should be the identification of the key scientific questions raised by the proposal, including the risks associated with the technology and approach, and to make an assessment of each.

In international waters focal area, where projects are usually multi-country and often complex, STAP felt it important that a socio-economic and/or a technical analysis, complement a natural science evaluation. At present some reviewers overlooked the scientific aspects of a project while others totally left out the socio-economic aspects. STAP also emphasized the importance of adequate information on the scientific and technical basis of the proposal as a basic requirement of a scientific review.

3.3 Ratings of the Reviews

Overall, the quality of the reviews for FY01 was rated adequate to excellent by Task Managers in the Implementing Agencies, with a majority (65%) being “good”, 20% “excellent”, and 15% adequate. Ninety per cent (90%) of the climate change project reviews were rated “good” by the Implementing Agencies and 10% excellent. The biodiversity and IW focal areas exhibited more variety in their ratings: in biodiversity 45% were rated good, and 22% each excellent and adequate; in IW 60% were evaluated as good, 25% excellent and 15% adequate. The cause of the rather poor rating in the biodiversity focal area seemed to be dual: reviews that were too much focused on local social issues, which was considered to be not in the TOR of a STAP review; and a limited knowledge of the local conditions which invalidated the suggestions made in one case and which produced a too general review in another case. The IA recommended that one particular reviewer of two biodiversity projects should not be called upon again.

This year the Implementing Agencies, in particular UNDP’s Biodiversity Task Managers, devoted substantial efforts to providing comments on the quality and value of reviews, in addition to the standard ratings. STAP found the comments very insightful. While some of the comments were in line with the view of STAP, others reflect more the particular concerns of the Implementing Agencies. The most frequently made comment is that the GEF related TOR, namely the linkages with GEF’s operational strategies and programmes and the contribution to the improved definition of GEF’s strategies and policies was inadequately or not at all covered by many reviewers. The IAs felt that reviewers not fully conversant with the GEF criteria and policies have difficulty in

properly grasping what is intended in the TOR for the STAP reviews. The IAs also consider it important that the reviewer confirms the soundness of a project proposal. Some of the comments were very positive and confirmed STAP’s assessment of the added value of the reviews. In one case the IA indicated that as a result of a reviewer pointing out a lack of commitment on part of the government, the project was held back till there was a better buy in.

Only in a few cases did STAP rate a review as poor, most of them in the climate change focal area. Those were the reviews that merely endorsed the project without offering a careful analysis or scrutiny. More reviews were considered very good to excellent by the STAP, than by the IAs. Fifteen per cent (15%) were rated as just adequate or average. In 15% of the ratings there was a significant discrepancy between the rating given by the panel and by the IA. The origin of the discrepancies is difficult to gauge without specific comments by an IA to support an excellent or adequate rating. However, a lower rating by STAP is usually given for reviews that lack in critical evaluation and that merely endorse the project.

	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor
IAs (average of all focal areas)	20%	65%	15%	
STAP	75% (very good to excellent)		15%	10%

Table 3.1. Ratings by STAP and Task Managers – FY01

It may be pointed out that an analysis of the quality of the reviews reveals that the performance of the same expert as evaluated by STAP members can range from poor to excellent in case of different projects reviewed.

In response to a request by the IAs to make available information on the performance of reviewers as rated by the STAP, the STAP Secretariat has examined the best way to do so. Providing an overall rating per expert seems inappropriate given the disparity of the ratings: the evaluation can range from poor/adequate to excellent for the same reviewer. Therefore, the most appropriate way of presenting performance information is a table listing all the reviewed projects for each reviewer, and the ratings by the IAs and STAP. STAP would be happy to make this information available.

3.4 Response from the project proponents on the Reviewer’s Comments

The Implementing Agencies are required to indicate in the project document how they have responded to the reviewers’ comments and recommendations and how they will be addressed and reflected in the revised project document. Overall, the Agencies give careful consideration to the roster reviewers’ comments, indicating how the reviewer's comments were integrated into the project brief as well as how the suggestions to

improve the project will be taken into consideration at the appraisal and implementation stages.

STAP is very happy to note that over the years there has been a marked improvement in the review process, in particular in the response from the IAs to the reviews. The role of the reviewer seems to be better understood today than four years ago, and the entire process seems to be maturing. Quite naturally there are some areas where the review process can be improved. There already are good examples of exchanges between the STAP roster reviewer and project proponents throughout the project preparation phase. This has resulted in the reviewer making a valuable contribution in strengthening the scientific and technical soundness of the project. Nevertheless, unsatisfactory responses from project proponents to issues raised by reviewers occasionally do occur, often because of differing perceptions of what the focus of the review should be. In these cases, STAP felt that it would be useful to also obtain a feedback from the reviewer to the response by the IA.

3.5 Development and Management of the Roster

The management of the roster of experts encompasses a number of tasks, the majority of which are performed by the STAP Secretariat. These include updating the information contained in the roster, adding and removing experts on the roster, responding to the needs of the evolving GEF portfolio, publication of the roster, maintenance of the database held in the Secretariat, and tasks related to quality control and outreach.

In a continuing effort to streamline and update the STAP Roster of Experts, 71 experts (20 from the climate change focal area; 13 from biodiversity; 17 from international waters; 17 from cross-cutting, and 5 from Ozone) have been removed from the Roster of Experts since 1999. Although removed from the web accessible Roster database, they are nevertheless maintained in a subsidiary database that can be accessed by STAP.

In an effort to strengthen the roster and to respond to the evolving areas the GEF is addressing 86 new experts have been added to the Roster database. The process of filling the gaps included the solicitation of nominations through the Panel and its networks, global and regional scientific and technical networks, institutions, the Implementing Agencies and the GEF Secretariat. The selection of the experts was done in accordance with the criteria set out in the Operational Guidelines of the roster. Great care was taken to choose experts with profiles that meet the needs of GEF. Approximately 50% of the newly selected experts come from developing countries.

In March 2001, the STAP screened and selected experts in the following areas, agrobiodiversity, biosafety, carbon sequestration, coral reefs, fisheries, dryland biodiversity, sustainable use of forests, transboundary issues associated with pesticides and freshwater, integrated land and water management and transport, along with additional experts in renewable energy. We still need additional experts in areas such as regulatory frameworks, energy policy, power sector reform and utilities. The Panel and

the Implementing Agencies also expressed the need to include experts with experience in the social aspects of projects.

Although many CVs were received from biodiversity experts, the panel decided to add only a few experts with expertise in agrobiodiversity (4) and biosafety (4). It was felt that there is a sufficient number (124) of biodiversity experts on the roster, with many so far unused by the IAs (84).

In the Climate Change focal area which had 107 experts since the removal of outdated CVs, 30 experts were selected, with expertise ranging from technology development, RETs, energy policy, power sector reform and adaptation. Although only 26 experts were used in the last 5 years, a high percentage of the unused experts have a climate change research orientation, which is less in demand than the renewable energy, energy efficiency or energy policy type of expertise.

In International Waters with 68 experts, STAP selected an additional 20 experts, with expertise covering fisheries, coral reefs, freshwater and integrated land and water management. In addition 10 scientists with expertise in POPs were selected.

The panel also selected eighteen (19) natural and social scientists with a land and natural resource management orientation, to add to the “cross-cutting” section of the roster, which had 44 experts. It is expected that this “underused” section of the roster will be increasingly drawn upon for OP#12 type of projects.

The table below lists the numbers of experts in all focal areas, before and after the new experts were added.

Focal Area	Number of experts in updated roster	Number of new experts added	Total Number of Experts (revised roster)	Number of Experts removed
Biodiversity	124	10	134	18
Climate Change	107	30	137	15
International Waters	68	30 (10 of which in POPs)	98	17
Cross Cutting Issues	44	19	63	14
Ozone	8	nil	8	7

Table 2. Number of experts in the roster per focal area before and after the addition of the new experts.

In order to facilitate the continuous strengthening and updating of the roster to keep pace with the evolving areas to be addressed by the GEF, it is important that the users of the roster provide feedback to STAP on its weaknesses and shortcomings, as well as on all issues related to use and quality. One such feedback relates to the selection of roster experts, not only on the basis of fields of relevance to the GEF, but also on relevant operational, country or regional experience, thus ensuring a balance between academic credentials and practical field experience. STAP has taken this concern expressed by the IAs on board.

A feature which has enhanced the management of the STAP Roster of Experts is its accessibility via the STAP web site, its dynamic web pages allows one to browse and search the experts database. Experts are encouraged to update the data in their CVs on-line, while the database integrity is being protected by a security system whereby the STAP Secretariat first approves and edits the changes made in the CV before it overwrites the old data. The web site also facilitates the submission of new CVs on-line, which are kept in the database till they are approved and ready for publishing.

The selection of experts to review a project is facilitated by the possibility to conduct database searches on the basis of sub-focal area, fields of expertise, countries and geographical area of expertise. With the increased use of the “fields of expertise” search to match a project with a reviewer, a number of shortcomings and inconsistencies became apparent. A new coherent system is being proposed of on one hand “academic” disciplines reflecting the current new developments in academic subjects and on the other a more “environmental and sustainable development” based categorization reflecting the evolving OP structure. This complementary approach would allow experts to identify themselves with both their academic background and research through the academic disciplines whilst the more GEF-aligned environmental issues type of search will make it easier to match a real-world expertise with a GEF demand.

3.6 Outreach to STAP Roster of Experts

Information packages are being developed to be sent out to new experts to inform them of the GEF, STAP and their role as reviewers of GEF project proposals, as part of the outreach activities of STAP. Reviews that have been categorised as ‘excellent’ by both the STAP and the IAs will be included in the information packages. In addition, a newsletter is under preparation with information on the experience with the roster in the current phase of the GEF, the review process, the evolution of the roster and the expectations GEF has from roster experts. In the newsletter the experts are also being asked for their views on the review process and how it could be enhanced. More specifically those experts that have been used for reviews by the IAs have been sent a questionnaire asking more specific questions on their experience of reviewing projects for GEF. Their feedback would complete the picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the review process and how it could be enhanced.

SECTION 4: LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE: ENHANCING THE ROLE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

4.1 The Review Process

STAP believes that there has been a marked improvement in the review process over the years, in particular in terms of the response from the IAs to the reviews. The role of the reviewer seems to be better understood today than four years ago, and the entire process seems to be maturing. The feedback from the exercises of assessment are reassuring and suggest that the STAP roster reviews are performing a valuable role in the GEF project cycle. Reviews often contribute to strengthening the long-term strategy by suggesting key changes in the approach and objectives. Overall, the quality of the reviews is rated high by both STAP members and the Project Managers. But, of course, there is no room for complacency, and the comments from within the GEF community point to a number of issues that would repay a closer scrutiny. It is most appropriate therefore that we further explore ways and means to strengthen the process and enhance the contribution of the STAP roster reviews in the project cycle.

While, by and large the engagement of the roster expert has been restricted to an evaluation of the project brief just prior to its submission to the Council, there have been excellent examples of exchanges and dialogue between reviewer and project proponents and Implementing agencies throughout the development phase leading to thorough, critical but constructive reviews and strengthening the scientific and technical soundness as well as the overall quality of the project.

- (i) However, much of the time, the reviewer is given little time to undertake the review. In order to minimize any uncertainty about the quality and acceptability of a review, there is naturally a tendency to use a known expert, so much so that this year 75% of the reviewers were from amongst those already used earlier. Around 70% of these came from the developed world, and this is likely to be related to the observation that the uneven quality of the reviews is often rooted in insufficient knowledge of the institutional and socio-economic reality of the country/region where the GEF intervention is being implemented. Another potential cause of the uneven quality of the reviews is the difficulty for a single reviewer doing justice to all aspects of a complex project or one involving innovative technologies.
- (ii) In view of the fact that a large number of experts have not been and most likely will never be used, IA's and STAP have considered the need to further prune the roster. However, removing experts though is a task which cannot be undertaken without criteria to do so. The operational guidelines of the roster provide no other criteria for removal than poor performance. Since most of the experts cannot be called upon to perform, it is impossible to assess their performance. Moreover, a large number of the unused experts on the roster possess valuable but very specialized skills and expertise that may still be used in cases where a more technically specialized opinion is required. Examples are experts in taxonomy and climatology, two areas of expertise the GEF rarely draws upon.

- (iii) Another important issue highlighted by the OPS2 team is that GEF has so far done little to engage developing country scientific networks in its project cycle. GEF is also very conscious of the desirability of contributing to development of capacity in the recipient countries, and of mobilizing the wider scientific community to participate in its activities. The engagement of STAP roster experts in the GEF project cycle can offer valuable opportunities of addressing these concerns.
- (iv) STAP's expectations of the review process can be summarized as follows: the review should add a critical evaluation, a systematic assessment, and concrete suggestions to improve a project; the selection of the reviewer should be based on the CV that takes into account the geographical and substantive expertise; and the reviewer should be offered a reasonable amount of time for his engagement, preferably beginning at an early stage in the project design. STAP would therefore like to suggest. This would require that GEF must apply itself to the question of overcoming the "GEF exposure barrier", which has been identified by the IAs as a major constraint in extending the use of the Roster.

4.2 Orientation of STAP Roster of Experts

The GEF Council, at its meeting in November 2000 agreed that a GEF orientation should be provided to roster experts, especially those who have been newly added to the roster or who have not so far participated in a STAP review. The STAP Chairman, in his statement to the GEF Council in November 2000, suggested that consideration should be given to allocating resources for STAP, in collaboration with scientific and technical networks, to undertake the task of providing a GEF orientation to roster experts. In this regard, a critical assessment of the STAP module in GEF Country Dialogue Workshops should be undertaken with the view of determining the efficacy of this modality in achieving the objective as defined by the GEF Council.

On its own initiative UNDP (India) organized a series of 4 two-day GEF awareness workshops with substantial participation of existing and potential STAP roster experts, working closely with STAP chair. This was a most rewarding experience, and GEF needs to consider seriously the possibilities of a more substantive programme in this context. STAP is of the view that such an orientation could be provided more effectively and efficiently on a regional basis, and where appropriate on a country basis.

The orientation sessions could be structured to train the roster experts in providing reviews that add maximum value to the project cycle, i.e. reviews that assess the possible deficiencies of the proposal, evaluate the risks and constraints of the proposed approach, provide suggestions on how to enhance the scientific and technical dimensions of the project and bring to bear recent knowledge of the situation on the ground. Although the training would comprise a "GEF orientation" segment, the sessions would focus on the role of the technical review by roster experts in the project cycle, and in ensuring the scientific and technical soundness of GEF projects. Working sessions are proposed

where roster experts write reviews of existing projects following the GTOR and the focal area-specific annotations, and discuss them in working groups.

The expected outcome of the GEF/STAP orientation sessions would be an increased awareness on part of new, never used and potential STAP roster experts of the GEF and their role in the project review process and in STAP. Implementing Agencies would then be more confident in selecting experts who are new or have not been used before, resulting in the widening of the pool of expertise GEF draws upon for the independent review of all its project proposals in GEF. This would contribute to an enhancement of the quality of the reviews as more experts would be selected on the basis of their expertise and local knowledge. As pointed out in the Annual Reviews of FY98 and FY99, the uneven quality of the reviews is often rooted in insufficient knowledge of the institutional and socio-economic reality of the country/region where the GEF intervention is being implemented, and the inability of the reviews to cover all aspects of the project, especially in case of highly complex projects. In addition, the orientation session would be a concrete step in building relationships with national scientists and scientific institutions in recipient countries, which would further strengthen the S & T base of the GEF programmes.

STAP has also stressed the need to consider the possibility of engaging more than one expert in the review of the more complex and innovative projects. In such a case it might be desirable to ensure that: (i) at least one of them comes from developing countries (ii) engagement could be over an extended period, not just a one time assessment (iii) expert can bring on board other knowledgeable colleagues if the project review requires specific knowledge and information the reviewer does not possess (iv) the expert may work with his/her scientific networks to bring in the necessary scientific and technological opinions. In considering these options, due attention will need to be paid to the transaction costs, the value added as well as the existing system for the evaluation of projects in the Implementing Agencies. In addition, it would be desirable for engagement over an extended period be informed by “good” practices.

In examining the question of how to enhance the project review process, STAP had the opportunity to draw on lessons learnt from the French GEF experience while recognising the differences between the institutions, the experience of the French GEF provides valuable lessons from which the GEF can draw. After an initial period of asking the scientific committee to evaluate the scientific and technical soundness of finalized projects, the French GEF made two changes. The first was to let the evaluation take place at an earlier stage in order to allow the Implementing Agencies to adapt the project design according to the observations made by the Scientific and Technical Committee. However, at the early stage of a draft proposal, it is even more difficult to critically assess the proposed approaches and methods, because of the lack of detailed information at that stage. Consequently, the French Committee abandoned the “assessment” objective, and adopted an approach whereby a list of scientific and technical questions is presented that it identifies as key issues to ensure the success of the project. This early evaluation allows the Implementing Agents to adapt the project design in view of the observations made. After the finalization of the project document, these key issues provide a set of indicators

against which an evaluation can be made on how the issues identified earlier were addressed.

The difference with the French GEF is that the project review is done by their scientific panel given the small number of projects submitted every year. The panel member is however, faces the same difficulties: limited information at the earlier stage of project development and complex projects that require a range of expertise. Once the key issues have been identified, the expert organizes a consultative process, looking for more specialized skills to cover all aspects of the project. After the review is completed, the committee expert may be drawn upon for clarification of additional specific advise.

A similar process may be adapted to the institutional context and procedures of the GEF giving an opportunity to a greater involvement of the wider scientific community, while keeping the responsibility for the review, and thus the predictability of its quality, in the hands of one or two reviewers.

The STAP web site address is: <http://stapgef.unep.org/>