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**ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE STAP ROSTER OF EXPERTS, FY02
(JULY 2001-JUNE 2002)**

(Prepared by the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel)

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*Prepared by the STAP Secretariat
October 2002*

**STAP Secretariat
United Nations Environment Programme**

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.

Julia Carabias
STAP Chair

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1. Introduction

The Annual Review of the STAP roster of experts is produced at the end of each GEF financial year in accordance with the Operational Guidelines of the Roster established in 1996. The purpose of the review is to provide information about and an analysis of the roster and the review process with the view to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the review process and to make recommendations about the roster, including the filling gaps in expertise and the use of the roster.

Two main inputs form the basis for the review: the “review of the reviewers” by STAP members, and the evaluations by the Implementing Agencies (IAs). In addition, the use of the roster is analyzed and commented on, and updates on the management of the roster are reported.

The Annual Review for FY02 is the first review prepared on the basis of inputs of STAP III, which started its mandate in July 2002. However, the findings and conclusions drawn by STAP II, resulting from 4 years of reviews and analyses, were taken into account by the new panel.

The key issues of improving the review system and enhancing the utility of the roster are not addressed here, as they are the subject of a discussion paper submitted at the first meeting of STAP with the view to finalize the STAP proposals for the May 2003 Council meeting.

2. Size and Composition of the Roster FY97-2002

The STAP roster of experts was established in 1996¹, and became operational in the second half of FY97, comprising 368 experts, 37% of which were from GEF eligible countries. The roster was divided in five sections, according to focal area and with the addition of a small “cross-cutting” section to fulfill GEF’s needs for expertise in land degradation, geography/planning, anthropology and social sciences. In 1997, STAP made an effort to increase the percentage of developing country experts in the roster by specifically seeking nominations from developing country institutions. With an addition of 55 experts, the total number of experts was brought up to 423, 40% of which were from developing countries.

In response to the evolving needs of the GEF, particularly in the POPs, biosafety and agrobiodiversity areas, and also in an effort to strengthen intensively used areas of expertise, STAP added another 76 new experts in March 2000, 50% of which were coming from developing countries.

Due to natural attrition, being joining one of the Implementing Agencies or STAP, death, or loss of contact because of a change of address and in some cases the request to be

¹ See the Operational Guidelines of the Roster, approved by the Council in 1996 for the criteria for inclusion in the Roster. Nominations are screened by STAP members taking into account the criteria for inclusion, and the need to fill gaps and strengthen the roster.

removed, the roster has not increased in size with the two addendums. Between 1997 and 1998, 14 experts were removed, and following a major updating exercise in 1999, an additional 71 records were deleted from the roster database between 2000 and 2001. Furthermore, another 35 experts were removed following a revision of the roster after the 10th meeting of STAP in February 2002, which had recommended the removal of experts lacking in project and or developing country experience or possessing very narrow specializations less relevant for the GEF. As a result, the roster at the beginning of the third phase of the GEF contains 379 experts, which is less than in 1997. Figure 1 shows the change in size of the roster since 1996 .

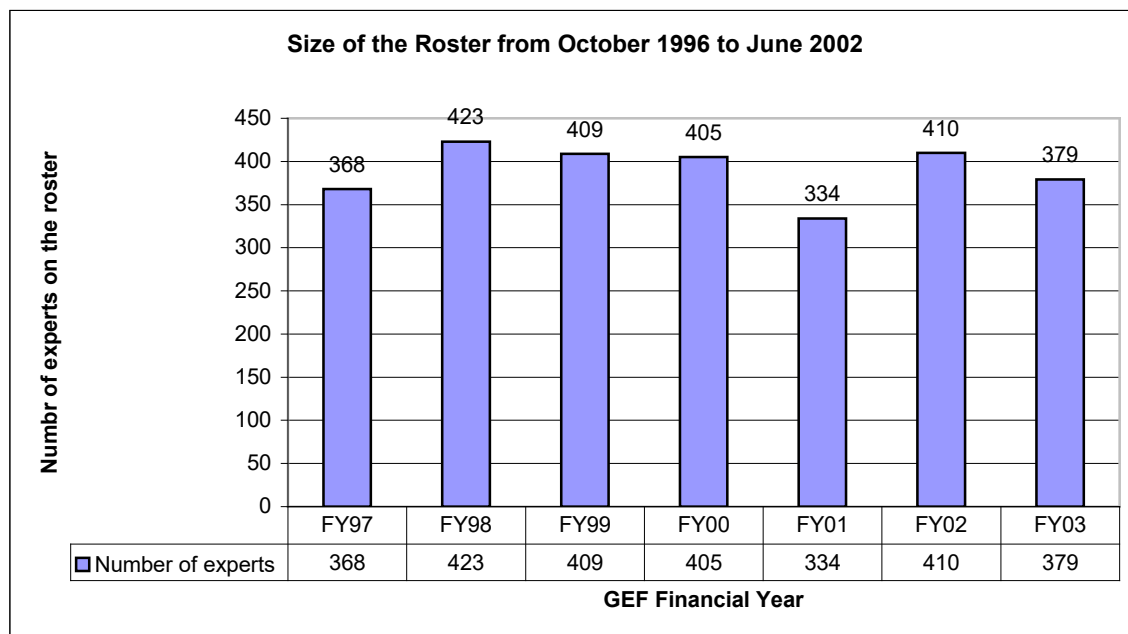


Fig. 1 Evolution of the size of the roster since 1996.

Of the 379 experts currently on the roster, 44% are from developing countries.

At the outset the largest section of the roster was the biodiversity one, followed by climate change, international waters and cross-cutting issues. Since June 2002, the climate change section contains the highest number of experts, and the international waters share has increased, with the addition of POPs and integrated land and water management experts, reflecting the shift in priorities of the GEF.

Climate Change	Biodiversity	International Waters	Cross Cutting	Ozone
29%	24%	23%	11%	3%

Table 1. Distribution of experts over the different sections of the roster in June 2002.

Despite the fact that efforts were made to solicit nominations for biosafety and POPs experts, the roster still needs strengthening in those areas. There is also a need to add more adaptation, transport and agrobiodiversity experts.

Furthermore, the Council asked STAP to consider including experts with indigenous and traditional knowledge. Initial steps were undertaken to respond to this request and STAP III was asked to further pursue the issue.

Pruning of the roster is addressed in detail in the STAP Discussion Paper on “Improving the Review System and Enhancing the Utility of the Roster”, which contains preliminary recommendations for consideration at the first meeting of STAP III on 26-28 September 2002. The final recommendations of STAP will be reviewed and adopted at the second STAP III meeting to be held in March 2003 with a view of submitting STAP recommendations for Council review at its May 2003 meeting.

3. Use of the roster in FY02

Fifty (50) experts reviewed sixty seven (67) projects in FY02; 26 in biodiversity, including biosafety, 24 in climate change, 10 in International Waters, 1 in Ozone, and 6 in integrated ecosystem management.

Of the fifty experts, sixteen (16) were not used before, including five (5) of the second addendum added at the beginning of FY02. One special request was made for the review of a biosafety project, to use an expert not on the roster. Twenty eight (28) % were from developing countries. As anticipated, the development of projects under OP#12 is leading to an increased use of experts in the cross-cutting section of the roster. In addition, roster experts with experience in adaptation to climate change were used in this financial year.

The total number of experts on the roster used for reviews since FY97 is now hundred thirteen (113). They reviewed 334 project proposals.

STAP is stressing again the importance of bringing to bear on GEF projects the scientific and technical opinions of a wide range of experts, as opposed to a small pool of familiar and heavily used experts. It is STAP's view that the GEF project review would benefit from new experts to bring new ideas and the latest scientific findings and knowledge to the project cycle.

4. Evaluation of the Quality of the Reviews in FY02

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 compilation and analysis. In addition, a “review of the reviewers” is undertaken by STAP members on an annual basis, whereby the reviews are rated and their quality, relevance and comprehensiveness commented on. In addition STAP members may draw overall conclusions with regard to the quality of the reviews in their focal area.

4.1 Review of the Reviewers by STAP

Approximately 60% of the reviews were rated as good to very good by STAP and about 15% were considered as excellent, setting standards for other reviews. Twelve % (12) were rated adequate or fair. A poor to very poor rating was given to another 12% of reviews.

Many of the issues raised by STAP are not new and were already brought to GEF's attention in Annual Reviews of the Roster.

The question of the need for more than general statements regarding approaches and models proposed in the project documents was pointed out again. Unless some detail of the "how" is provided, and substantive technical aspects are described, a reviewer is limited to raising general findings regarding the approach taken in the proposal. 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 provide more details.

The lack of the substantive review of the scientific and technical soundness of the proposals was commented on, and the need for more analysis on the scientific and technical aspects of the projects was stressed. In this context it was observed that reviews should address whether the proposal gave sufficient information about scientific components and rational for the activities and how the absence of crucial statistics and data may affect the project implementation.

Another observation is that reviewers rarely cover both the scientific and socio-economic aspects equally well, resulting in reviews that either neglect the scientific aspects or the socio-economic dimensions.

Another shortcoming of some reviews is their lack of location-specific references and recommendations, because of the reviewer not being fully knowledgeable about the implementation conditions, leading STAP to recommend that in so far as possible, to select a reviewer with experience in the country/region where the project will be implemented.

Some reviews were found too positive, contributing little to improve the scientific quality of the project proposal.

The reason for the poor rating of some of the reviews originated in falling short of recommending substantial changes prior to approval, being superficial and failing to raise critical weaknesses and omissions. In once case STAP found it difficult to rate a review of 1,5 pages for a project with a total cost of 50 to 90 million, and expressed the hope that it was based on an in-depth analysis and extensive preparatory discussions. In once case STAP recommended that one reviewer of a biodiversity project not be used anymore.

Generic comments on the Biodiversity projects and reviews

STAP felt that the scientific content of the project proposals is minimal, often amounting to no more than general references to the biodiversity of the target area. STAP had

expected a far sharper synthesis of biodiversity values and systems to evaluate changes to these. The absence of such technical detail seems not to have been tackled in any of the reviews – perhaps it is assumed that such detail would not form part of the project concept document.

It is nevertheless of concern that GEF proposals within the Biodiversity Focal Area contain so little about the biodiversity goals and measures of these which form the primary rationale for the project's existence. Most of the proposals have more detailed discussion on issues of stakeholder participation, sustainable livelihoods, capacity building, international support, etc., than they have about the target species and ecosystems to be conserved. While the need for a firm socio-economic foundation to biodiversity conservation is clear, one is, in several of the proposals, left wondering whether the proposal, and its reviewer, have “lost the plot”.

Local or at least regional knowledge of the target areas of proposals is ideal, if not essential, and although this was not an evident weakness in the reviews, a second opinion by a local specialist should be mandatory where reviewers are not familiar with the local situation – however excellent they might be in the general discipline. Furthermore, knowledge of the situation on the ground might help to ensure a “reality check” on some of the more optimistic expectations of certain of the projects. The Mali project, and that in Algeria, seem to have set rather high hopes on increased eco-tourism, socio-political stability, increased biodiversity from improved range management systems, etc. Are any of these realistic?

Finally, there is a dilemma in the project proposal having to provide adequate detail on methodology or processes of consultation, plus covering all the elements required by GEF, and meeting requirements of brevity. Proposals of greater than 100 pages become excessively weighty, yet even this length might not be sufficient to describe the “how” as well as the “what”. So the balance between comprehensiveness and economy is a difficult challenge.

Generic Comments on the Climate Change projects and reviews

The importance of familiarity of the regional/national implementation conditions was emphasized.

As in previous years, STAP has again pointed out the role of the reviewer to verify assumption made in the project, to assess the risks, and give recommendations how they could be minimized.

In evaluating the review of a wind power project, STAP felt that the reviewer should have raised the issue of which framework conditions and incentive schemes are needed to establish a sustained wind power market and manufacturing industry.

Generic comments on the International Waters projects and reviews

It should be mandatory for all IW projects to include a brief section on *data needs assessment and availability*, since lack of data can seriously jeopardize the delivery of

projects. It is the responsibility of the STAP Reviewer to raise this as an issue, so that a clear response might be elicited from the proponent.

It is not possible to properly evaluate the effectiveness of the tasks proposed for achieving the objective, when the details are sketchy and generally vague. It will require much more than simply statements such as “review gaps in national legislation..”, “implement effective regional EIA processes”, “assist countries in developing realistic National Plan of Action...”, etc, if measurable progress is to be achieved. STAP reviewers should therefore request pertinent details and further insights into the thinking behind these vague and general statements.

STAP is also concerned very often the scientific methodologies are not described in the project document.

Another general area of concern not adequately addressed in some reviews is the availability of data required to implement a project. The implicit assumption that underpins proposals is that adequate information exists for the execution of all project components, including the design and execution of the representative demonstration projects. It would therefore be helpful to include some assessment of key data needs, as a means of reassuring the evaluation team that data availability is not a serious constraint.

Another unexplored issue is the desirability of evaluating the efficacy of local, indigenous knowledge, solutions and technologies.

4.2. Performance Evaluation by the Implementing agencies

It is the responsibility of Implementing Agencies task managers and programme officers to complete the standard evaluation form for each review. Information on conflict of interest must be disclosed on the form, and ratings are to be given for all the TOR. IAs are also encouraged to provide general comments on the reviews, and the review process.

In FY02 55% of the reviews were rated as excellent; 37% as good; 5 % as adequate and 3% as inadequate.

As in previous years, the IAs ratings indicated that the GEF-related aspects are the least well covered in the reviews.

One agency recommended that one reviewer on the roster not be used anymore for review of dryland projects.

From the comments made by task managers it appears that IAs appreciate thorough reviews by technically well-versed experts who also have a good understanding of socio-economic and political contexts.

It should also be noted that projects sometimes undergo thorough internal peer reviews in the IAs.

In one case, the task manager made the suggestion in the evaluation to consider if a panel of experts can provide continued advice and consultation during project implementation for a number of similar projects in the African region.

5. Impact and effectiveness of the review process

From the reading of this and previous annual reviews it is clear that, after 6 years of "review of the reviews", STAP has exhausted all the generic issues that can be raised with regard to the reviews and the review system.

It is equally clear that the thorough reviews by STAP have no impact on the project quality, because they are conducted *post-factum*, and because they do not have a role in the project cycle. In fact, the reviews seem to be merely beneficial for the STAP members themselves, at least for the first year, as it serves as a useful introduction to the nature and process of the GEF project system.

STAP remarked that it is necessary to study the individual proposals in some detail before evaluating the reviews, which draws one into commenting on the proposal rather than the review – separating the two is at times difficult.

STAP is therefore questioning its task of review of the review, and seeks to provide more useful inputs in the project cycle than is currently the case.

In the Discussion Paper on the review system and the roster, STAP has put forward a proposal to make its role more meaningful and useful, and has also addressed the role of the roster review in the project cycle. In addition the evaluation of the reviewers by the IAs is addressed.

6. Response to the questionnaires sent to reviewers used between FY97 and FY01

In order to support STAP's analysis of the roster review process, questionnaires sent out by the STAP Secretariat to all experts used between FY97 and FY01 to obtain feedback from the reviewers. The questionnaire consisted of factual, open and neutral questions regarding the time, guidance, TOR, timing, IA feedback and STAP guidance for undertaking project reviews. It also asked their views on the review process in general and how it could be improved to add more value to the GEF project cycle. The response rate was nearly 60% with a majority of intensively used experts having sent back their responses.

The findings from the responses can be summarized as follows:

1. A high variance exists in the notice given to a reviewer, and one reviewer usually has different experiences. In about half the cases a notice of less than one week was given. Most reviewers feel that more lead time should be given in order to allow for consultation and researching specific issues.

2. A high variance exists in the type of guidance received from the IA. Most “experienced” reviewers are satisfied with the guidance. However, they are uncertain about the impact and value of the review and indicated that they would appreciate feedback from the IAs on what is most useful in STAP reviews.
3. Most reviewers are of the view that the potential difficulty to cover all aspects of a project depends on the scope and complexity of the project and on the experience of the reviewer. More than 50% of the reviewers find that one expert cannot cover all aspects with equal competence and use the option of obtaining an opinion from networks when they have enough time to do so before the deadline for submitting their review to the IA.
4. The timing of the review is often perceived as very late in the cycle, when “the project is cast in stone”, as an “afterthought”. Reviewers feel it is “squeezed in”; it “puts extreme pressure” on the reviewer; and it is experienced as “rushed and cramped”. Some reviewers suggested a two-stage/stepwise approach consisting of an initial assessment at the concept stage before the project is cast in stone, followed by a later evaluation as this may lead to better quality projects
5. The majority of experts feel that feedback on their review by the IAs should be made a standard practice. They would feel more valued and they would better understand their role in the project cycle.
6. Expectations from STAP: a small majority feels that examples of good reviews would be helpful for reviewers. Very few responses were received about the value of the annotations to the TOR. The STAP web is found comprehensive but suggestions were made to add a list of all reviews and news on the latest development in GEF and STAP.

The feedback received from reviewers was taken into account in STAP’s proposal to improve the review process.

7. Management of the Roster

In response to the demand by the IAs and some reviewers, in particularly those who have no prior GEF review experience, the STAP Secretariat made available on its web site examples of very good reviews.

Furthermore, the roster was again updated, and CVs removed as a result of pruning following agreed upon criteria.

In order to further strengthen the utility of the roster, STAP members will be asked to review the roster in their area of expertise with the view to make recommendations on further pruning and strengthening of the roster.

A revised roster will be published in hard copy in FY04.