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## ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE STAP ROSTER OF EXPERTS, FY98 (JULY 1997 – JUNE 1998)

[Prepared by the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP)]

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STAP ROSTER OF EXPERTS, FY98  
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*Prepared by the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel  
September, 1998*

**STAP Secretariat  
United Nations Environment Programme**

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### **1. Introduction**

1. The STAP Roster of Experts has been operational since FY 1997. In October 1997, Addendum 1 of the Roster of Experts, containing 55 experts, was published, bringing the total number of experts on the Roster to 423. In the selection of experts for the Addendum, particular emphasis was placed on increasing the number of experts from developing countries as well as experts in the applied science and economics. As a consequence, 60% of the experts contained in Addendum 1 of the Roster are from developing countries. This brought the overall share of developing countries' experts in the Roster to 40%. In addition to being available in a hard copy format, an electronic version of the Roster is also available on the World Wide Web, as part of the UNEP home page at <http://www.unep.org/>.
2. In addition to experts in the various areas of specialization relevant to the GEF, the Roster also contains the general criteria for their inclusion in the Roster as well as the generic Terms of Reference (TOR) for technical reviews to ensure standardization. Moreover, to ensure the highest quality of the review, a "review of the reviewer" is undertaken annually, consisting of two main phases: an evaluation by the Implementing Agencies (IAs) as well as by the STAP Panel. This report constitutes the annual review of the use of the STAP Roster of Experts for FY98 (July 1997 to June 1998) by STAP, supported by its secretariat at UNEP.
3. The annual review of the Roster for FY97 focused mainly on the composition of the roster and its use by the Implementing Agencies, from a geographical perspective, and to the adherence to the standardized Terms of Reference for the reviews. This year's review analyses the experience of the use of the Roster, identifying gaps and progress, and suggesting ways to enhance the quality of the reviews and to improve the user-friendliness and management of the Roster.

## **2. Analysis of the Use of the Roster by the Implementing Agencies**

### **2.1 Projects Reviewed During FY97**

4. In accordance with the guidance given by the GEF Council<sup>1</sup>, the selection of the Roster expert for project review is undertaken by the Implementing Agencies as part of their operational functions in the GEF project cycle. STAP's Terms of Reference and the GEF Project Cycle mandate that all project documentation for submission to the GEF work programme be copied to STAP, which records the selected experts, their nationality and use in the past, and compares their expertise with the expertise required to review the project.
5. During FY 1998, 46 reviewers reviewed 45 projects, 4 of which were not recommended for inclusion in the work programme. The 45 projects were divided over the four focal areas as follows: 19 in Biodiversity, 15 in Climate Change, 7 in International Waters, 3 in Ozone and 1 Cross Cutting (Figure 1). One biodiversity project had as its focus the land degradation/biodiversity interface.

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<sup>1</sup> See Terms of Reference of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), Mandate, Composition and Role approved by the GEF Council in October 1995.

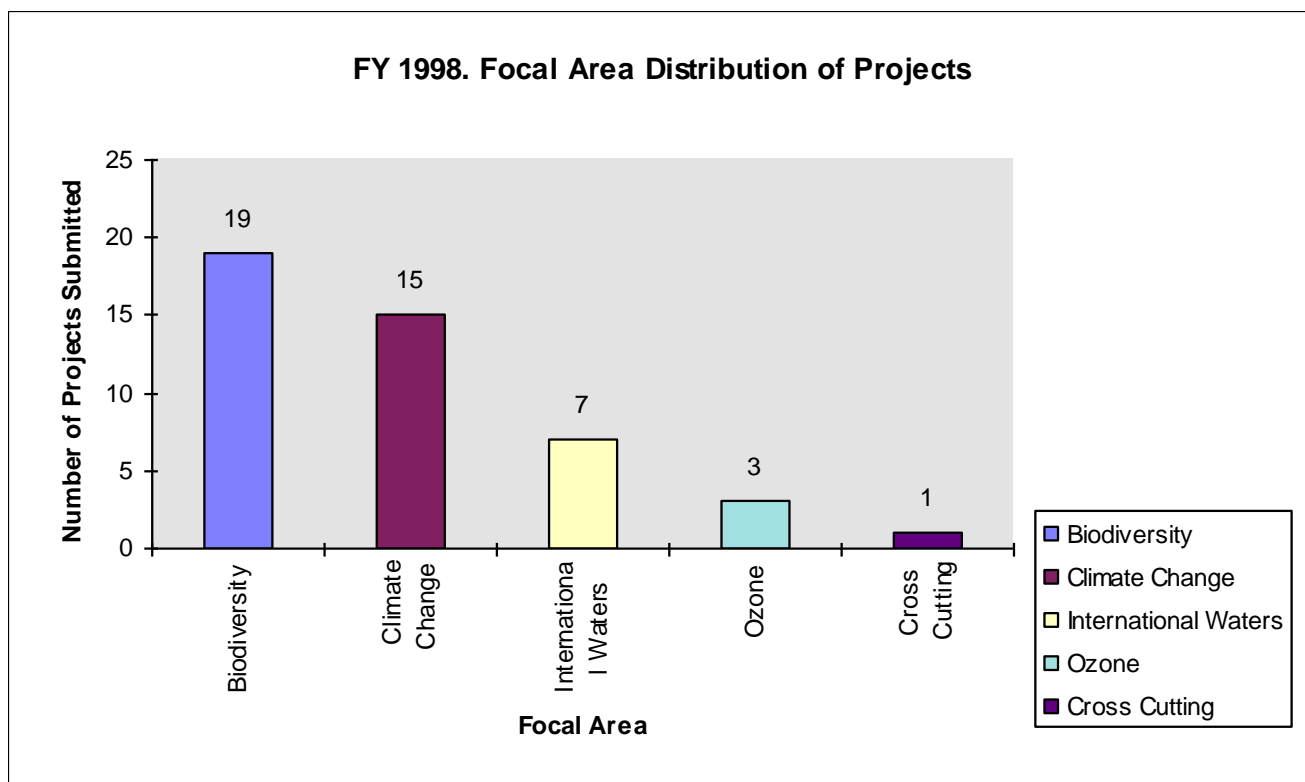


Figure 1. Focal Area Distribution of Projects Submitted in FY98.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.2. Geographical Distribution of Roster Experts

6. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the origin of the reviewers in FY98. As in FY97, the main country of origin of the reviewers was USA, followed by UK. The region with the highest number of reviewers was North America, (Canada 1, USA 14) followed by Europe (UK: 7, Sweden: 2, France: 2; Norway: 1, Netherlands: 1), Latin America: 3 and Africa: 3. In Figure 2, UK has been treated separately from Europe because of the high number of reviewers with this nationality, while Australia (2 reviewers) was aggregated with Europe. Overall, 79% of the reviewers in FY98 came from developed countries, as compared with 18% from developing countries.
7. The analysis for FY98 when compared with that of FY97 with respect to the origin of the reviewers (see Figure 3) shows a similar predominance of North American based reviewers (40%) and the repeated use of the some reviewers in the course of the financial year. This has been drawn to the attention of the Implementing Agencies. Part of the explanation given by the IAs is that nearly 25% of the experts on the roster are either a national of or based in North America. It is hoped that with the inclusion of 55 new experts in October 1997, the majority of which came from developing countries, the IAs will have access to a larger pool of non-American experts.

<sup>2</sup> Of 3 reviewers come not from the Roster, the nationality was not disclosed. Of 5 others no information was received from the Implementing Agencies.

8. Three reviewers, who reviewed three climate change projects, were not on the Roster. It is not clear why the Implementing Agencies chose experts not on the Roster since the expertise required for the reviews appears to be available on the Roster. STAP recommends that disclosure of names of reviewers to STAP before the bilateral reviews become standard procedure and that clarification be provided if a non-Roster expert is selected for a review.

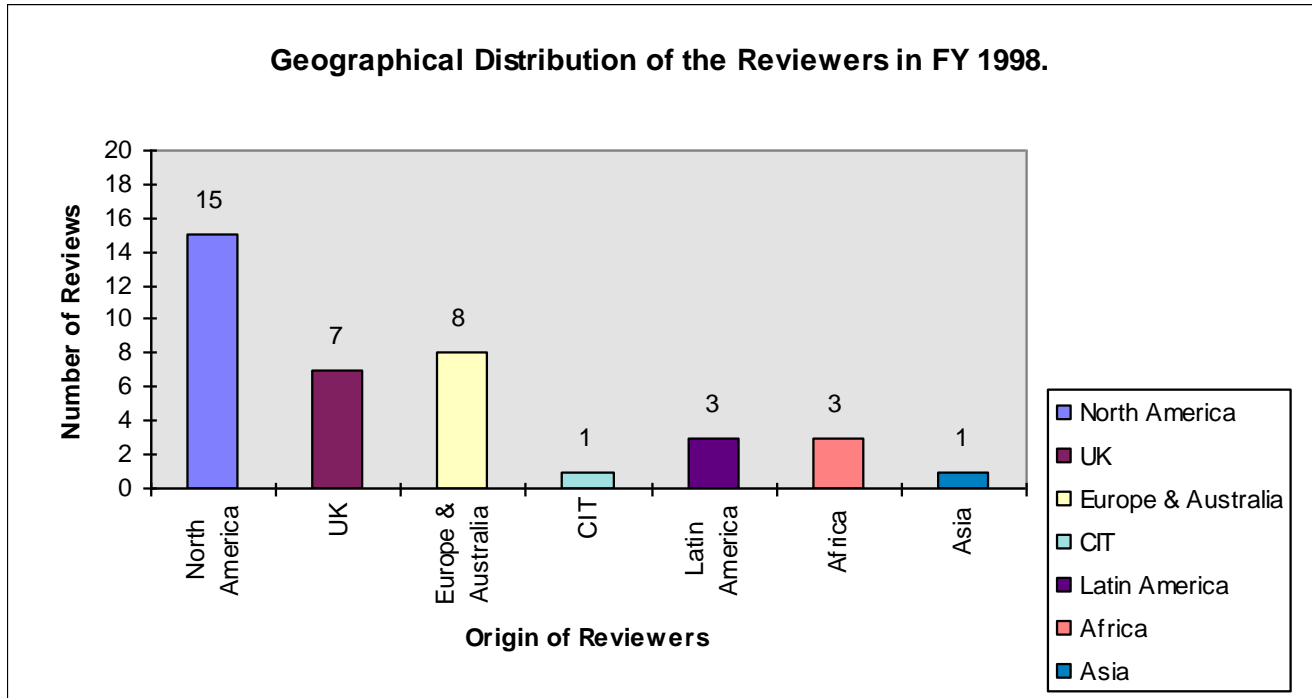


Figure 2. Geographical Distribution of the Reviewers in FY 1998.

9. The main conclusions which can be drawn from this year's analysis are as follows:
- The geographical distribution of the Roster of Experts used for project reviews during FY98 when compared to FY97 shows a positive trend. Whereas in FY97 6% of the reviews come from developing countries, this has increased to 18% in FY98.
  - The majority of reviews continues to be conducted by experts from developed countries, particularly USA and UK which together accounted for 55% of the roster experts used in FY98.

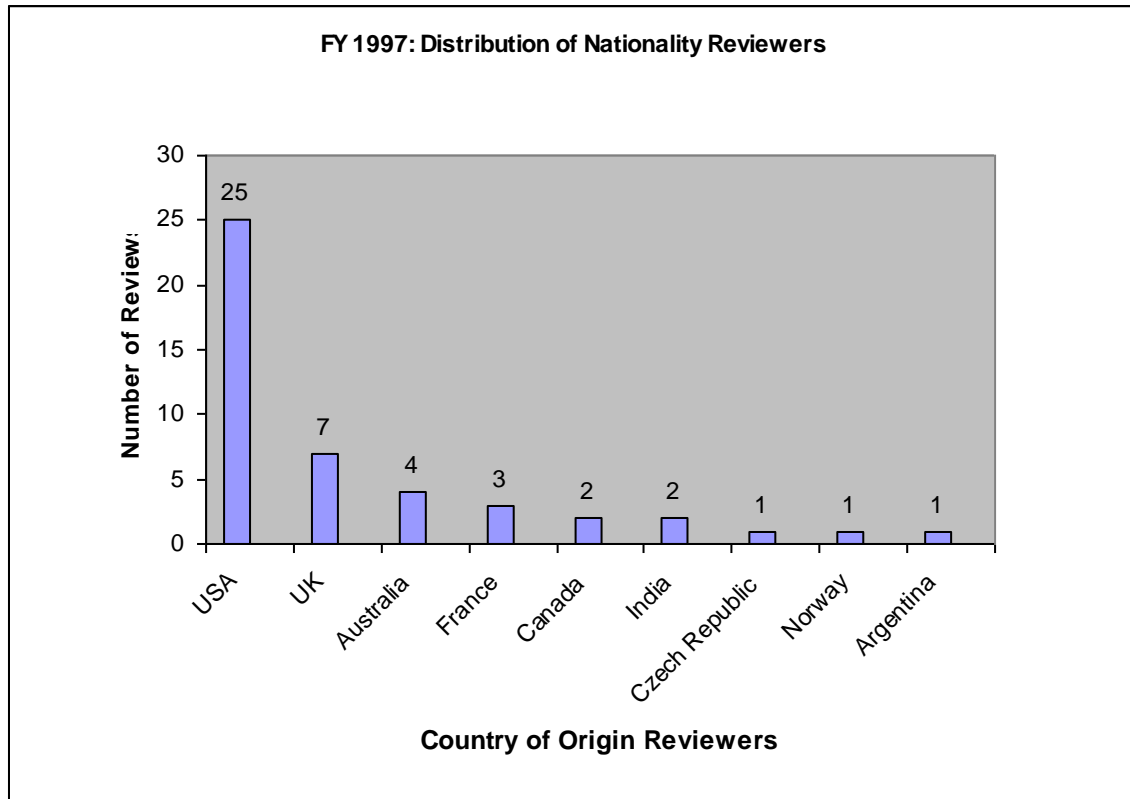


Figure 3. Geographical Distribution of Reviewers in FY97.

### 2.3 Repeat Use of Roster Experts

10. Despite efforts to broaden the pool of experts used for technical reviews, 50% of the reviews were conducted by Roster experts used in the previous financial year. Among the 50%, one expert was used twice this year and one three times. Although repeated use has become less frequent compared with the previous financial year, there remains a preference for experts who have worked with the IAs before. Repeated use of the same experts might also reflect the limited depth of expertise in given fields and/or the international respect/expertise of a particular expert.
11. In the long term, the use experts known to the IAs from previous assignments and/or experts referred to them could potentially affect the quality of reviews if familiarity were to take precedence over adequate substantive experience and local knowledge. As positive as the results are from Roster technical reviews, STAP believes that they could be better if the breadth and depth of expertise in the Roster were used.
12. The reasons given for the preference for “familiar”, often North American or European, reviewers is that they know better what is expected from them and that they can be briefed more easily because they are more accessible by telephone and e-mail. For example, where possible, the World Bank invites the reviewer to take part in departmental review meetings. The Implementing Agencies have pointed out that major issues in selecting reviewers include the quality of their review work, their knowledge of the substantive and geographical areas

involved, their willingness to work under time constraints (usually about a week to 15 days before submission), and their knowledge about what the GEF can fund. The agencies further note that practice indicates that not all experts on the Roster can usually provide the same quality of service and, moreover, that they differ substantially.

## **2.4 Measures to Broaden the Use of Roster Experts**

13. In order to broaden the use of the Roster and to increase the share of experts from developing countries in undertaking reviews, STAP intends to strengthen its outreach towards the experts on the Roster as a means of increasing their knowledge of GEF operational strategy and programmes and the requirements necessary for GEF project reviews. In addition, STAP will explore a variety of means (such as the participation of Roster experts in STAP Expert Group Workshops and GEF Country Workshops) to increase the experts' familiarity, not only with GEF operations, but also directly with the Implementing Agencies. STAP will also fill existing gaps in expertise and make available lists of experts per operational programme and region. A better briefing of, and outreach to, the experts on the Roster and better organized Roster information to the agencies should increase their confidence in a larger number of experts.
14. The Implementing Agencies indicated that in the past, inadequate reviews have been received from Roster experts and discarded, forcing the IAs to contact another reviewer for the same project. These first reviews were not passed on to STAP for evaluation. STAP recommends that all Roster reviews be copied to STAP. This would enable STAP to better discharge its responsibility with respect to quality control of the Roster of Experts. It would provide STAP with the necessary information to make determinations on performance by experts and to remove experts from the Roster because of poor quality of reviews.
15. It may be advisable that STAP monitor closely the selection of reviewers and alert the IAs about the repeated use of experts from developed countries, advising on alternative experts on the Roster in such cases. However, this option would need to be balanced with the need to avoid lengthening submission times and with the operational responsibilities of the Implementing Agencies. STAP's paramount interest will be to ensure that projects benefit from the best scientific advice available, without procedural limits on reviewers.

## **3. Quality of the Reviews**

16. A quality assessment of the reviews is undertaken by two parties: the Task Manager who selected the reviewer and the STAP panel. On a yearly basis, STAP analyses the ratings and comments by STAP and by the Implementing Agencies' Task Managers. The patterns of the ratings are consistent over the four focal areas: approximately half of the reviews are rated as being excellent, 10% adequate, and the remainder "good" (see Figure 4). In about 15% of the cases, the IA rated the review higher than STAP members. However, in general, the IAs' ratings of the reviews match STAP's evaluations. In addition to "rating" the performance of the reviewers, STAP also highlighted the weaknesses and shortcomings of the reviews, on a case by case basis and by focal area.

### **3.1 Ratings of the Reviews**

17. Although the performance rating by the Implementing Agencies, contained in the standard evaluation form filled out by the Task Manager for each reviewer, suggests that the overall



quality of the reviews is very good, further discussions with the IAs and the GEF Secretariat seem to suggest unevenness in the quality of the reviews and shortcomings of some reviews.

18. The roots of the uneven quality of reviews, as perceived by the Implementing Agencies and the GEF Secretariat, are insufficient knowledge of the institutional and socio-economic reality of the country/region where the project is to be implemented, lack of expertise to cover all aspects of the project, and lack of knowledge of GEF operations and the project cycle. A frequently made observation is that comments are often too academic, too narrowly focused on one particular aspect or component of the project, and insufficiently anchored in reality. If a review is not tied into GEF requirements, it loses its relevance for the IA.

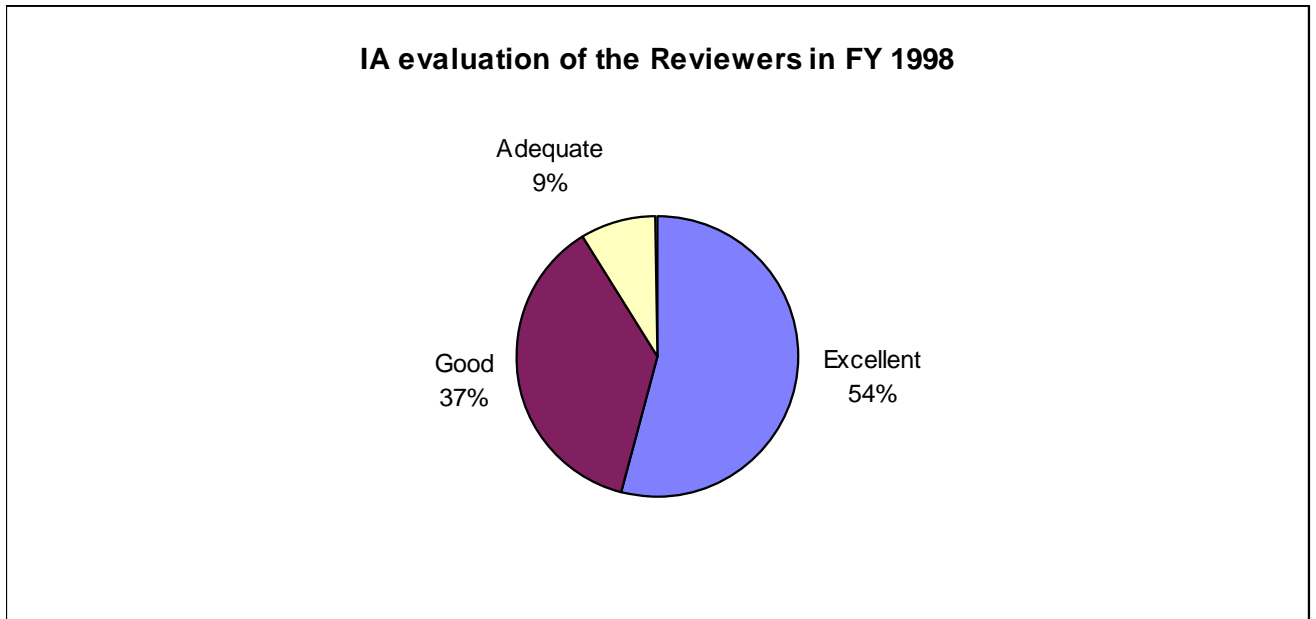


Figure 4. IA Evaluation of the Reviewers in FY1998.

19. A general observation made by STAP in the “review of the reviewer” evaluation process is that the reviews differ greatly in depth and comprehensiveness. It was noted that it is unreasonable to expect that a reviewer can review all aspects and components of any project with equal attention and competence. Notwithstanding this, the general conclusion is that most reviewers exhibit solid theoretical and empirical knowledge of the topics, and exhibited good insight of many aspects of the projects. Fewer reviewers gave evidence of knowledge of the local context. An examination of the geographical expertise of this year’s reviewers revealed that 30% of them had no experience, according to the information contained in their CVs, in the regions where the projects they reviewed were going to be implemented.
20. The best reviews come from experts who have in-depth knowledge of the problems addressed in the project and of the region where it is carried out. They expounded on the global experience to date, on current best practices; the risks and benefits of the approach adopted in the project; the difficulties that are likely to be encountered in the implementation of the project; the appropriateness of the approach and/or technology to achieve the projected

impact and offer alternative ways of doing things. In short, they give clear and operational suggestions and implementation guidelines.

### **3.2 Adherence to STAP Generic Terms of Reference (TOR)**

21. Another observation made by Panel members is that, as a result of not adhering to the generic TOR contained in the Roster to guide reviewers, important aspects of GEF projects are not being adequately analyzed. Although consistency with the TOR does not necessarily lead to a good review, STAP believes that it is beneficial both for the comprehensiveness of a review and for the “review of the reviewer” evaluation process.
22. It would appear from the available information that approximately 50% of the World Bank project reviewers, and 44% of the UNDP project reviewers did not seem to follow any TOR, whether it be the generic TOR developed by STAP, or the TOR for technical reviews developed by World Bank and UNDP respectively. Of those reviews following a set of TOR, only a minority used the TOR developed by STAP; instead, the World Bank or UNDP TOR for technical reviews were observed. The reviewers of UNEP projects all adhered to the generic TOR contained in the Roster of Experts. The pitfall of not asking reviewers to follow the generic TOR is that the assessment of technical or scientific aspects may be excellent, but the wider implications and aspects associated with the GEF intervention may be ignored.
23. To address these issues, one suggestion is to revise the generic TOR and to make them focal-area specific, or alternatively, annotations could be written for the TOR. This elaboration of the TOR is recommended by STAP as well as the majority of the Roster users. This task will be undertaken by STAP in collaboration with the various GEF inter-agency Task Forces. The revised TOR will need to ensure that they do not impose constraints and tie down reviewers.

### **3.3 STAP Analysis of the Reviews, by focal area**

24. In the Climate Change focal area, STAP found that a shortcoming of a number of energy project reviews is the limited attention paid to and the weak assessment of institutional frameworks. Another crucial function of each technical review of energy projects could be the verification of the soundness of the estimates made and values and data given in the project brief. STAP recommends that, where feasible, reviewers should undertake some form of data verification.
25. In the Biodiversity focal area, STAP concluded that there is a tendency for the IAs to select specialists in the natural sciences over those specializing in social issues of biodiversity and conservation. According to STAP, several of the biodiversity project proposals indicated a less than optimal grasp of social organization, tenures systems, local technical knowledge, local leadership on conservation measures, local organization for conservation enforcement and monitoring etc., but these aspects were little appreciated by some reviewers. Adequate inclusion of social science “technical issues” is imperative and the review process should ensure that most reviewers have the expertise to pick up such inadequacies. STAP recognizes that the biodiversity section of the Roster is dominated by natural scientists and that corrective measures are needed in order to include more biodiversity experts with a background in the social sciences and especially field level implementation of GEF-type projects.

### **Management of the Review Process**

26. A critical issue raised by STAP is the number of Roster experts that should be used for project reviews. This is particularly relevant for large complex projects or those attempting to change policy in fundamental ways in countries where the projects are to be implemented. The IAs have organized their review procedures to ensure broad coverage of issues during the quality control/review process, including but not limited to participation of STAP Roster experts. STAP is considering the necessity and feasibility of two or more Roster experts with complementary expertise being commissioned to review large and complex projects. Depending on the nature of the project, one reviewer could be asked to review the social and institutional aspects, while the second reviewer could concentrate on the scientific underpinning and components of the project. Alternatively, the skills of one reviewer from a developed country with the specialized technical knowledge could be combined with the knowledge of the local context of the second reviewer originating from the region or country where the project is to be implemented.
27. Another issue raised by STAP is the length of time given to reviewers for project reviews. Roster experts are often given short notice to review projects; in exceptional cases, they might have one or two days to carry out their task. The combination of the relatively short notice and the short time available to review a project could have an impact on the thoroughness and comprehensiveness of a review. STAP is recommending that the length of time accorded to reviewers, particularly for complex project or projects requiring data verification, be extended.
28. STAP also highlighted the issue of the timing of the review which is indirectly related to the quality of the reviews. One recommendation being considered for broader application is that two reviews could be requested: one at an early stage before substantial preparation has been started, and then a second one on the basis of the document to be sent to Council. This would allow the Roster expert to provide guidance at a formative stage in project development and then verify how earlier comments had been taken into account.

#### **4. Response to STAP Roster Expert Comments**

29. The Implementing Agencies have been requested to indicate how the comments of Roster reviewers have been addressed and reflected in the final project briefs. Of the total number of projects adopted in the Work Programmes of FY 1998, only six contained no clear indication as to how the reviewer's comments were addressed.
30. Usually the text of the project indicates which issues raised by the reviewer were addressed and how. For a number of projects the Task Manager submitted under separate cover a response to the reviewer's comments, outlining how the project brief was amended as a result of the review, or if this was not practical, how they will be addressed during the appraisal phase. STAP supports this type of response and is of the view that it should be made a standard practice. Some Council members have suggested that substantive project amendments resulting from a STAP reviewer's comments should be referred back to the reviewer, since the reviewer is well-placed to assess the changes.
31. Comments from Council members suggest that the technical reviews, if to the point, are taken seriously by the Council, and that they are a critical part of the process which not only requires rigorous application but also rigorous follow-up. If there is a difference of opinion between the IA and the reviewer, this needs to be clearly dealt with, and either included in subsequent project design, or explicitly discounted with adequate rationale. In most cases, the IAs indicated that specific comments and recommendations will be addressed during the

final preparation and appraisal stages. Often recommendations made by reviewers provide interesting guidelines for work and consideration to the experts and agencies who will be in charge of implementing the projects.

32. A comment made repeatedly by reviewers is that some components in the project briefs are insufficiently developed, and not detailed enough for the reviewer to make meaningful comments on. However, the desire for greater detail must be balanced against the need for brevity in the project documentation. For example, in many biodiversity projects, gaps in the knowledge of flora and fauna and ecosystem functioning have been highlighted. Generally, the most frequent areas referred to include monitoring and evaluation, in particular the need to use indicators to measure changes in the ecosystems and the impact of the project, and the sustainability of the intervention; stakeholder participation and the formalization of stakeholder input in the implementation of the project; and, building into the project targeted research components to strengthen the project activities.
33. Although the responsiveness of IAs towards reviewers' comments has improved considerably in this period under review, STAP members have observed it would be useful to have more information on how specific comments of project reviewers have been incorporated into the project brief and/or will be addressed during the appraisal phase.

#### **5. Gaps in Expertise in the Roster**

34. There is general consensus in the GEF that there is a need to expand the database, but only selectively in areas that are not covered sufficiently well. It is not enough to have one or two experts in one field of expertise because of possible non-availability of the person. The international waters and dryland sections are underdeveloped while there are few experts with an economic, social and anthropological orientation.
35. Other specific areas that need strengthening, as identified by the IAs and the GEF Secretariat are: renewable energy technologies, energy efficiency, coral reefs, sustainable forestry, sustainable use of biodiversity, agro-biodiversity, fisheries, surface freshwater, pesticide and contaminants in transboundary situations.
36. On the basis of the gaps identified by the IAs and the GEF Secretariat and on the outcome of the review of the operational programmes, STAP will determine how many experts, and in which sub-focal areas, will be required to meet the needs of the GEF. In undertaking this exercise STAP will bear in mind the concerns raised by the Implementing Agencies that experts selected in the past were often too academically oriented with limited experience in the field. In the next months STAP will use its network to solicit in a targeted manner, submissions from relevant institutions and individuals to fill the existing gaps in the Roster.

#### **6. Management of the Roster**

37. The management of the Roster of Experts encompasses a number of tasks, the majority of which are performed by the STAP Secretariat at UNEP. These include updating the information contained in the Roster, updating the Roster web page, adding and removing experts on the Roster, publication of the Roster, the maintenance of the database held in the Secretariat, and tasks related to quality control and outreach. The arrangements for managing the Roster are a subject of on-going consultation and dialogue with the Implementing Agencies and the GEF Secretariat.

38. Now that the Roster is in place, much more attention will be given by STAP to enhancing the management of the Roster. This will involve improvements in quality control of the review process; enhancement of the user-friendliness of the Roster, and greater interaction with and involvement of the experts in GEF operations.
39. One aspect of management of the Roster is the selection and subsequent inclusion of new experts to fill gaps in certain fields of expertise. In order to better respond to the needs of the GEF and the Implementing Agencies in particular, STAP will need to move away from the system of a yearly update, expansion and publication of the Roster. The hard copy does not permit a regular updating of the information contained in CVs, such as changed contact information. Instead, gaps identified by the users will be filled on a rolling basis throughout the year, after a screening by STAP of the CVs of recommended experts.
40. It is also becoming apparent that a simple screening of an expert's CV might not be sufficient to merit inclusion in the Roster; rather STAP might need to exercise more proactive quality control functions that assures the IAs of the experience and ability of the expert to conduct a knowledgeable, objective and constructive review. One option being considered by STAP is a smaller Roster, that can be validated by STAP members as being composed of an outstanding group of experts who are recognized as knowledgeable in their respective fields.
41. The Roster database will be updated on a monthly basis and information will be provided on changes and newly added experts. For the users to benefit from a regularly updated and flexibly managed Roster, they will need to consult the Roster on the STAP web page as opposed to the hard copy. A survey revealed that most Roster users prefer to use the hard copy version of the roster since the Roster on the web site is not searchable. It is expected that before the end of the year a search engine will have been developed for the database on the web, permitting to run queries related to expertise and geographical origin and expertise of experts.
42. The next step will be to improve information flow between the STAP Secretariat and the Implementing Agencies. From STAP's side, the STAP Secretariat will provide information on the type of expertise available for each Operational Programme and sub-region, and will consult with the IAs on the contents of the briefings it will develop for Roster experts. From the Implementing Agencies' side it would mean the following: alerting the STAP Secretariat to the inadequate performance of reviewers, to shortages and gaps in expertise, to any problem related to the use of the roster; providing STAP with names of experts they would like to be on the roster; disclosing the names of the reviewers at the time of submission of the projects for bilateral meetings; and, providing clarifications about the use of experts who are not on the roster. An important element in such improved information flow will be the sharing of STAP's evaluations of review quality with the Implementing Agencies to improve the common understanding of what constitutes a "good review".
43. A third component of the future management of the roster is strengthening STAP's outreach efforts towards Roster experts. The main purpose would be to inform them about GEF operations and their responsibility in the project cycle, and to provide guidance on the review of projects. STAP recommends an information package that will be developed by the STAP Secretariat and sent out by electronic and ordinary mail. In addition, all material will be made available on the Roster web page. The package will include examples of high quality comprehensive reviews to guide the experts. Furthermore, it is expected that the STAP module in the GEF Country Workshops will also contribute to an enhanced awareness of the GEF among Roster experts and of the role of the STAP Roster of Experts in particular.

44. As part of the GEF's evolving outreach strategy and the emphasis being placed on the mobilization of the wider scientific and technical community, STAP intends to make available on the web, information related to STAP activities. Electronic newsletters may be one way to raise awareness on scientific and technical issues that STAP is addressing. Although not sufficient in itself, an informative and regularly updated roster web page, embedded in a STAP web page, would make STAP's work more visible for the scientific community, give the experts on the Roster a better sense of being part of a wider network, and contribute to greater transparency of STAP activities. Giving the Roster experts access to information on STAP activities via the world wide web would provide them with a better basis for interaction with the GEF. Moreover, the Roster experts will be given an opportunity through a survey to express their view points on the use of the Roster and on the guidance given for the reviews.
45. Although the main purpose of the establishment of the Roster was to provide the GEF with a cadre of experts for the independent technical review of project proposals, the Roster could be utilized in other ways and could be a tool in GEF's efforts to reach out to and involve the wider scientific and technical community in the development and implementation of projects. Consideration could be given, for example, to the use of Roster experts for all review functions, as well as to draw on the Roster for consultants used in the development of projects and for other specialized assignments, such as project appraisal missions and evaluation studies. Other ways of using Roster experts include: participation in STAP selective reviews, GEF Country Workshops, and STAP Expert Workshops, and in the provision of technical support on Enabling Activities. These options would need to be consistent with two key principles: avoidance of any conflict of interest by a Roster reviewer and the operational responsibility of IAs for selecting reviewers and project team members.
46. A sub-group of STAP members, supported by the STAP secretariat, has been established to work with the Implementing Agencies and the GEF Secretariat, to discuss and review current procedures for the use of the Roster and its management, and to propose any necessary changes.