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Shaping the CGIAR's Future

Addendum to CIFOR External Review Report

The Report of the First External Program and Management Review of CIFOR was issued on September 15, 1998 as Document Number SDR/TAC:IAR/98/5. Attached are the transmittal letter from the TAC Chair and the CGIAR Executive Secretary to the Chairman of the CGIAR, TAC's Commentary on the Review, and the response of CIFOR's Governing Board and Management to the Review Report.

Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Donald Winkelmann, Chairman

15th October 1998

Dear Mr. Serageldin,

We are pleased to submit to you the Report of the First External Programme and Management Review of CIFOR which was conducted during March 1998 under the chairmanship of Professor Jeffery Burley of the United Kingdom. The Review Report and the response from CIFOR were considered by TAC at its 75th Meeting held at CIMMYT in September in the presence of the Panel Chair. CIFOR was represented by Professor Jeffrey Sayer, the Director General. In view of the complementarities between CIFOR and ICRAF the two Panel Reports were considered in tandem.

This being the First External Review of CIFOR since its establishment in 1992, the Panel did not have the advantage of earlier reviews for general comparison. Therefore, the Panel took a pragmatic approach, recognizing the need for the Centre to respond to current challenges while setting a firm foundation for its future.

The Panel underlines CIFOR's successful transformation into a Centre with an excellent reputation in the international forest research community. The Panel considers that CIFOR's research management and governance are of good quality and recognizes that these aspects will become more complex as the Centre grows and diversifies the scope of its activities. In this context, TAC agrees with the Panel's view that CIFOR's current research activities and outputs need to be linked more closely to its mission through improved organizational, priority-setting, and resource allocation arrangements.

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TAC's consideration of the Review Report noted, *inter alia*, the importance of CIFOR's social science research in forestry, recommending that the Centre expand the set of relevant social variables to include determinants of collective action and patterns of social organization in forest activities. These areas are key to CIFOR's research on devolution, smallholder forestry, and forestation of marginal lands.

In addition to the Report of the Panel, there are two attachments to this letter. The first contains the TAC commentary summarizing TAC's reactions to the Panel's Report and to the written response of CIFOR's Board of Trustees and management to the Review Report. The second attachment is the written response of CIFOR.

The overall picture emerging from the Review Report and the TAC Commentary indicate that CIFOR has made remarkable progress and grown from a concept to a leading international forestry research centre. We recommend continued strong support to the Centre.

Sincerely yours,

Alexander von der Osten

Alexander von der Osten
Executive Secretary, CGIAR

Donald L. Winkelmann

Donald L. Winkelmann
TAC Chair

TAC COMMENTARY ON THE FIRST CIFOR EXTERNAL PROGRAMME AND MANAGEMENT REVIEW

TAC expresses its thanks to the Chair, Dr. Jeffery Burley, and members of the Panel that conducted the First External Programme and Management Review of CIFOR for a constructive and forward-looking report. The Panel's report is analytical and positive about the future role and importance of the Centre. It was discussed at TAC 75 in the presence of the Panel Chair and the Director General of CIFOR, Dr. Jeffrey Sayer.

TAC is pleased to note the remarkable progress that has been achieved in all aspects of the Centre's work since its establishment in 1992. The Committee commends the Board, management and staff for this substantial achievement.

TAC agrees with the findings of the Panel, and, in general, endorses the recommendations made in the Panel's report. The Committee is pleased to note that the Board and management of CIFOR are in broad agreement with the Panel's findings, and that the Centre has already taken action to implement them all, even though it has some reservations about the rationale underlying two of the recommendations. The Committee offers the following commentary, prepared with inputs from the CGIAR Secretariat, to supplement the Panel's report.

Linkage Between CIFOR's Research and its Mission

The Panel has recommended that CIFOR should evolve its current grouping of research activities into a framework that links more closely and clearly its research activities and their outputs to CIFOR's mission and to the broad thematic needs implied by it. The Panel has also recommended that CIFOR should develop and implement an organizational arrangement that would secure the above linkage, facilitate a transparent mode of priority setting and resource allocation, as well as underpin good management processes. Despite the difficulty in accepting the methods proposed by these recommendations, CIFOR has accepted their objectives. TAC considers the recommendations to be timely, necessary, and appropriate as CIFOR lays its institutional roots for enhancing effective research management.

Quality of Science

TAC appreciates the Panel's extensive evaluation of the quality of CIFOR's programmes in terms of type of research, formulation of research activities, quality of inputs and methods, and published research outputs. The Committee accepts the Panel's conclusion that CIFOR scientists are doing pioneering research and have produced many high quality publications. However, TAC would like to have seen a more explicit discussion on the quality standards of the research *per se* in terms of soundness of theory, use of up-to-date methodology as well as policy relevance. It is more effective when the quality of science practised is discussed with explicit reference to the state-of-the-art, in terms of the underlying theory and methodology, and whether the methodologies are in step with progress in other comparable advanced research centres. While TAC understands the Panel's positive sense on such themes, it encourages CIFOR to take these elements into account as it develops further its own quality assurance mechanisms and processes.

Social Science Research in Forestry

Discussions at TAC 75 gave attention to the importance of CIFOR's sociological and economic research, and the need to evaluate these two areas distinctly, not only collectively as "socioeconomic research". CIFOR management rightly feels that large gains can be achieved now by exploring in depth the social, institutional, associational and tenurial dimensions of forestry. The quality of social-anthropological research and economic research was not distinctly and specifically analysed by the Panel. TAC recommends that CIFOR expand the set of relevant social variables, to include determinants of collective action; patterns of social organization in forest activities, etc. This is relevant for CIFOR's research on devolution, smallholder forestry, and forestation of marginal lands.

Impact Assessment

TAC appreciates the fact that CIFOR has not been in existence long enough to have had any major impacts in terms of its mission. The Committee, therefore, concurs with the Panel that only some of CIFOR's activities can be expected to have already had direct impacts on the well-being of people or on environmental protection. However, it would have been useful to TAC to know how CIFOR proposes to empirically measure the intermediate and ultimate impacts of its work. The Committee believes that although impact assessment in forestry research is still subject to considerable methodological debate in the international arena, the Centre should take a more proactive stance on the matter. TAC would also expect the Centre to pay particular attention to developing its impact assessment methodology, despite the long-term nature of CIFOR's research and impact pathways.

Outposting and Partnership

TAC shares the Panel's concern about CIFOR's plans for field placement of scientists, leading in some cases to an internationally recruited scientist working in isolation. The Committee agrees with the Panel that fewer field stations each with a cluster of scientists will help to better promote the CIFOR culture at field sites, as well as in forging effective collaboration with partner institutions.

Relationship with ICRAF

The Panel notes, as in the ICRAF review, that although the formal relations established between CIFOR and ICRAF are cordial, the amount of programmatic cooperation and joint involvement has been less than optimal, considering the potential complementarity of the talents and interests involved. TAC agrees with the view that CIFOR and ICRAF need to develop the relationships and mechanisms that allow them to complement and supplement each other where possible and share responsibility where their interests overlap. Some five years ago the Directors General of the two Centres undertook a study of their complementarities within the context of the Alternatives to Slash and Burn Programme. Since then, both Centres have established regional presence but regional research and partnership strategies have yet to be explicitly defined. The Committee recommends that CIFOR and ICRAF undertake a joint strategic planning exercise at the earliest possible date to (a) define opportunities for collaboration; and (b) agree upon an MOU that would ensure complementarity and operational effectiveness.

Governance and Management

TAC strongly supports the Panel's recommendation that the Board should play a stronger role in setting the research agenda and in programmatic and financial oversight. TAC notes the favourable response of the Board to this proposal.

31 July 1998

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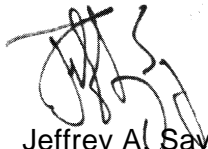
Dear Dr. Winkelmann and Dr. von der Osten:

On behalf of the CIFOR Board of Trustees and Management, we are pleased to submit our response to the First External Program and Management Review of the Center for International Forestry Research.

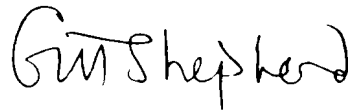
CIFOR's Board of Trustees and Management want to express their gratitude to the EPMR panel for its professionalism and for its extremely positive and constructive report. Our thanks also go to you, the Secretariat staff, particularly Paramjit Sachdeva and Amir Kassam, for your assistance in helping to ensure the success of CIFOR's first EPMR.

Our response is attached.

With kind regards,



Jeffrey A. Sayer
Director General



Gill Shepherd
Chairman, Board of Trustees

Enclosure: CIFOR's Response to the First External Program and Management Review

CIFOR's Response to the First External Program and Management Review

A. CIFOR Management Response

Overall reaction

The review was conducted in a thoughtful and professional way and is perceived by CIFOR staff as having been a useful and constructive exercise. We are particularly grateful that the demands placed upon our resources and on the time of our scientists were less than we had anticipated. We feel that the Panel worked in a very constructive and positive way and truly sought to understand the difficulties that have confronted CIFOR during its first five years and the challenges that lie ahead. We would therefore like to extend our thanks to the Panel for the contribution that their work will make to the further evolution of CIFOR.

Structure of the Management response

This response deals with both major recommendations and subsidiary suggestions as identified by the EPMP Panel. Responses are organised in the order in which the recommendations and suggestions occur in the Panel's report.

Chapter 1 – Background and context

This chapter provides a clear and concise summary of CIFOR's history, evolution and plans for the future. The Panel has captured the essential nature of CIFOR's partnership approach to research and the chapter suggests a strong appreciation for both the interdisciplinary nature of the problems to be solved and of the approach outlined in CIFOR's Strategic Plan.

Chapter 2 – Linking CIFOR's research programme to its mission and strategy

Recommendation: CIFOR should evolve its current grouping of research activities into a framework that links more closely and clearly its research activities and their outputs to CIFOR's mission and to the broad thematic needs implied by it.

The general principle that CIFOR's research programme should derive logically from our Mission and Strategy is of course beyond question. Exactly how this might best be achieved is a more complicated issue. The text of the EPMR implies that there should be some rigorously logical sequence of steps leading from the Mission Statement not only to the research activities but also to the management structure of the Center. We acknowledge the desirability of this in principle but feel that it is impossible to implement. For instance, CIFOR's Mission Statement was derived from the CGIAR Mission Statement as it was in 1992. However, the CGIAR has subsequently changed its Mission Statement in ways that are significant for CIFOR and it is likely to do so again as a result of the External Review of the CGIAR in 1998. CIFOR's Board and Management recognised deficiencies in our own Mission Statement when we tried to use it as a basis for driving our strategic planning process. However, the Board has noted that the existing Mission Statement is an integral part of a number of legal documents associated with CIFOR's establishment, including the Host Country Agreement, and its modification would only be possible with the agreement of the four sponsoring countries and the Host Country. We therefore feel that it is not useful to seek to revise our Mission Statement at the moment. The Mission Statement is viewed by the Board as setting out broad goals for CIFOR but not as rigidly determining what we do and how we do it. We also feel that both the CGIAR Mission Statement and CIFOR's own Mission Statement are so all-embracing that they are not particularly helpful in establishing priorities. As one example, there are genuine trade-offs, at least in the short term, between protecting the environment and eliminating poverty. The CGIAR Mission Statement gives no guidance as to the relative priorities of these two major goals.

Similarly, we do not see any particular reason why it is desirable to "group research activities" into a "framework" that links to the Mission and to the Strategy. We believe that the grouping of the research activities is a purely functional consideration driven by efficiency and there is no inherent reason why the functional groupings should necessarily reflect the way the Mission is expressed. We do not, for instance, believe that because poverty alleviation and protecting the environment are separate items in the Mission Statement that these two functions should be conducted separately within CIFOR. In fact, we think this would be counter to logic and functional efficiency. Our present administrative structure is based on the reporting structure advocated by TAC and the CGIAR in 1995-96 with problem-focused research projects as the basic unit of organisation. The projects are time limited and their composition and modus operandi are determined by the nature of the problems they are intended to solve. There is no particular reason the internal structure and management of all projects should be identical. We feel that management structures based on "the broad thematic needs implied by the mission" would tend to be discipline-based and would be susceptible to supply-drive. Our intention instead is to make our projects as demand-driven as possible although we recognise that we still have some way to go in achieving this.

Notwithstanding the above, we do recognise that the present allocation of resources to ten separate projects is not optimal. This issue had already been discussed by the Board's Executive Committee during its meeting in Antalya, Turkey in October 1997. A decision was taken that there would be some rationalisation of the project structure but that we would await the deliberations of the EPMR before taking final decisions. The EPMR has been useful in helping to focus the debate on project structure, and Management has since explored the issue further with the Programme Committee and the full Board with the objective of fine-tuning the structure to achieve greater efficiency and to eliminate some redundancy and duplication. We will bring to the November 1998 BOT meeting a proposal for a reduced number of projects and a somewhat revised management structure to support the projects. We also believe that the present number of direct reports to the DDG-Research is too high and we plan to reduce the number in the coming months.

Although we have reservations about the rationale for arriving at the proposed "alternative research organising framework" given in Table 2.5 of the EPMR Report, we do find a significant

convergence between what CIFOR has arrived at through its “demand-driven” approach and what the EPMR arrived at through its “mission-driven” approach. It does seem likely that CIFOR will move towards a smaller number of projects similar to those given shown in Table 2.5. The actual number of projects will probably be slightly higher than recommended by the EPMR Panel and the distribution of activities within projects will differ somewhat from what is suggested in the table.

The EPMR Panel’s statement in Chapter 2 that “CIFOR’s research programme is focused on the relevant and priority themes or topics needed to address its mission” provides important validation of our research priorities in spite of the Panel’s criticism of the methods used to establish those priorities.

Chapter 3 – Assessment of cross-cutting themes/priorities, impact, research quality, linkages and outreach

Recommendation: CIFOR should develop a more formal, transparent and systematic priority setting process that includes an explicit set of criteria for (1) judging exclusion or inclusion: appropriateness to mission, cost-effectiveness, international public goods contribution; and (2) setting priorities among the group of included project activities and among projects.

We agree with the recommendation. We recognise that CIFOR’s documentation inadequately reflects the extent to which CIFOR is addressing research priorities that have emerged from a number of international processes over the last decade. In fact, the reason that CIFOR was established was to address issues identified by the UNCSD and related processes. These can in general be stated as the following:

- Improved understanding of the influence of extra-sectoral policies on forest resources.
- Policies and technologies to achieve better management of natural forests.
- Policies and technologies to achieve sustainability and expanded productivity of plantation forests on degraded or low-potential sites.
- Policies and technologies to improve biodiversity conservation.
- Policies to improve local institutional arrangements for forest management.
- Understanding of patterns of change of forest resources at a regional and global level.

CIFOR’s objectives could very well have been framed in terms of these problems rather than in terms of the hierarchy of more fundamental issues that figure in the Constitution. The extent of the global consensus that these are the most important problems is so great that it would not seem appropriate for CIFOR to challenge it. The issue for CIFOR in setting priorities is, therefore, to determine the allocation of its resources between these activities and within them. CIFOR’s projects are designed to solve those elements of the above list of potential issues for which we have a comparative advantage and for which our NARS partners are seeking collaboration. Historically, however, resource allocation between projects has been driven primarily by consideration of the costs of doing the different types of research represented by the different projects. At CIFOR’s present size, we are only marginally able to tackle the most important elements within each of the above issues. There are, however, interesting issues to be addressed in the event that our total size grows to the point that more significant decisions could be taken about between-project resource allocation.

CIFOR recognises that allocation of resources between projects has been driven partly by opportunism and pressures to maintain the status quo ante. Changes in allocation have been incremental and have not been subject to comprehensive review and approval by the Programme

Committee or the full BOT. Both the Programme of Work and Budget and the annual rollover of the Medium-Term Plan are approved annually by the BOT but the timing of Board meetings in the past has meant that these approvals have been made after the year's work had already begun so there was little opportunity for the BOT to suggest substantive changes. We recognise this as an issue that needs to be addressed and intend to institute formal between-project resource allocations at future Board meetings. We anticipate that this will be easier when we move to a reduced number of projects in pursuit of the recommendations outlined in Chapter 2.

We do not believe that it is possible to allocate resources either between or within projects on the basis of ex-ante impact assessments in any sort of rigidly structured or quantitative way. An inherent problem is that the research supports the production of public goods whose values are not established through markets. Determining values for the diverse goods and services provided to different stakeholders by forests is itself a major research challenge that is unlikely to yield definitive results in the medium term. In these circumstances the sort of ex-ante impact assessment which can drive priority setting in the commodity centres of the CGIAR will not be applicable to CIFOR in the medium term. We would point out that TAC has used the volumes and values of some forest commodities in its own priority setting exercises. In doing so, TAC has apparently not appreciated the weakness of the datasets held by FAO on forest products such as fuelwood. Recent publications by CIFOR's staff have demonstrated that there is no reliable, quantitative information on fuelwood consumption or demand in developing countries. The FAO data used by TAC in its most recent priorities and strategies exercise were derived from a small number of case studies extrapolated on the basis of population models. There is no particular reason to think that they bear any relation to reality (and good theoretical reasons for supposing that they do not). Similarly, priority setting based on any of the internationally available statistics on timber production would be very misleading given CIFOR's focus on forest conservation and poverty eradication.

We therefore see the essential issue for resource allocation as increasing the clarity and transparency of between-project allocations. For the time being we feel that within-project allocations must be negotiated between project teams and management. Between-project allocations, however, should be subject to a formal decision-making process at BOT meetings. At present we believe it is impossible to link resource allocation to eventual impacts in any credible way, so these allocations will depend largely upon expert judgement by BOT members. The net result is that the decision-making concerning CIFOR's annual program of work and budget and forthcoming medium-term plans will become more formal and will involve Board deliberations as part of the planning process.

The Panel has suggested (§ 3.3.2) that outside experts should be used to review and evaluate projects and advise on both priority setting and methodological issues. This has already happened to quite a large extent and several projects are supported by external advisory bodies. However, we agree with the recommendation that we should expand this form of review and evaluation.

The EPMP also suggests (§ 3.3.3.3) that CIFOR should commission a review of methodologies for inter-disciplinary research. We feel that we already have considerable expertise in this area both on staff and on the Board of Trustees. We are not, therefore, convinced that a formal external review is likely to be the best way to improve inter-disciplinarity. Rather, we see this as itself being a major part of the research agenda. It would of course be pursued in collaboration with leading authorities from outside CIFOR.

Partnerships (§ 3.4.3)

The review proposes that selection of partners should include those from outside traditional forestry or agricultural research services. We agree, and assert that CIFOR's record in this area is already excellent. We have developed a very broad range of partnerships with people who have hitherto had few links with formal forestry research or with the CGIAR. The Panel further suggests that we should increase the effectiveness of existing partnerships rather than seeking to add new partners. We agree with this recommendation and it is consistent with our intention to focus more effort in a smaller number of eco-regional foci so as to reduce the transaction costs of working with a large number of partners in many sites. There will be a continuing need to review and possibly change partnership arrangements as the research agenda evolves.

Outreach functions (§ 3.5)

The EPMP Panel concludes that a "separate training unit is required". This issue has been discussed at length by Management and the Board. We have also taken note of the discussions that have taken place in the CGIAR on the comparative advantage of the system for training and capacity building. We believe that at the present size of CIFOR's operations, our current approach to outreach is optimal (see pages 36 and 37 of the CIFOR Strategic Plan). We have in fact taken the opposite view to the EPMP in that we believe that the establishment of a separate unit creates the danger of reducing the quality of training and professional development opportunities that arise through research collaboration. Of the US\$1.5 billion spent annually on official development assistance in forestry, a very large proportion goes for training and capacity building. CIFOR's comparative advantage lies in professional development of researchers. We do not think that the needs of this particular target group would be best met by a free-standing unit, which inevitably would tend to have a didactic rather than interactive *modus operandi*. Again, we think that CIFOR's record in capacity building and professional development is excellent and that our greatest impact so far has probably come in this area. At a practical level, it is hard to see how a training unit which, with present resources, could only conceivably consist of one or two professionals and one or two support staff based in Bogor, could have a meaningful impact at the global scale of CIFOR's operations.

Chapter 4 – Governance and Management

Recommendation: The BOT should seek Trustees who, between them, have broad managerial and financial competencies, familiarity with the CGIAR System, and with the private sector.

At its meeting in April 1998 the Board accepted this recommendation and will seek additional members to enhance its skills in these areas. Management is also in agreement with the EPMP Panel on this issue.

Frequency of BOT meetings (§ 4.1.1.2)

The recommendation that the Board should meet at least twice a year is noted. Management believes that the Board should meet twice annually and the Board agreed during its April 1998 meeting to implement this recommendation immediately. Furthermore, one meeting each year will be scheduled so that the Board can provide substantive advance input into the Programme of Work and Budget and the annual rollover of the Medium-Term Plan. In order to give the Board

greater opportunity to interact with CIFOR's partners, one of the two meetings each year will be held at a location away from Bogor.

Tenure of Board membership (§ 4.1.1.2)

We note the suggestion that all Trustees should be appointed for an initial three-year term. This is in fact the case and the only difference between the present situation and that proposed by the EPMR is that there should be a more rigorous selection process on an annual basis for any subsequent renewals. The Board addresses this suggestion in its own response (Part B of the CIFOR Response).

Planning for succession and other human-resource issues (§ 4.2.1)

The EPMR Panel suggests that a more comprehensive planning system is needed to accommodate staff departures, recruitment and career development. Management recognises that CIFOR is likely to experience a relatively high turnover of international staff. We also accept that prospects for career development of internationally recruited staff will always be limited given the small size of the institution, the highly specialised nature of most of its staff, and the limit of 10 years' maximum total employment at CIFOR imposed by BOT policy. However, we do agree with the recommendation that CIFOR should promote its existing staff to fill management positions (as we have done in the past) in preference to hiring outside candidates. In those cases where replacements for departing staff have to be recruited externally we rely on international competitions while continuing to make direct appointments in special situations. Given the unpredictability of staff departures, planning for staff replacement has inevitably to be opportunistic.

Links between performance evaluations and salary increases (§ 4.2.1)

Recommendation: CIFOR should carefully consider re-establishing the link between performance evaluations and salary increases.

Management accepts this recommendation. The link between performance evaluations and salaries was suspended for one year pending a review of the performance appraisal system. This review took place in June 1998 with help from an outside consultant and we anticipate that it will move us to a situation where more formal links between performance and compensation will be possible. We have always been clear that our aim is to reward scientific results rather than bureaucratic skills and we are developing a reward structure that will further this objective.

One issue that may have not been captured fully in the EPMR report relates to CIFOR's partnership style of operation. The Panel's comments on the performance-appraisal system makes no reference to the difficulties of developing and applying assessment criteria in a situation where most research is carried out in collaboration with partners. This is an issue with which we continue to grapple. As noted above we are developing a new performance-appraisal system with the assistance of an outside consultant. To help us in this effort we have brought in representatives of partner organisations to work with our own scientists and the consultant in considering ways to more effectively evaluate the work of both individual scientists and project teams.

Management of research (§ 4.3.2.2)

The EPMR Panel suggests that CIFOR's research management be strengthened by using locally recruited project assistants who are trained administrators. We agree that there is merit in this approach; our experience with one such person to date has been very positive. However, it is unlikely to be the panacea that the EPMR Report suggests. Inevitably a considerable amount of the administrative burden that falls on scientists can only be shouldered by the scientists themselves, whatever the management structure. The transactions costs which come with being part of the CGIAR and having thirty donors, many of whom have independent reporting requirements, are inevitably going to be very high. Preparation of the technical reports required by donors, as well as research proposals, cannot be offloaded from scientists to administrative assistants.

Alternative management approaches (§ 4.3.3)

Recommendation: Management should develop and implement an organisational arrangement that (a) filters all potential and present projects and their component activities through an organising framework such as that outlined in Chapter 2 to ensure consistency with CIFOR's mission and strategic objectives; and (b) maintains the essential underpinnings of good management processes.

This recommendation derives largely from the recommendation in Chapter 2 and the response given there also applies here. Thus, whilst our method for deriving the management structure differs from that used by the EPMR Panel, we are coming to an outcome which resembles very much the one advocated by the Panel.

We certainly intend to “maintain the essential underpinnings of good management processes”. We may differ to some extent from the EPMR Panel on what these underpinnings might be. We agree that there is need for greater clarity in the role of project leaders and are in the process now of redefining this role. We believe that management models based on self-motivating work groups are well-tested in research organisations and are highly appropriate to CIFOR. We do not, therefore, wish to move to a more hierarchical management structure. We do, however, recognise that there needs to be greater clarity as to the precise role of project leaders, that accountability has to be more clearly allocated, and that project leaders need to have sufficient authority to permit them to meet the objectives for which they are held accountable. We also recognise that the number of direct reports to the DDG–Research should be reduced and our revisions to the performance management system will achieve this.

B. CIFOR Board of Trustees' Response

General

The Board found the work of the EPMR team helpful in two main ways. Firstly, it was happy to have it confirmed that the team was broadly very satisfied with CIFOR's work and saw no major problems. Since this was the Center's first External Review since its inception, confirmation of the thrust of its work in this way was most welcome.

Secondly, of the recommendations for the Center made by the EPMR team, some confirmed the importance of changes already proposed by the Board and in hand, and the rest focused upon issues already under debate between Board and Management. While, in the case of some of these issues, we do not entirely concur with the EPMR Team's proposed solutions, we are in complete agreement with their selection of issues.

Specific comments

Chapter 2

The Board are in agreement with the comments of Management on this issue. While the process of priority-setting in the allocation of funds to projects needs to be made more transparent, and to involve the Board more fully (see below), we do not concur with the EPMR team in believing that a radically different CIFOR management structure would deliver a better focus for priority-setting.

Thus it is the Board's view that Table 2.5 of the EPMR Panel's report, while offering a neat visual representation of the issues with which CIFOR grapples, does not represent a useful blueprint for an ideal CIFOR structure. CIFOR, since its inception, has already adapted its structure in various ways in order to deliver the interdisciplinary and problem-oriented research towards which it strives, and which leads ultimately to the fulfilment of CIFOR's mission.

The Board believes that only relatively minor adjustments are now required. It does, however, agree with the EPMR team that the total number of projects has been too high. This issue was discussed briefly in the Board's EXCO meeting in Antalya in October 1997, and at much greater length in the full Board meeting in Tokyo in April 1998. The Board looks forward to Management's final proposals on the subject, in response to its recommendations.

Chapter 3

While it is the Board's view that research priority-setting at CIFOR has in fact always taken cost-effectiveness, contribution to International Public Goods criteria and contribution to CIFOR's Mission and Strategy into account, we agree that the process could probably be more transparent and formal.

Until now, the Board has been unable to play as active a part in this process as it might have liked, because the timing of the single annual Board Meeting made it impossible to do more than approve the Programme of Work and Budget and Medium Term Plan in retrospect. The EPMR

team's proposal that the Board now move to two meetings a year is particularly welcomed in this context, since the second meeting can be timed to provide input to the process of resource allocation between projects. With closer involvement at this level, more focused support to broader priority-setting will also follow.

The Board concurs with Management in preferring the embedding of training within research collaboration, rather than via a separately instituted CIFOR training unit.

The EPMR team's comments about the development of research methodologies for greater interdisciplinarity are welcomed. CIFOR is in a unique position to advance capacity in this area and provide leadership to its national research partners. However, the Board does not feel that an ICER in this area would be of great help. It would rather suggest a workshop in which CIFOR researchers and others who have been working in interdisciplinary, problem-oriented research focus on lessons learnt and helpful methodologies, and share the results.

Chapter 4

The Board accepts the recommendation that it seek Trustees who, between them have broad managerial and financial competency, familiarity with the CGIAR system and with the private sector. These were indeed the recommendations of the outgoing Nominations Committee chair in 1997 and are strong priorities for the Board. The EPMR team's endorsement of these needs is very welcome.

The EPMR Panel's report also discusses changes to Board Members' terms of office beyond the first three year term, and suggests annual renewals thereafter. The Board's response is that this is too prescriptive. Planning for the phased renewal of Board Members is already a very time-consuming task, and a commitment to annual renewals for what could be a high proportion of the Board would bring unwarranted additional difficulties. It was agreed, instead, that Board Members should have no automatic right to a second three-year term, and that in some cases individual members might be asked to stay on for a period of less than three further years, if this fitted the Board's projected profile better.

As indicated above, the Board welcomes the EPMR team's recommendation that Board meetings become biannual. It is clear that the range of topics which can be covered in one Board meeting a year is now too limited, and that two meetings would offer opportunities to engage more effectively with CIFOR's research programme. The Board sees this engagement as including: the fostering of a closer and more productive working relationship with CIFOR research staff; more opportunity for inputs to the Medium Term Plan and Programme of Work and Budget; and a greater involvement in decisions on resource allocation between projects.

Conclusion

The Board were grateful for the opportunities they had to interact with the EPMR team, for the helpfulness of the exchanges, and for the useful report which has emerged from the process.