Report of the
Third External Programme and Management Review
of the International Service for National Agricultural Research
(ISNAR)
This report comprises:

(a) Extract from "Summary of Proceedings and Decisions", CGIAR Mid-Term Meeting 1997, Cairo, Egypt

(b) Letter from TAC Chairman and CGIAR Executive Secretary, transmitting the Report of the Third External Programme and Management Review

(c) TAC Commentary on the Third External Programme and Management Review of ISNAR

(d) ISNAR’s response to the Third External Programme and Management Review

(e) Transmittal letter from Panel Chairman to TAC Chairman and CGIAR Executive Secretary

(f) Report of the Third External Programme and Management Review of ISNAR
CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND CGIAR SECRETARIAT

Report of the
Third External Programme and Management Review
of the International Service for National Agricultural Research
(ISNAR)

TAC SECRETARIAT
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
October 1997
From: The Secretariat

July 1997

CGIAR Mid-Term Meeting
May 26-30, 1997
Cairo, Egypt

External Review of ISNAR

The CGIAR discussed the external review of ISNAR in Parallel Session II under the chairmanship of Mr. Paul Egger (Switzerland). Review Panel Chair Samuel Paul presented the findings of the review team. The EPMR noted the significant progress made by ISNAR over the review period; however, in view of the changing global environment, the review called for a strategic repositioning of the center.

ISNAR Board Chair Amir Muhammed noted that ISNAR largely concurred with the panel's analysis, conclusions, and recommendations, and had already put in motion a process for implementing them. ISNAR Director General Stein Bie indicated that a medium-term plan, expected to be completed by ICW97, will outline a new ISNAR strategy.

TAC Chair Donald Winkelmann summarized TAC's views on the review, stressing the need for ISNAR to adopt a more systematic approach to priority setting and TAC's broad endorsement of the panel's recommendations. Both TAC and ISNAR noted that one shortcoming of the review was the limited attention it gave to analysis of ISNAR's collaboration with other CGIAR centers and with FAO.

During the ensuing discussion, members noted several key directional changes, as recommended by the EPMR and endorsed by TAC, including the following:

- ISNAR should more clearly define its niche. This would involve strengthening the research base for its services, enhancing knowledge about policy, and making better use of strategic alliances.

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1 Extract from "Summary of Proceedings and Decisions - Report on Parallel Session II", CGIAR Mid-Term Meeting 1997, Cairo, Egypt
• ISNAR should better focus on capacity building. This involve moving up in the capacity building ladder; linking research and research-based services with capacity building; strengthening capabilities in capacity building efforts in and close to NARS, particularly in the management field; and, aligning its staffing and skill mix with the new skills the center will need.

• ISNAR should operate on the basis of a broad NARS concept. This would require, among others, supporting partnerships and facilitating the functioning of regional fora.

• ISNAR should focus on weaker NARS and collaborate with stronger NARS as needed in regional efforts and within the context of a clearly articulated strategy.

The session chair concluded the discussion by noting that the parallel session endorsed the recommendations of the external review and was pleased that the center concurred with them. The parallel session suggested that, in addition to the comments made by TAC, ISNAR should also consider the suggestions listed above during the strategic repositioning of the center.

Conclusion. Following its review of the EPMR report and the response from the board and management of the center, the Group endorsed the recommendations of ISNAR's EPMR and those in the TAC commentary, and welcomed ISNAR's efforts to move forward with a process for implementation. The Group noted that ISNAR expects to complete an outline of its new strategy by ICW97.
Dear Mr. Serageldin,

We are pleased to submit to you the report of the Third External Programme and Management Review of ISNAR which was conducted recently under the chairmanship of Mr. Samuel Paul of India. The review report and the written response of the ISNAR management and Board of Trustees were considered by TAC at its 72nd meeting in March in the presence of the Panel Chair. ISNAR was represented by the Chair of the Board of Trustees, Mr. Amir Muhammed, the Director General, Mr. Stein Bie, and the Deputy Director General, Mr. Howard Elliott.

In addition to the report of the panel, there are two attachments to this letter. The first contains the TAC commentary which summarizes TAC’s and the CGIAR Secretariat’s reactions to the panel’s report and to ISNAR’s response. The second attachment is the response of ISNAR.

We are pleased to note that the review found ISNAR to be well administered, that ISNAR’s outputs have increased considerably over the last five years, both in terms of quality and quantity, and that NARS and other stakeholders have indicated high satisfaction with ISNAR’s work and services. Nevertheless, we agree with the review’s finding that some important directional changes will be required to help ISNAR respond more effectively to a rapidly changing external environment and to develop a more coherent research agenda. ISNAR should formulate a new strategic plan and carefully review its priority-setting process. We also urge that ISNAR develop a strategic research agenda and ensure that mechanisms are in place to guarantee high quality in all of its work.

Mr. Ismail Serageldin
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We are encouraged that the Board and management have responded favourably to the recommendations of the review and that the incoming Director General will initiate a strategic planning process as soon as possible.

TAC agrees with the panel that ISNAR’s mandate and mission continue to be relevant. With the directional changes proposed and a more coherent research agenda, we believe that ISNAR will continue to have a prominent place within the CGIAR System. We recommend continued strong support to ISNAR by the CGIAR.

Yours sincerely,

Alexander von der Osten
Executive Secretary, CGIAR

Donald L. Winkelmann
TAC Chair
TAC expresses its thanks to the Chair, Dr. Samuel Paul, and the members of the panel for a forward-looking, concise and analytical report that focuses on the main strategic issues regarding ISNAR. The Committee appreciates the innovative format and structure of the report in which each of the chapter headings reflects a major thrust of the terms of reference for the CGIAR review process. It consists of a brief main report with details on programme and management confined to annexes. TAC cautions readers of the EPMR report against focusing their attention on the main body only, as much of the discussion of the programmes is only in the annexes.

TAC endorses, in general, the recommendations of the panel and is pleased to note that the Board and management of ISNAR in their response also agree with the major directions and recommendations proposed by the panel. The Committee is pleased that ISNAR was found to be well administered, that its outputs have increased considerably over the last five years, both in terms of quality and quantity, and that NARS and other stakeholders have indicated high satisfaction with ISNAR’s work and services. Nevertheless, TAC supports the review’s finding that some important directional changes are required to help ISNAR respond effectively to a rapidly changing external environment and to develop a more coherent research agenda. The Committee offers some further comments, which have been prepared with inputs from the CGIAR Secretariat, to supplement the views of the panel.

**Priority Setting and Strategic Planning**

TAC strongly endorses the recommendation that ISNAR should develop a new Strategic Plan in the light of changes in its external and internal environment and an assessment of the emerging challenges. In this regard, TAC would strongly encourage ISNAR to carefully review its priority setting process. The Committee urges ISNAR to develop a more systematic approach to priority setting which also attempts to more directly link ISNAR’s outputs and activities to CGIAR goals. TAC endorses the panel’s views on the need for ISNAR to shift towards the research-based end of the service spectrum, gradually leaving the less research-based parts to other service providers. ISNAR should attempt to be more proactive in the development of a coherent research agenda. In this respect, the Committee is pleased to note that the panel’s views are consistent with those expressed by TAC earlier in relation to its strategic study on the future of institution strengthening research and service in the CGIAR. TAC thereby also appreciates ISNAR’s concern that such a shift should not be at the expense of a loss of financial integrity.

In its strategic planning process, ISNAR should also carefully consider the nature of its research, which ranges from the development of tools to research on the research policy environment. This should also include a careful consideration of the research organizations active in the field of policy and management in view of the need for strategic alliances in order to maximize the returns from the restricted resources ISNAR has at its disposal. In this regard, TAC notes the limited attention given in the panel’s report to the collaboration between ISNAR and other CGIAR Centres, and between ISNAR and FAO. ISNAR should carefully assess opportunities to expand such collaboration in the future. The Centre should,
furthermore, give more emphasis to the possibility of alternative suppliers, particularly for itsservice activities. In carefully defining its niche, as recommended by the panel, ISNAR will
clarify many of the issues raised above. On that basis, ISNAR will also be able to better
consider the mix of skills it requires to effectively address the new challenges. As the panel
recommends, ISNAR should have at least a minimum nucleus of enhanced expertise in
management, supplemented, as necessary, with part-time expertise obtained from external
centres of management excellence.

Capacity Building

The panel recommends that ISNAR move up the capacity building ladder, concentrating more
on building institutional capabilities. This recommendation has been subject to a number of
interpretations ranging from building “mini ISNARs” around the world, to developing tools
others can use to strengthen NARS capabilities. TAC supports the spirit and intent of the
recommendation and encourages ISNAR in its strategic planning process to give even greater
emphasis to multiple avenues in implementing its work.

Quality of the Research

The panel found that ISNAR’s work is of varying quality and that maintaining consistency in
quality should be an important Centre goal. Given the shift of emphasis towards research, it is
doubly important, as the panel says, that management focus more on quality control. As the
Centre will need to increasingly shift the balance of its activities towards more research, TAC urges
that ISNAR ensure stronger coherence in its research agenda and ensure that
mechanisms are in place to monitor quality in all its work. ISNAR has made a promising start
in initiating internally commissioned external reviews. TAC considers that this process
should be further enhanced and that by the time of the next external review, all of the Centre’s
work should have been made subject to a rigorous external peer review. TAC further notes
that while the panel has made a quantitative estimate of the number of ISNAR publications,
this assessment is not accompanied by further analysis as to the adequacy of this publication
record.

Board of Trustees

The Committee notes that there is a difference of opinion between the ISNAR Board and the
panel on whether the Board conducted formal evaluations of the Director General. This
seems to have resulted from different interpretations of what constitutes a “formal
evaluation”. In the future, the ISNAR Board could make use of the more formal assessment
instruments that are available.

TAC encourages the ISNAR Board of Trustees to give more leadership in providing guidance
on strategic issues, and to take an active role in the forthcoming strategic planning exercise.

Overall, TAC agrees with the panel that ISNAR would benefit from significant changes. The
Committee is encouraged that the incoming Director General will initiate a strategic planning
process as soon as possible. The Centre should keep TAC and the Members of the CGIAR
informed of the progress made.
ISNAR’s Response to the Third External Program and Management Review

ISNAR’s management and Board of Trustees would like to thank the members of the review panel. As will be seen below, we concur largely with the panel’s analysis and conclusions, and we endorse most of the recommendations contained in the review report. We believe the panel did a commendable job of understanding ISNAR, pinpointing some of its major strengths and weaknesses and suggesting some promising -- certainly thought-provoking -- changes in direction.

The EPMR report contains a relatively short main report and more lengthy annexes with detailed assessments of program and management. The report contains four main recommendations (drawn from the main report) and eight other recommendations (drawn from the annexes). In the following two sections, we respond to these recommendations. A final section contains an additional observation.

Main Recommendations

I. The panel recommends that ISNAR define and interpret its niche both to guide its own future planning and to improve the understanding of its role by its clients and the donor community.

Endorsed. ISNAR appreciates the need to more clearly define its “niche” -- mission, mandate, strategic directions and areas of comparative advantage -- in order to improve planning and the use of scarce resources, and also to communicate more effectively with its stakeholders and partners. As part of a review of the ISNAR strategy (recommendation IV), ISNAR will seek to clearly define its niche and elaborate methods for setting its priorities and focusing its activities.

II. The panel recommends that ISNAR move more towards the research-based end of the service spectrum, gradually leaving the less research-based part to other service providers.

Endorsed. We concur with the panel that ISNAR should strengthen its research activities. Linking research and service produces synergy that benefits both functions; having a research base improves the quality of service activities, and involvement in service activities feeds lessons from the field into the research process. Hence, as we move toward the “research-based end of the service spectrum” we will strive to:

- develop more effective methods for integrating research, service and training
- learn from our field involvement
- institutionalize the lessons learned
- disseminate results to various client and stakeholder groups
III. The panel recommends that ISNAR move up in the capacity-building ladder, concentrating more on building institutional capabilities both within and outside NARS in countries and regions so that the functions/services being provided by it from a distance could be increasingly performed by appropriate organizations/groups in closer proximity to NARS.

Endorsed with a qualification. We agree with the panel that ISNAR should work to strengthen NARS capacity to help themselves. ISNAR’s strategy argues for development of tools and approaches that others can use in delivering institution-strengthening services in NARS; this has been a hallmark of much of our work in the past.

Where our views may differ from those of the panel is in the strategies that ISNAR should use to develop NARS institutional capacity. The panel states that ISNAR should increasingly pay attention to building and strengthening institutional capabilities in organizations outside NARS, which can in turn provide services and training for NARS. This idea has been debated on a number of occasions at ISNAR and even experimented with. So far, the results have not been up to our expectations. However, ISNAR will continue to explore this and other avenues to identify and deliver alternative sources of support to NARS for institutional development.

IV. The panel recommends that ISNAR reformulate its strategy in light of the changes in its environment and its assessment of the emerging challenges, review the activities/functions it needs to divest in order to address the new challenges and tasks it plans to undertake, and specify the changes in the mix of skills it will attempt to put in place in support of its strategy.

Endorsed. The current ISNAR Strategy has proven flexible and continues to provide direction to ISNAR’s work. However, we envision a process in which the new Director General, interacting with the Board of Trustees, will review the strategy and organization of ISNAR, taking into account the recommendations of the External Review and the Medium-Term Plan. This review of ISNAR’s direction and activities may require revision of the MTP-1998-2000, as well as identification of the professional and other resources needed to implement the new strategy.
Other Recommendations

1. The panel recommends that ISNAR's Policy and System Development Program take steps to:
   - focus on a related set of problems and issues in a more integrated manner
   - develop a research agenda that leads to better identification and understanding of key policy factors affecting the overall performance and effectiveness of the research system
   - build capacity to integrate lessons drawn from other parts of the program, from the Management Program, and from other sources, and contribute all this to ISNAR's institutional memory
   - improve quality through better conceptualization of research, better research design and teamwork, and in particular, interdisciplinary research
   - improve targeting of publications for policymakers
   - develop strong allies, both regional and international, including long-term outposting and secondment of staff, where this accelerates learning and/or implementation
   - improve the staff mix of scientific disciplines in relation to major problems and issues identified

Endorsed: The program, like ISNAR as a whole, needs to clarify its niche and enhance the coherence and integration of its activities. This will be done in the context of the review of ISNAR's strategy, mentioned above.

Identifying and understanding factors that affect the performance of research systems will be a priority for both the Policy Program and the Management Program.

We appreciate the need to improve ISNAR's research, including the process of learning from field activities and making the lessons available to a range of stakeholders. ISNAR's two programs should also learn more from each other's experiences. Additionally, ISNAR will make efforts to interact with other centers of knowledge and expertise in its field of work and will seek to access and use information available in these centers.

ISNAR appreciates the need to ensure high quality in specific research activities and in its programs as a whole. The Policy and System Development Program has a good track record in externally published books and peer-reviewed articles. ISNAR management and board fully accept the challenge of monitoring research quality and ensuring that the Programs employ adequate mechanisms for interdisciplinary teamwork.

We are in agreement with the suggestion to target more of our publications for policy makers. Effort will be made to package research results for policy audiences in existing publications such as our policy briefs and to disseminate findings through policy dialogues. A readership survey planned for 1997 should provide useful information for targeting our publications to the needs and interests of policy makers.
ISNAR will continue to aggressively seek to develop alliances, and in specific cases, where both a strong need and an opportunity (particularly funding) exist, outposting may be considered.

The recommendation to improve staff mix will be considered in the new strategy and revised program of work.

2. The panel recommends that ISNAR’s Management Program take steps to:

- expand its work on benchmarking, particularly with respect to experiences from the private sector
- define clearly what its future role would be in the development and implementation of information systems, in the light of developing-country needs, availability of alternative suppliers, and other demands for ISNAR services
- plan its future activities in the management area through rigorous needs assessments and priority setting

*Endorsed.* We intend to further expand our benchmarking activities, and to pay particular attention to capturing experiences in sectors outside of the traditional national agricultural research organizations, including the private sector and NGOs as well as other service providers in the public sector. We will also look beyond the developing countries, to capture experiences of advanced research institutes and other types of organizations in industrial countries.

A thorough review of our work in management information systems will be carried out in the near future.

The Management Program will systematize and analyze information on NAROs’ needs in the management area and will carry out a formal priority-setting exercise for the Program’s activities.

3. The panel recommends that ISNAR develop and implement an explicit public-awareness strategy with the assistance of qualified public-relations professionals.

*Endorsed.* ISNAR will develop and implement a public awareness strategy, involving public-relations professionals where appropriate.

4. The panel recommends that ISNAR benchmark best practices regarding spousal employment at other international organizations operating in The Hague, and actively search for a solution in order to enhance the center’s ability to attract and retain the quality of professional staff it requires to fulfill its mandate.

*Endorsed.* ISNAR places high priority on the issue of spousal employment, and there are on-going discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on this subject.

5. The panel recommends that ISNAR make every effort to attract internationally recruited staff with advanced degrees in management.

*Endorsed.* In future, ISNAR will place high priority on recruiting staff with advanced degrees in management. We will also continue to establish close ties
with external centers of management excellence, in both industrial and
developing countries.

6. The panel recommends that ISNAR develop mechanisms to link the annual
staff performance appraisal to tangible forms of recognition and reward, and to
replace the current seniority-based pay system with one which explicitly links
pay increases to performance.

Endorsed. ISNAR will strive to improve the annual performance appraisal
process and to strengthen the links between performance and pay increases.

7. The panel recommends that ISNAR design and implement an integrated
strategy for human resource management at ISNAR with the benefit of input
from a qualified human resource professional with experience in similar
organizations.

Endorsed. We will develop a human resources strategy, with the input of
qualified specialists in human resource management and experience in similar
institutions.

8. The panel recommends that ISNAR carry out a formal work-process
reengineering study with regard to Central Files in order to understand its needs
regarding the circulation and filing of written communications in today’s
environment, and design, utilizing today’s advanced information technology
(which is readily available from ISNAR’s Computer Services Unit), a more
appropriate system to satisfy the center’s needs.

Endorsed. ISNAR will carry out the recommended work process study
regarding the circulation and filing of written communications, and to design a
more appropriate system to satisfy the center’s needs.

Additional Observation

The review panel indicated that the Board of Trustees had not carried out any sort of
formal performance evaluation of ISNAR’s Director General.

The board would like to communicate that it did carry out formal annual evaluations
of the Director General, and that results of these performance evaluations were
communicated to the Director General by the chair of the board.
THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND CGIAR SECRETARIAT

REPORT OF THE

THIRD EXTERNAL PROGRAMME AND MANAGEMENT REVIEW

OF THE

INTERNATIONAL SERVICE FOR NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

(ISNAR)

Review Panel:  Dr. Samuel Paul (Chairman)
Dr. Jacques Brossier
Dr. Kenneth Hoadley
Dr. Jesus Moncada de la Fuente
Dr. Mandi Rukuni
Dr. Roberto Vazquez Platero

Dr. Guido Gryseels (Panel Secretary, TAC Secretariat)
Dr. Selcuk Özgediz (CGIAR Secretariat)

TAC SECRETARIAT

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

December 1996
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TAC Chair  
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U.S.A.  

Mr. Alexander von der Osten  
Executive Secretary, CGIAR  
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Subject: Report of the Third EPMR of ISNAR

Dear Don and Alexander,

I am pleased to submit to you the Report of the Third External Program and Management Review of ISNAR.

The Panel conducted this review in a period of substantial changes in the external environment that have made ISNAR’s task much more difficult and complex. As indicated in the report, the Panel is unanimous in its assessment that ISNAR’s mission continues to be relevant today. ISNAR is very well administered and its outputs have increased considerably during the last five years, both in terms of quality and quantity. Staff morale is good. NARS and other stakeholders have indicated a high degree of satisfaction with ISNAR’s work and services, and with the contributions ISNAR has made in strengthening national research capacities.

The Panel is of the view, however, that important directional changes are required at ISNAR, particularly because of the need to respond to the rapidly changing environment. ISNAR needs to define the niche it should carve out for itself in the years to come. We have included some pointers to assist ISNAR and the CGIAR in defining this niche. ISNAR should also reformulate its strategy.

We tried a novel approach in preparing our report. We kept the main report short and related it directly to our terms of reference, covering: strategy, outputs and impact, quality, management and ISNAR’s future. Annexes provide more detailed assessments of ISNAR’s programs and management.

The report includes four main recommendations and ten other recommendations. The main recommendations are in the main report, the others in the annexes.
We want to express our sincere appreciation to the Director General, Management and staff of ISNAR for their superb efforts in preparing documentation and providing logistical support for this Review, their cooperation at all times and their warm hospitality.

I also want to put on record my personal appreciation for the Members of the Review Team and the CGIAR and TAC Secretariat resource persons. They were a fine team that worked well together, and while our debates were sometimes intense and occasionally difficult, we always found a way to reach a consensus.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Samuel Paul
Panel Chair
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OVERVIEW

During the period under review, ISNAR’s activities and outputs expanded substantially compared to the preceding period, and its contributions towards the mission of strengthening NARS have, on the whole, been positive. Service has remained ISNAR’s major thrust and its supportive activities in terms of publications, training, and information have reinforced this. The internal tensions generated by the divergent pulls and uncertainties of donor funding and disparate client demands, and their negative impact on the institution’s focus and internal priority setting, have lessened somewhat over the period under review. The External Program and Management Review (EPMR) Panel is unanimous in its assessment that ISNAR’s mission continues to be relevant today.

The Panel is of the view, however, that important directional changes are required in ISNAR. These changes are necessary both because the operating environment of ISNAR has changed significantly in recent years and because of the need to anticipate and respond to the evolving needs of NARS in a changed context. Among the major external environmental changes that deserve to be noted are the broadening of NARS to include new players, the changing role of NAROs in the new setting, the fluidity and shifts in the rules of the game concerning the generation and acquisition of new technologies, the decline in real resources available for agricultural research both globally and in specific countries, and the emergence of competition in the field in which ISNAR operates. The implications of these factors for NARS’ needs are several. For some of the services that are less research based or that are repetitive, NARS may increasingly turn to other service providers who could potentially be more cost effective as well. The resource constraints on ISNAR imply that a centralized approach to service delivery in different parts of the world could become an increasingly unsustainable option, and one that might make only a limited impact. Clearly, there is a need for ISNAR to reposition itself to be relevant and effective in a changing and complex environment.

All these are reasons why ISNAR needs to carefully review and define the niche it should carve out for itself in the years to come. This is necessary both as a guide to its future planning and to improve the understanding of its role by its clients and the donor community. In the Panel’s view, ISNAR should develop a distinctive competence to lead (1) in the production, acquisition, and delivery of knowledge and information about the policy, institutional environment, and management of NARS, and (2) in the provision of services based on this knowledge to improve the policies and management of the organizations, partnerships, and linkages of NARS in the poorest countries. In this way, ISNAR can create a niche for itself, provided that in the performance of these tasks, it makes greater use of strategic alliances both to leverage its influence and to facilitate local capacity building. This is a direction towards which ISNAR ought to move. It may, however, necessitate the scaling down or elimination of some activities, and even functions, presently being performed by ISNAR.

In specific terms, the implications of the niche proposed above and the external environmental changes summarized at the outset for ISNAR are several. First, ISNAR should move more towards the research-based end of the service spectrum, gradually leaving the less research-based part to competitors and other service providers. Underlying this recommendation is the recognition of the need to more fully exploit the comparative advantage of ISNAR as a
provider of public goods that others cannot easily produce. It is also a response to the increasing competition by others to deliver the less research-based and more repetitive services to NARS.

Second, ISNAR should increasingly pay attention to the building and strengthening of institutional capabilities, both within and outside NARS, in countries and regions so that the functions/services being provided by it from a distance could be performed by appropriate organizations/groups in closer proximity to NARS. This would imply a shift in focus from training as the primary means of human resource development towards one of enhancing the competence of other organizations that could supply services to NARS. Institutional strengthening of this nature would entail collaborative arrangements with other partners. The eventual outcome of this effort will be the emergence of a new set of institutions located in at least a few countries/regions, including some within NARS, that will directly engage in the kind of research and services for NARS that ISNAR is providing today. The creation of such “intermediate” organizations located closer to NARS is the only way to strengthen NARS on a global basis. Long-term capacity building of this kind has to be done selectively and a good understanding of country and regional contexts will be a prerequisite for work in this area. Obviously, direct service delivery will have to be continued in countries/regions that are not ready for such initiatives. ISNAR is exploring this approach, but does not as yet have any significant experience in this area.

Third, the Panel recommends that ISNAR reformulate its strategy in light of the changes in its environment and its assessment of the emerging challenges, review the activities/functions it needs to divest in order to address the new challenges and tasks it plans to undertake, and specify the changes in the mix of skills it will attempt to put in place in support of its strategy. This strategy should provide guideposts for the future, while maintaining the needed flexibility to evolve over time in response to new external changes that are difficult to anticipate at this time.

The Panel also reviewed the management of the center and its programs in detail. On the management side, it found the basic structures, systems, and practices to be adequate for the efficient conduct of ISNAR’s operations. The Panel found the program outputs to be substantial, but has pointed out gaps and areas for improvement. Specific recommendations and suggestions for action have been made for both management and programs.
LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Main

The Panel recommends that ISNAR

- define and interpret its niche both to guide its own future planning and to improve the understanding of its role by its clients and the donor community;

- move more towards the research-based end of the service spectrum, gradually leaving the less research-based part to other service providers;

- move up in the capacity-building ladder, concentrating more on building institutional capabilities both within and outside NARS in countries and regions so that the functions/services being provided by it from a distance could be increasingly performed by appropriate organizations/groups in closer proximity to NARS;

- reformulate its strategy in light of the changes in its environment and its assessment of the emerging challenges, review the activities/functions it needs to divest in order to address the new challenges and tasks it plans to undertake, and specify the changes in the mix of skills it will attempt to put in place in support of its strategy.

Other

The Panel recommends that ISNAR

- Policy and System Development Program take steps to:
  - focus on a related set of problems and issues in a more integrated manner;
  - develop a research agenda that leads to better identification and understanding of key policy factors affecting the overall performance and effectiveness of the research system;
  - build capacity to integrate lessons drawn from other parts of the program, from the Management Program, and from other sources, and contribute all this to ISNAR's institutional memory;
  - improve quality through better conceptualization of research, better research design and teamwork, and in particular, interdisciplinary research;
  - improve targeting of publications for policymakers;
  - develop strong allies, both regional and international, including long-term outposting and secondment of staff, where this accelerates learning and/or implementation; and
  - improve the staff mix of scientific disciplines in relation to major problems and issues identified.
Management Program take steps to:
- expand its work on benchmarking, particularly with respect to experiences from the private sector;
- define clearly what its future role would be in the development and implementation of information systems, in the light of developing-country needs, availability of alternative suppliers, and other demands for ISNAR services;
- plan its future activities in the management area through rigorous needs assessments and priority setting;

- develop and implement an explicit public-awareness strategy with the assistance of qualified public-relations professionals;

- benchmark best practices regarding spousal employment at other international organizations operating in The Hague, and actively search for a solution in order to enhance the center’s ability to attract and retain the quality of professional staff it requires to fulfill its mandate;

- make every effort to attract internationally recruited staff with advanced degrees in management;

- develop mechanisms to link the annual staff performance appraisal to tangible forms of recognition and reward, and to replace the current seniority-based pay system with one which explicitly links pay increases to performance;

- design and implement an integrated strategy for human resource management at ISNAR with the benefit of input from a qualified human resource professional with experience in similar organizations;

- carry out a formal work-process reengineering study with regard to Central Files in order to understand its needs regarding the circulation and filing of written communications in today’s environment, and design, utilizing today’s advanced information technology (which is readily available from ISNAR’s Computer Services Unit), a more appropriate system to satisfy the center’s needs.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

ISNAR was established in 1979 to help strengthen national agricultural research capabilities in developing countries. Its ultimate goal is to assist developing countries in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of their agricultural research systems through enhanced capacity in the areas of research policy, and organization and management (from the ISNAR Constitution as revised in 1989).

During the first five years of its operation (1980-85), ISNAR’s activities focused primarily on diagnostic reviews of NARS. A favorable external program and management review in 1985 recommended that ISNAR continue its operations at the end of the five-year “sunset clause” imposed on it at the time of its establishment. In 1986, ISNAR produced its first strategic plan in which it proposed to operate as a research-based service organization with an allocation of resources of 50% to advisory services, 25-30% to research, and 20-25% to training. In 1991, ISNAR developed a new strategic plan which further defined the nature of the advisory services it would provide: comprehensive institutional development, component strengthening, and knowledge generation and information dissemination, each of which would have a service, a research and a training component.

ISNAR underwent a second external review in 1991, which made a number of recommendations, primarily to give more emphasis to priority setting, to working with universities, to a greater involvement of NARS in the center’s strategic planning, to developing a training strategy and publication policy, and to research, personnel and financial management. In general, according to ISNAR, almost all of the 1991 recommendations have been implemented either fully or partially (see Annex B-1).

ISNAR has developed three medium-term plans so far; the first two cover 1989-93 and 1994-98, and a third plan has now been prepared in draft for the period 1998-2000. In preparation of its review of CGIAR priorities and strategies, TAC commissioned a strategic study on the future role of the CGIAR in institution-strengthening research and services. The report of this panel was finalized during 1995. The Panel was chaired by Dr. John Nickel and its report made a number of recommendations on the future organization of the CGIAR’s work in this area. The outcome of this strategic study provided a major input into the preparation of this report by the review Panel.

ISNAR today has a 1996 budget of USD 10.9 million (consisting of approximately USD 6.5 million of unrestricted core contributions, USD 1 million of restricted core contributions from the Dutch government, and USD 3.4 million from funds mostly earned from the sale of services and through special projects) and a program that is entirely within the CGIAR agreed research agenda. It has a total staff of about 95 people of which 55 are professional and 40 are support staff. Of the 55 professional staff, 41 are internationally recruited.

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ISNAR allocates 73% of its resources to CGIAR Activity 5 on strengthening NARS and 27% to Activity 4 on improving policies. The allocation of 73% of resources to strengthening NARS is composed of about 39% for organization and management counseling (about a third of which can be considered as research), 24% for training, 6% for documentation and information dissemination, and 4% for networks.

ISNAR has two major programs. One on Policy and System Development, which, with a 1996 budget of USD 3.3 million, accounts for 34% of ISNAR's budget, and one on Management, which, with a budget of USD 2.8 million, accounts for 24% of ISNAR's budget. There are also several cross-program activities. The programs are supported by specialized units: computer services, library and documentation, publications, and training.

1.2 Internal and External Developments

Several developments in the external environment over the last 18 months have had major consequences for the future work of ISNAR. In the renewal process of the CGIAR, which culminated in the 1995 Lucerne Action Program, the Group was encouraged to continue its efforts to develop a more open and participatory system with full south/north ownership. In particular, a recommendation was made to accelerate the process of systematizing participation by the national research systems of developing countries in setting up and implementing the CGIAR's agenda. Following Lucerne, specific action plans were drawn up for each of the major regions, culminating in the preparation of a Global Plan of Action which was discussed and endorsed at a Global Forum during ICW 96.

A number of other important external developments were well summarized in a paper prepared by the Director General of ISNAR for the 1996 Internal Program Review. The Deputy Director General also presented a most useful paper on important internal developments.

The Panel recognizes that the 1996 External Program and Management Review was held in an environment that has become much more difficult and complex for ISNAR. Some major aspects are worth mentioning in this introduction (others follow elsewhere in the report).

- It is now widely recognized that the CGIAR accounts for 4% of global investment in agricultural research for developing countries, with NARS accounting for most of the other 96%. This highlights the need to clearly define comparative advantage and to develop strategic partnerships.
- The changes in the financial environment in the CGIAR have led to budget reductions, insecurity in funding, downsizing, and a critical financial outlook in all international research centers. At the same time, expectations on ISNAR and demands for its research and services have grown rapidly.

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• Most NARS have had to cope with reduced financial resources and increasing costs. Resources available for scientists have been reduced considerably, particularly in Africa and Latin America.
• Increasing regionalization of research and the development of regional research organizations and regional fora have given NARS a forum through which they can be their own spokesperson in international fora, and have changed the environment within which ISNAR operates.
• Efforts to link the CGIAR more closely in the global agricultural research system have emphasized the need to broaden partnerships not only with NARS but also with actors such as NGOs, the private sector, advanced research institutes, and universities.
• The need for the CGIAR to engage in new partnerships and the move towards system-wide programs have further stressed the already limited capacity of ISNAR to effectively respond to the numerous requests for collaboration.
• ISNAR has had to cope with a process of major internal changes and developments of new organizational structures, while facing ever-increasing demands for its services.
• The TAC-commissioned strategic study of institution-strengthening research and services in the CGIAR made a number of recommendations with a major bearing on ISNAR's work.

ISNAR's current Director General, Dr. Christian Bonte-Friedheim is retiring in February 1997 and will be succeeded by Dr. Stein Bie, currently with FAO. This external review was planned so that the Panel's report could be completed before the retirement of the outgoing Director General while the response of the Board and management to the recommendations of the review would be made through the incoming Director General.

1.3 Conduct of the Review

This Third External Program and Management Review was conducted along the Terms of Reference for Panels conducting external reviews of CGIAR centers. The topics to be covered are the Recent Evolution of the Center; Mission, Strategy, and Priorities; Program Accomplishments and Impact; and Organization and Management (see Annex B-2).

Members of the CGIAR were also asked to state any specific issues that should be raised by the Panel. The work of the Panel started with the Panel Chair, together with the Panel Secretary and the Resource Person from the CGIAR Secretariat, attending the meeting of ISNAR's Board of Trustees in May 1996, at which a number of issues were identified as requiring careful attention during the review. On this basis, Panel membership was finalized and the entire Panel attended the internal program review of ISNAR from 23-26 September 1996. The Panel also considered a comprehensive set of background documentation, including a number of ICERS developed by ISNAR in preparation for the review. During this period, as well as on Friday 27 September, the Panel discussed the major issues to be addressed during the review and agreed on how to share responsibilities.

The Panel chair and one Panel member subsequently visited the World Bank, IFPRI and the Inter-American Development Bank. Three Panel members attended the Global Forum of NARS, interacted with other participants in the global agricultural research system, and interviewed many NARS leaders who were present at ICW96. One Panel member attended
the Executive Committee of AARINENA in Cairo from 25-27 November 1996. The SACCAR Board Meeting in Pretoria from 15-17 November 1996 was also attended by a Panel member. Individual Panel members studied in detail ISNAR’s involvement in Zimbabwe, Uruguay and Mexico. The Panel benefited substantially from internally commissioned external reviews by ISNAR, in particular the ICER on impact assessment. The Panel’s work was also facilitated by a staff survey conducted by ISNAR’s management. The Panel chair and two Panel members attended some of the sessions of the meeting of the ISNAR Board of Trustees from 3-6 December and held discussions with the incoming Director General.

The main phase of the review was conducted from 9-20 December 1996. The Panel met with the Director General designate and conducted interviews with most senior staff and many of the support staff. The Panel also met with the Director General and Senior Management. At the end of the main phase, the Chair presented the main findings of the EPMR Panel to ISNAR’s management and staff.

1.4 Outline of the Report

This report contains two parts. First is the main report, which provides a synthesis of the Panel’s findings and its views on ISNAR’s strategy, achievements, and impact; quality of work; management; and future strategic directions. Second is a set of annexes: Annex A provides a more general discussion of programs, support units and management. Annex B provides the Terms of Reference for the Review, information on Panel membership, and an overview of ISNAR’s response to the recommendations of the 1991 External Review.
2. STRATEGY

2.1 Background

The CGIAR’s creation in 1971 brought international agricultural research to the front lines of the battle against hunger and poverty. It didn’t take much time to realize that such a task could not possibly be accomplished without the support of strong national agricultural research systems (NARS) and accordingly, in 1979, ISNAR was created as a service with the broad mandate of providing assistance to the NARS, by strengthening their capacity of utilizing their resources in an effective and efficient manner. Staffed with professionals highly experienced in the direction and management of research organizations, it attempted to build experience by working through various types of collaboration on a global basis.

In 1986, ISNAR conducted its first strategic planning exercise, which defined its goal as “to help developing countries to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of their agricultural research systems, by increasing their capacity in four specific fields: policy, organization, direction and management”.

In order to achieve this goal, ISNAR organized three complementary functions: advisory services, applied research, and training. These three components of its initial strategy have remained through time as the basic areas of action for the institution.

In order to define the thematic fields for concentration of efforts, twelve factors were identified as critical to NARS performance. These factors were grouped into three major categories, respectively related to the policy context, the structure and organization of research systems, and the management of the research institutions.

In consultation with NARS leaders and according to specified criteria that included the country demand for services, the relevance of each factor in the achievement of NARS performance, ISNAR’s own comparative advantage and the expectation of achieving impact through its collaboration, the following six areas were selected for the concentration of efforts:

- formulation of research policy, priority setting, resource allocation and long-term planning;
- structure and organization of research systems;
- linkages between NARS, technology-transfer systems and beneficiaries;
- program preparation and budgeting;
- monitoring and evaluation;
- development and management of human resources.

Early in the nineties, two major factors led ISNAR to re-examine its strategy: the significant changes that had taken place in the global environment during the eighties and the lessons learned from its own accumulated experience working with NARS for more than a decade. Accordingly, a new strategy (“Service through Partnership”) was developed in 1991-1992.
2.2 The Strategy for the Nineties

With the goal of assisting developing countries in bringing about sustained improvements in the performance of NARS, the new strategy defined ISNAR as a research-based service organization, which implied that through its multidisciplinary research it would develop and adapt policy and management approaches and technologies that would support the services provided to improve the performance of NARS.

The new programmatic structure of the organization included three major Programs: Research Policies and Systems Strategies (RPSS), Research Program Design and Management (RPDM), and Management of Organizations and Resources (MOR). In addition to the Programs, three special services were created: Collaborative Services and Training, Information Management, and Administrative Services. According to the strategy, each Program was to:

- carry out research to generate new knowledge;
- provide technical advice and support to NARS;
- deliver training and develop materials;
- disseminate knowledge and information gained through research and advisory services.

In 1994, these three programs were consolidated into two: (1) Policy and Systems Development and (2) Management. Additionally, in an attempt to build on the lessons learned from experience as well as specific problems considered as challenges to ISNAR’s performance in the years ahead, five major strategic directions and three themes were defined to guide the development and the execution of its programs and services through the nineties. Major strategic directions included:

- target services to the needs of national systems at varying stages of development;
- cover a wide range of research entities;
- strengthen work on research policy;
- forge strategic alliances with other organizations;
- seek multipliers for increased impact.

Major themes considered were:

- institutional sustainability;
- assessment of institutional performance;
- institutional implications of research on natural resource management.

While specific efforts were made to define a service strategy that included three different delivery modes (comprehensive institutional development, strengthening of research policy and management components, and generation and dissemination of knowledge and information), strategies in regard to research and training were not specified separately.

Beyond the above-mentioned fields, the strategy addressed other areas of importance for the future work of NARS, basically related to ISNAR’s allies and partners and including the emerging significance of regional and transnational approaches to research and service.
2.3 Implementing the Strategy: An Assessment

The assessment of ISNAR’s strategy cannot possibly ignore the rather difficult environment in which the institution carried out its work. In fact, the period under consideration was characterized by financial insecurity and budget reductions both at the international level and in its partner countries. At the same time this financial crisis was taking place, the needs and demands from NARS were significantly increased due to a changing global scenario that called for a much broader research agenda. NARS had to develop new areas of expertise, such as biotechnology, as well as consider new dimensions in research, such as the internalization of consumer attitudes, as a necessary component of their research activities in support of agriculture’s competitiveness. This unbalanced scenario in terms of available resources and demands certainly had a negative effect on the potential impact of ISNAR’s work.

In assessing ISNAR’s strategy, the Panel focused its attention on ISNAR’s adequacy to fulfill its mandate, the relevance of its strategy to beneficiaries, its usefulness to guide the institution’s work, and its coherence with CGIAR priorities. Both, the content and the processes involved in the activities carried out were taken into consideration. In doing so, the Panel has identified a number of issues that are considered relevant in defining the future strategic directions of the institution. The Panel’s observations were grouped under the following headings.

- Has ISNAR implemented a sound research-based strategy?
- How adequately has ISNAR focused its country services?
- Has ISNAR been able to forge strategic alliances to deal with the increasing volume and complexity of the country demands?
- Are the staff composition and program structure consistent with ISNAR’s strategy?
- How has ISNAR addressed the strategic theme of institutional sustainability?

2.3.1 Has ISNAR implemented a sound research-based strategy?

The underlying logic of the research-based strategy calls for a mutual reinforcement of research, advisory services, and training. Both within and across programs, the three types of activities should actually support each other with the basic objective of improving the quality of the services delivered and creating capacity at the country level rather than substituting local staff in direct action.

There are two major components of a research-based service strategy. Services should be delivered in specific areas where ISNAR has either done research or adapted knowledge produced in other institutions to country needs. On the other hand, research ought to be of a problem-solving nature, responding to the needs of NARS, accumulated through the experience of the services provided to them.

A number of activities carried out by ISNAR would qualify as research-based services. Its publications on policy research and their dissemination, policy dialogue workshops, approaches and tools such as priority setting and master planning, IBS and NRM work, PME in LAC and INFORM represent varying degrees of attempts to integrate research and services.

But there are also activities where this type of integration is not in evidence. When tools are borrowed from an existing knowledge base but the lessons of experience from their
application on the ground are not learned or synthesized to improve upon future services, the research-service link would appear to be weak. The same applies to training programs that are not linked to research, as was noted in some cases. The Panel concludes that an adequate integration between both types of activities is yet to be achieved.

**Services**
Most of the areas in which the ISNAR services were provided have been supported by adaptive research. However, as demands from the countries increased, ISNAR’s services, possibly because of budgetary constraints, have been led by country requests and the availability of donor funding, with only limited attention to internal priority setting that would have allowed a better integration of its research and service activities. A more proactive role, anticipating NARS needs and developing research programs to meet them, is called for.

According to ISNAR’s own staff, the institution has done only a partial job in reinforcing their country work with learning from experience. Institutional learning from service design and delivery is critical to the task of research-service integration. Synthesis of the lessons of past experience is one way to achieve this objective. Efforts toward this end have been made in some cases but much remains to be done in terms of institutionalizing the process. The limited field presence of ISNAR in the regions could also have acted as a barrier to effective communication and learning from below.

After the original identification of critical factors that took place in the mid-eighties, the determinants of NARS performance have been only partially researched either through cross-section or time-series analysis of NARS. The same applies to the development of case studies, including any on developed-country research systems, an area emphasized by the last EPMR which has not been fully reflected in ISNAR’s work. Research thrusts of this nature could potentially strengthen a research-based service strategy.

**Training**
The Panel recognizes the important role of the Training Unit in improving the formal aspects of the training activities. However, establishing an explicit set of criteria to plan and prioritize training activities at the program level could have improved the integration of training with other programs of work. The need for a Corporate Plan, referred to in the ICER of ISNAR’s training function supports this view.

The PM&E project wherein participatory activities were carried out in some cases (in particular, the ISNAR-IDB project in LAC) with the trainees gradually becoming trainers and acting as effective multipliers for ISNAR’s activities, is a good example of training being reinforced by research. Its sound conceptual and practical approach elicited positive comments from NARS leaders during the Panel’s field visits.

Most of ISNAR’s research is aimed at senior managers and policymakers. Their ability to use ISNAR results in their work is addressed through policy dialogues in the form of workshops and seminars. Much of the training efforts, however, are directed at middle- to low-ranking staff, a fact that ISNAR might wish to review. A research-based training strategy would imply the need for more careful targeting of training. Similarly, although incorporated to some degree in PM&E training, the soft but important area of management that covers themes such as leadership, guiding values, governance, and culture of organizations is seldom emphasized
by ISNAR’s training work, possibly because research does not seem to focus much on these aspects.

2.3.2 How adequately has ISNAR focused its country services?

Although from its very beginnings ISNAR recognized the need to work with systems rather than with individual institutions, the reality was that at the country level, well-organized systems, comprising a diversity of entities (public research institutions, universities, research foundations, NGOs, and private organizations) working with common goals, seldom existed. Therefore ISNAR concentrated its activities working either with research organizations (NAROs) or research institutions (NARIs) in an attempt to improve their performance by strengthening their capacity in policy and management. This institutional perspective, as opposed to a more outward perspective, is still relevant for individual organizations and institutions. But, the major changes that have been taking place in the external context of national agricultural research during the last decade require that appropriate attention be given to other dimensions of strengthening NARS as well.

Many services have been delivered and tools and approaches applied in specific NAROs. Other institutions, consultants, and international research centers have also adopted them. This reflects well on ISNAR’s work and reputation. However, there is evidence that some of these services did not have long-lasting results at the country level. There is no doubt that the difficult NARO environment is part of the problem. An in-depth analysis of these results could provide important lessons that should prove useful for future work in this area.

In the Panel’s opinion, an outward approach that entails looking at the NAROs’ linkages with other relevant actors for their research strategy will become increasingly important. The NAROs’ performance will be decisively influenced by their capacity to articulate their work with that of other institutions involved in research and technology transference, either public or private, in their own country or abroad. Establishing adequate links with the agroindustrial sector so as to adapt the research strategy to consumer demands is also important. High quality and relevant research must be directed towards improving NARS performance in this respect.

ISNAR has devoted some of its efforts to this task, particularly in the context of organizing and participating in regional fora. However, it is perhaps too early to expect results from the activities in this area. On the service side, the IBS project and university-NARS linkages are examples of attempts to strengthen the capacity of NARS to develop their links with other system institutions. In recognizing this, the Panel notes that ISNAR has introduced a new vision in this respect in the draft 1998-2000 MTP.

2.3.3 Has ISNAR been able to forge strategic alliances to deal with the increasing volume and complexity of the country demands?

During its early years, ISNAR concentrated its efforts on providing advisory services on comprehensive institutional development to individual countries. The 1990 strategy, recognizing that different countries had different levels of development and diverse demands for ISNAR’s services, shifted to a more demand driven service orientation, trying to satisfy different types of demands with modes of different service delivery.
This strategic change made very evident a problem that lies at the root of the institution’s existence: ISNAR has very limited capacity to meet the complex demands of NARS, both because it cannot have all the expertise required in house and because of its budgetary restrictions. Under these constraints, it cannot have a direct impact on a large number of countries through its assistance.

In trying to address this issue, the 1990 strategy suggested that forging strategic alliances with other organizations would help ISNAR complement its own expertise in fields where it was lacking, while working with other institutions on the delivery side, seeking multipliers, would strengthen and broaden its outreach and impact.

This important strategic direction is well understood by senior staff. While steps are being taken to implement this strategy by exploring potential collaborators in several areas, a generalized vision about the meaning and importance of these alternatives to improve ISNAR’s performance is still to be achieved.

On the supply side, for example, ISNAR has made use of the expertise of outside individuals to support its own work. However, it is the Panel’s opinion that forging relevant alliances on a long-term basis requires institutional commitment rather than individual participation. In this respect, several initiatives such as collaboration with NAARM in India and with selected northern academic centers are being pursued. There will be a need for additional funding to stimulate the creation of these types of partnerships.

On the demand side, some cases of successful cooperation with other institutions to multiply ISNAR’s impact have taken place, according to staff and as confirmed by the opinion of NARS leaders in the field. In such cases, a multiplier effect was achieved. However, this is an area that deserves further attention so that ISNAR’s impact can be broadened.

The emergence and consolidation of various regional research associations represents a positive external change that can greatly contribute to a more cost-efficient delivery mode as well as to a substantial broadening of the institution’s impact, particularly when they group relatively weak NARS. ISNAR is involved in different kinds of cooperation with regional associations. Evidence on how well this type of collaboration is working is yet to be assembled.

2.3.4 Are the staff composition and program structure consistent with ISNAR’s strategy?

Although new strategic directions were identified within the 1990 programming exercise, no specific responsibilities were assigned within or across the programs in such important fields as developing links with other institutions to allow a higher quality and broader impact of ISNAR’s activities. The DG may have carried out this work himself for the most part. The program structure needs to be strengthened to reflect these important strategic directions.

The Panel concurs with the information provided by some of the Program staff members that the professional expertise of the organization does not fully match the requirements of emerging institutional needs. It is evident that despite a high concentration of ISNAR’s work being on management problems, there are relatively few formally trained persons in this area of expertise.
In order to fulfill its mandate, it is important for ISNAR not only to formulate a sound strategy, but also to adjust its structure and staff composition to meet the requirements of a changing environment, a process that is not easy to achieve in any type of organization.

2.3.5 How has ISNAR addressed the strategic theme of institutional sustainability?

There are different dimensions related to institutional sustainability, a theme that is emphasized in the 1990 strategy. Sustainability is a function of two factors: local capacity and country commitment.

In respect to capacity building, ISNAR’s focus has been to build local capacity in NARS through the direct delivery of services to them. But there are clear limits to this approach. Eventually, what is required is the creation of in-country capacity to generate research, advisory, and training services that ISNAR cannot possibly perform on a permanent basis or on a large scale. How to approach this issue is a matter for careful consideration.

The second dimension related to institutional sustainability refers to country commitment. Whether it is explicitly recognized or not, ISNAR’s work involves a process of institutional reform in developing countries. The experience of many processes of this kind carried out by multilateral financial institutions has demonstrated that the single, most relevant variable in determining the failure or success of such reforms is the country’s commitment to it. The sustained use of ISNAR’s approaches and tools in several NARS is evidence of commitment at the country or institutional level. But there are also cases in which the efforts of many years of work have been eroded in a short period due to many different reasons whose common denominator is the absence of commitment. In defining the priorities for individual country assistance, ISNAR may not have fully taken this perspective into consideration, particularly in a donor-driven and fund-constrained operating environment. The Panel considers that at times of severe budget constraints, one of the most important mechanisms to assure commitment to the reform of research institutions is to be able to demonstrate the institution’s impact to stakeholders and policymakers. The assessment of a NARO’s impact constitutes the best alternative to demonstrate accountability, a field where most NARS, particularly the weaker ones, have not succeeded in implementing adequate procedures. This is a subject on which ISNAR proposes to do more in the future.

2.4 Concluding Remark

In light of the foregoing discussion, the Panel is of the view that ISNAR’s stated strategy for the 1990s and its activities on the ground have not always moved well together. Some parts of the strategy have been better implemented than others. To some degree this reflects the problems in ISNAR’s own environment and the conflicts between the requirements of the strategy and the compulsions of external project funding of some of ISNAR’s activities. Similarly, the shift toward a more demand-driven service orientation, called for in the 1990 strategy, was not always in harmony with the objective of building a more research-oriented institution. These divergent pressures may have caused operational problems that the early strategy did not address properly. While there is evidence of progress in dealing with these tensions in recent years, it is an area to which ISNAR should give continued attention.
3. OUTPUTS AND IMPACT

3.1 Background

It is useful to distinguish between outputs, outcomes, and the ultimate impact of ISNAR’s work. ISNAR’s outputs include research results (or contributions to knowledge), advice given to specific clients, management tools designed, training courses offered, and publications. The ultimate impact of ISNAR’s activities, as part of a network of international centers under the umbrella of the CGIAR, is to contribute to sustainable agriculture for food security in developing countries through activities to strengthen the national agricultural research capabilities of developing countries. ISNAR’s outputs lead to the achievement of the CGIAR’s mission only indirectly. ISNAR’s outputs lead to a number of outcomes (which are sometimes called intermediate impacts) which, in turn, can be expected to influence the achievement of the CGIAR mission—but, the relationship between intermediate impacts and ultimate impacts is difficult to measure. These outcomes relate to aspects of national agricultural research capabilities in developing countries, e.g., more effective research policies, strengthened research institutions and national research systems, individuals with better management skills, and a greater understanding of agricultural research management concerns.

The Panel has made this distinction between intermediate and ultimate impact because keeping the desired ultimate impact visible at all times provides an institution with a clear perspective on the raison d’être of its work—a perspective that can guide the setting of priorities and the making of choices. This is particularly important when institutional mandate and purpose are being examined, as in this review. As noted above, the Panel recognizes that assessment of ultimate impact is difficult.

The Panel was able to gather information about ISNAR’s outputs. These are provided in detail in Annex A and summarized in Section 3.2 below. It was also able to gather and analyze some information about ISNAR’s intermediate impact. The information on ISNAR’s intermediate impact is not as robust as the Panel would like. This is partly because the subject ISNAR deals with is not as conducive to assessment of impact as other agricultural research subjects, such as commodity research. The Panel’s analysis of ISNAR’s intermediate impact (for simplicity called “impact” in the rest of the report) is presented in Section 3.4.

3.2 Outputs

ISNAR has two major programs. The first, the Research Policy and System Development Program, has a 1996 budget of USD 3.3 million and is the larger of the two. The second, the Management Program, has a 1996 budget of USD 2.8 million.

The Research Policy and System Development Program has organized its activities around three themes:

- policy development;
- research system development;
new challenges.

The activities of the Management Program are also organized around three themes:
- managing research programs;
- managing resources for research;
- managing research organizations.

The activities of these programs are described and assessed in Annex A. What follows is a summary of the major work conducted by these two programs.

The Research Policy and System Development Program. ISNAR has targeted this program's activities towards senior and high-level policymakers concerned with agricultural research. The thrust of the program on the whole is couched within the evolving environment in which research is carried out. In this respect, the first two themes cover the diagnostic and planning phases of CID activities. Work in the three themes covers the following sub-themes:

Policy Development
- linking research with national policies;
- resources for research, including information;
- priority setting and impact assessment.

Research System Development
- strategic planning;
- system design;
- transnational cooperation.

New Challenges
- biotechnology;
- natural resource management;
- agro-industries and market orientation.

Outputs under the Policy Development theme include the following:

- Linking research with national policies. ISNAR has 11 projects under this sub-theme. The most important research project is on structural adjustment. This study looked at six "early adjusting" countries, including Burkina Faso, Chile, Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico, and Sri Lanka. The study found that structural adjustment did not automatically lead to spending cuts on research, but rather that the pressure was on increasing the accountability of the research system and its effectiveness as a development tool. Several publications resulted from this work, including a book published jointly with the World Bank. Several workshops and policy-type seminar activities were also completed.

- Resources for research. Work in this area relates to the redressing of the slowdown in public agricultural research expenditures and access to knowledge. The important projects under this sub-theme are the Indicator Series and the research-financing projects. The Indicator Series has been on-going since the mid-1980s. The initial data collection effort was focused on sub-Saharan Africa, and the effort has now shifted to Latin America and the Caribbean. This work has led to several important publications containing useful data
and quantitative analyses. The most important project under the financing of research work is the current compilation of a Research Finance Sourcebook.

- **Priority setting and impact assessment.** This area covers 11 projects in various parts of the world, including Bangladesh, Benin, and Kenya, as well as some regional support projects for Eastern and Southern Africa. The target is basically to institutionalize priority-setting tools that assist in better allocation of research funds.

Outputs under the **System Development** theme include the following:

- **Strategic planning** projects are country based, and in 1996 a total of 10 projects were underway in several countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Eritrea, Lebanon, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, and Togo. In most cases, the projects aim at developing a strategic plan for the research system.

- **System design** work falls into two main categories: organizational structure and governance issues and linkages, the latter covering linkages with farmers and with universities.

- **Transnational cooperation** aims to foster international spillovers at the regional level. As an example, a group of four countries pursues this objective by coordinating research on management issues (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Togo.) Each of the four countries in the group coordinates a theme, and under this arrangement Burkina Faso coordinates planning, monitoring, and evaluation; Mali, information; Niger, physical resources management; and Togo, technology transfer.

The **New Challenges** theme is the most recent addition to the program. Outputs include the following:

- **Biotechnology.** A total of seven projects are carried out under the Intermediary Biotechnology Service (IBS), all in support of new or potentially new users in Africa, Asia, WANA, and Latin America.

- **Natural resource management** (NRM) work aims at assisting NARS policymakers to clarify the NRM issues at a conceptual level, provide scientific measures of the importance of the problem or opportunity, and explain the consequences of alternative actions.

- **Agro-industries and market orientation** is the most recent addition to the program, with only one project. The objective of this activity is to capture the broadening research agenda as influenced by developments in those industries that process agricultural products and under national and international market conditions.

**The Management Program.** ISNAR's Management Program (MP) contributes to the ISNAR goal by focusing specifically on NAROs in developing countries and helping strengthen their management capabilities. The Program sees its primary clients as individuals playing key management roles in NAROs, such as directors, managers, administrators, program leaders
and scientists with managerial responsibilities. The program is organized around the following three themes:

1. **Managing research programs** aims to enhance the effectiveness, relevance, and quality of research programs and projects through the development of tools and approaches and the adaptation of existing management tools.
2. **Managing resources for research** is geared towards sustained improvements in the management of human, financial, and physical resources in NAROs.
3. **Managing research organizations** aims to generate sustained improvements in NAROs’ organizational performance.

The **Managing research programs** theme includes the following activities:

- *The planning, monitoring and evaluation* project focuses on the LAC region. It aims to analyze the region’s experiences with PM&E, sensitize top-level managers, prepare practical guidelines on PM&E, introduce and disseminate PM&E methods in the region. A sourcebook on monitoring and evaluation has been published in Spanish and English as well as a baseline study on PM&E in 13 organizations. Programs to strengthen PM&E are being implemented in Costa Rica, Cuba, Panama, and Venezuela. The approach has a strong training component.

- In Morocco, ISNAR and INRA Morocco jointly developed a program-planning method (*programmation par objectif*, PPO) which aimed at creating a methodology for planning applied research activities.

- **Management information systems.** This activity is aimed at developing a computer-based management information system that provides agricultural research managers with the facts they need for priority setting, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation. INFORM is the product ISNAR has developed for this purpose. The system covers information on inputs to research (people, finances and physical resources), the research program, and research outputs (improved technologies and reports on experiments and impacts). Twenty-six countries are known to have made some use of the system to a greater or lesser degree. An intense training program (54 weeks over the last five years) has been associated with INFORM, and in this respect ISNAR plans to collaborate with the National Academy of Agricultural Research Management of Hyderabad, India. ISNAR has developed a new version (called INFORM-R) in collaboration with NAROs, based on the lessons learned.

**Managing resources for research.** Six projects were in implementation or completed over the last two years, while a number of others are at various stages of planning. The activities include the following:

- human resource assessment and development for ASARFCA, in Guinea, and gender-related issues (4 projects);
- assessing researcher performance and linking performance evaluation to the reward system (a sourcebook);
- a manual and training package on personnel management;
- an integrated model for a planning and budgeting system;
- financial resources (2 projects);
strategies and approaches for fund raising and alternative funding mechanisms;
• a manual on the design of research facilities (produced in 1993).

Managing research organizations. This is an area where ISNAR has had a steady stream of outputs. Over the last two years, 41 projects have been associated with this theme. These include the following:

• Comprehensive institutional development (CID). CID is an approach ISNAR uses to assist a limited number of NARS in a holistic way through a wide range of activities in order to improve the performance of the NARO. The key objectives are to develop effective and efficient NARS and to improve the understanding of institutional development. The Uganda and Ecuador CIDs both focus on a number of components to be strengthened. In Uganda these included information management, monitoring and evaluation, training needs assessment, and developing appropriate financial management procedures. In Ecuador they were the design of a management information system, PM&E, human resource development and planning, transfer of technology, and extension linkages. These CID projects are jointly carried out with staff from the Policy and Systems Development Program.

• Managing Change (4 projects). Preliminary work was done using an in-depth cross-country analysis of NARS a few years ago. This covered synthesis work in three clusters of countries: French-speaking countries, English-speaking countries, and Spanish-speaking countries. The results were issued as ISNAR Working Papers; Busch and Bingen utilized the materials for their publications on “Organization and Structure of National Agriculture Reseach” and “Restructuring Agricultural Research: Some Lessons from Experience”. There are also projects on organizational performance assessment and management of change.

Detailed information about the publications of staff in both programs, as well as data on training conducted are covered in Annexes A-1, A-2, and A-3.

3.3 The ICER on ISNAR’s Impact

In preparing for this EPMR, ISNAR commissioned a review of its achievements, constraints and impact to an independent team of outside consultants. The study constituted the first phase of a seven-phase project proposal on assessment of organizational performance and institutional impact in agricultural research. The team was headed by Prof. Ronald Mackay of Concordia University in Canada. The study consisted of four components: a survey of NARS leaders, a survey of ISNAR stakeholders, three country case studies (Kenya, Morocco and Uruguay), and a review of ISNAR’s internally commissioned external reviews. The conceptual framework and methodology for the study was developed by the study team in conjunction with a group of ISNAR staff. The team produced a synthesis report on its findings, as well as background papers on each of the four components.

4 Discussion paper No 93-20 (September 1993) and Briefing Paper No 13 (May 1994).
The reports contain a wealth of information on ISNAR’s outputs, the perceptions and assessments of NARS leaders and stakeholders regarding ISNAR’s activities and reputation, and case studies on three countries where ISNAR has had a broad-base approach to strengthening national research capabilities. Overall, the findings of the study team are positive: ISNAR has made significant achievements, its work is of good quality, and NARS and stakeholders generally report favorably about what ISNAR is and does. While recognizing that there are major methodological problems in a study of this nature, and that ISNAR’s task is complex and difficult, the report concludes:

ISNAR has an important role to play in strengthening the management of agricultural research internationally. ISNAR carries out this role with vigor, resulting in a high level of client satisfaction and significant impacts on NARS and their constituent organizations. ISNAR has earned a good reputation for itself in the process.

The ICER provides a representative set of opinions of ISNAR’s clients and stakeholders about the effectiveness of ISNAR. The externality of the study team members increases the objectivity of what is presented. The data-gathering effort was based on a conceptual framework of institutional assessment. The interviews were conducted very professionally, as observed by some of the respondents. In addition, the surveys provided information, heretofore not systematically available, on client and stakeholder views on ISNAR’s work. Ratings by NARS leaders of ISNAR’s contributions in specific areas were particularly helpful to the Panel.

The EPMR Panel discussed the methodology, approach, and findings of this study and has made selective references to the information provided in the ICER throughout the review report. It regards the study as an experiment in assessing organizational performance and one that should be used as a stepping stone for building, in due course, more rigorous tools for institutional evaluation.

The Panel identified several areas where the approach used had methodological limitations. These relate to measurement of performance, measurement of change in performance, measurement of the ISNAR-related intervention, and attribution of change to the ISNAR intervention. The indicators of performance used in the surveys were necessarily all subjective, given the methodology. Also, the methodology used did not allow control of factors other than the ISNAR intervention influencing NARO performance.

The Panel is fully aware (from its own first-hand experience during this review) that conducting assessments of organizational performance is fraught with many methodological difficulties. Perfection in this area is extremely costly, but because ISNAR’s work in this area will serve as an example to others, the Panel urges the center to insist on greater methodological rigor during the next phases of this study.

### 3.4 Impact

The Panel has grouped the information on ISNAR’s impact into the following categories:

- raising awareness;
• influencing policy;
• developing institutions;
• introducing tools;
• training.

The following is a synopsis of the Panel’s views on these major areas. Annex A includes detailed statements of the assessment of ISNAR’s programs and activities.

3.4.1 Raising awareness

ISNAR has made a major contribution in raising awareness about policy, planning, organization, and management issues and putting them on the agenda of research institutions, particularly national institutions.

ISNAR is also well known and appreciated for its advocacy role for the cause of NARS in the international research and development community. NARS also greatly appreciate ISNAR’s role as a good and honest broker, as well as a facilitator of collaboration and promotion of interaction among NARS and between NARS and the broader research community.

3.4.2 Influencing policy

ISNAR influences policy through its policy-related research, its advice to clients on policy matters, its information products of value to those involved with the analysis or making of policy, and by its training, workshops, and seminars in policy-related areas. The ICER on impact notes that two-thirds of the respondents to the NARS survey considered ISNAR to have had a positive impact in the area of formulating of agricultural research policy and named one or more examples of specific contributions. (These were classified as “adopters” in the ICER.) We comment below on the most visible signs of impact by ISNAR in the policy area.

The Panel notes that ISNAR has published a number of studies in the policy area that are considered by many observers to be of high quality. These include the Agricultural Research Policy publication of 1991 and the Science under Scarcity book of 1996. The Financing Sourcebook, now being finalized, promises to be a major publication. The Indicator Series has generated a unique set of information on the funding, staffing, and organization of national agricultural research. The ICER on the Indicator Series alludes to the positive contributions of this project, as well as potential benefit that may follow a broadening of focus as well as more extensive analysis and interpretation of data. Other notable publications are listed in Annex A. ISNAR’s policy publications have a large audience within the international development community.

ISNAR’s work on the policy implications of biotechnology (through the Intermediary Biotechnology Service) is a highly regarded activity. A mid-term evaluation of IBS conducted in 1995 provides useful insights. The evaluators concluded that IBS had impressive achievements in terms of activities (interactive policy seminars) and outputs (database and technical publications) during its two-and-a-half years of implementation. Furthermore, IBS has developed the capability to consolidate its activities and output into potentially useful decision-making tools applicable to biotechnology management. IBS has also successfully
established its visibility among potential clients, which include developing countries as end users and international biotechnology programs as intermediary users.

### 3.4.3 Developing institutions

ISNAR has a few “flagship” cases of institutional development during the period under study. Prominent among these are work with the NAROs in Kenya, Morocco, Uganda, and Uruguay. In each of these cases, ISNAR has had sustained involvement over several (in some cases, many) years with the NARO. Interventions have been jointly designed by the client NARO.

An ICER is available on the Uganda work. ISNAR’s interventions in this country started in 1986. The panel that conducted the ICER gives ISNAR strong marks for its contributions through 1994. Interventions during the last two years have ranged from development of a research management system for the NARO to installation of management information systems (INFORM) and work to strengthen monitoring and evaluation practices. The ICER gives ISNAR mixed marks in terms of generating change during this latter period (p. 12, Uganda ICER):

> ...the program components included under the CID approach form a sound basis for strengthening the holistic development of NARO and its associated institutes, thus enabling them to plan, implement and follow up their activities in a coordinated manner. However, despite this overall positive outlook, problems have been encountered during implementation. Several components/sub components have either not been implemented or implemented poorly. Failures are due to neither NARO nor ISNAR alone. It is indicated by NARO management and staff that a higher level of success could have been achieved if program implementation had been started with adequate preparation in terms of availability of adequate staff, funds and facilities.

There are also three case studies (Kenya, Morocco, and Uruguay), conducted by a member of the team that conducted the impact assessment ICER, that shed light on the outcomes of ISNAR’s CID work. These case studies illustrate that ISNAR’s involvement with the NARO generally helped clarify research policies at the governmental level, in addition to introducing changes in the organizational or management processes of the NARO.

The Morocco case study notes significant impact from ISNAR’s work in the NARO: “This case study found that ISNAR has had and continues to have a substantial impact on INRA, the principal public NARO in Morocco. This impact is evident in changes and improvements in the latter’s environment, motivation, capacity and performance to varying degrees” (p. 5). The Kenya case study recognizes the importance of close partnerships for the success of the intervention.

### 3.4.4 Introducing tools

Over the years, ISNAR has developed or adapted a number of management tools for use in agricultural research organizations. The most prominent among these is INFORM, a management information system. There are also tools or approaches in strategic planning, human resource management, monitoring and evaluation, and other management subjects ISNAR has promoted with its clients.
The ICER on impact provides information on the views of NARS leaders on ISNAR’s contribution to the use of several management tools or processes within the NARS. The areas receiving the highest ratings include human resource management and strategic and long-term planning (76% and 73% of the respondents, respectively, noted positive contributions by ISNAR and named one or more specific examples). The lowest percentages were for financial management and accountability (37%) and organizational culture and staff commitment and loyalty (33%).

The Panel comments below on indicators of ISNAR’s impact in four areas: priority setting, INFORM, PM&E in Latin America and the Caribbean, program planning in Morocco. ICERs are available on INFORM and PM&E in LAC.

**Priority setting.** In the area of priority setting, ISNAR has recorded its greatest impact in a number of countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, and Uganda. Some of the recorded lessons include the importance of priority setting as an internal process, and that the process has to be consistent with organizational capacity and resource base, including human resources, if these tools are to be widely used. Few priority-setting exercises appear to have led to verifiable changes in resource allocation because the activity is de-linked from the resource allocation activity. ISNAR has apparently experienced that, with the exception of a few cases, the priority-setting exercises they support have insignificant legitimacy in terms of local influence on actual priorities or research agendas. There is yet no evidence of how sustainable the priority-setting techniques are after initial adoption.

ISNAR has assisted both SACCAR and ASARECA with priority-setting efforts at a regional level and this is expected to have a positive impact on national systems.

**INFORM.** The ICER on INFORM was completed two years ago. At the time it had been implemented in 16 countries. The ICER concluded as follows: “Results have been mixed. Some countries are making good progress in implementation of INFORM; yet none can be said to have fully operationalized it through its integration into the programming, monitoring and evaluation cycles” (p. 1). After describing the problems hindering more rapid progress, the ICER notes that “a key weakness of INFORM is that the databases do not include information that can be used in the assessment of the quality of the research nor the usefulness of research findings” and makes several recommendations for improvement.

ISNAR has made several improvements in INFORM over the last two years. A new version was tested in Zambia and a French version is in preparation. There are several signs of its use by others. For example, a UK consultancy company assisting Ghana’s National Agricultural Research Council has chosen INFORM as the tool for the management information system. Similar use is made of INFORM by Winrock International in a project in Pakistan. In India, NAARM adopted INFORM for use in its MIS training for ICAR in 1990. Now, NAARM is interested in the new version of INFORM.

**PM&E.** The LAC project was evaluated in 1994 and given excellent marks in terms of both its outputs and the participatory process used in executing it. The outputs include over 100 managers trained, training materials on PM&E, a sourcebook on M&E (in Spanish and English), 18 persons trained as trainers in PM&E, and case studies on the status of PM&E in
13 organizations. These are all valued outputs, and surveys of NARS and stakeholders have singled out this activity as one of the most useful carried out by ISNAR.

The Panel considers the 13 case studies as very important in measuring change over time in PM&E capacity in organizations. By designing the project to include baseline data collection, ISNAR is demonstrating how before-after measurements can be used to monitor and assess change. The Panel notes that had a similar approach been used by ISNAR in relation to its own interventions over the years, baseline data would have enabled ISNAR to assess change attributable to the center's efforts more objectively (and facilitate the work of external reviewers like us).

Program planning. The Morocco project was developed at the request of INRA as a novel approach for planning applied research activities for commodity-based and production-system-based research programs. Staff from INRA-Morocco participated closely with ISNAR staff in the design of the approach. The planning tool is used by INRA and other NAROs. Since 1990, 12 out of INRA’s 18 research programs have been planned using this method. A number of other countries, including Benin, Mali, Senegal, and Tunisia, have begun or are beginning to apply this approach to planning.

3.4.5 Training

ISNAR training refers to activities whose principal objective is to improve the capacity of professionals. This activity includes group training, workshops, and seminars. The ICER on impact notes that ISNAR has delivered over 100 management training events internationally, reaching over 2,500 agricultural research managers. According to the ICER: “NARS leaders, in response to a question asking them to identify specific products and services that ISNAR has provided to their organizations, cited training and human resource development most frequently” (p. 15). This reflects the visibility of training as an ISNAR activity by the NARS leaders.

3.5 Conclusions

The Panel concludes that, during the review period, ISNAR has produced a significant number of outputs, and that most of these have been appreciated by its clients and stakeholders.

ISNAR has had some positive impact on national agricultural research capabilities in several developing countries. These are in the areas of raising awareness about research policy and management issues, influencing research policies in developing countries, helping develop research systems and institutions, introducing useful management tools, and in training. Although the information available to the Panel does not allow it to assess the extent of ISNAR’s ultimate impact, the Panel’s impression is that ISNAR’s overall impact during the review period was more significant than during the period covered by the last EPMR.

There is more concrete evidence of the specific impact of some of ISNAR’s activities or projects, some of which has been noted above. ISNAR’s impact has not been evenly sustained across activities. The Panel’s impression is that activities with strong participatory
involvement of clients, carried out in the "action research" mode, and couched within the perspective of long-term comprehensive institutional development have had longer-lasting impact. Integrating baseline data collection in all new projects and progressively accumulating and/or synthesizing lessons across projects would help build a stronger information base for assessing impact in future years.
4. QUALITY

The Panel has been asked to comment on the quality of ISNAR's research, service and training activities, in addition to its outputs and impact. Clearly, assessment of quality requires more in-depth study of ISNAR outputs and practices than is possible during an external review. Recognizing this, the CGIAR has encouraged the centers to initiate a process of "internally commissioned external reviews" (ICERs). Each ICER would bring together the disciplinary expertise needed, in adequate numbers, to make judgments about effectiveness and quality in a specific area of a center's work. The external review team would then have available a set of opinions of qualified experts that they can use to form their own judgments on quality.

ISNAR provided the Panel with eight papers as ICERs. One is the ICER on ISNAR's impact referred to in Chapter 2. Another is a think piece on restructuring, but not an evaluation of an ISNAR activity. The remaining six are evaluation reports of varying coverage on selected ISNAR projects or activities. These include studies on:

- ISNAR's training function;
- the Indicator Series;
- INFORM;
- IBS;
- the comprehensive institutional development program in Uganda;
- the PM&E strengthening project for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Panel examined this set of six studies. It also reviewed the comments made by clients and observers of ISNAR about the quality of ISNAR's work, including the comments made by NARS and stakeholder representatives in the ICER on impact. Albeit subjectively, members of the Panel also examined some of the outputs of ISNAR from a quality perspective. Finally, the Panel examined ISNAR's quality management process. The comments made below reflect the opinion of the Panel on quality and the quality management process.

4.1 Quality of Research, Service, and Training

The ICER on impact notes that "NARS leaders rate ISNAR's overall impact on their organizations as positive and rate the quality of ISNAR's contributions as somewhat better than those of other institutions" (p. 13). It continues to note that "while the quality of many of these [advisory, research, and training] outputs is considered to be high, it is not uniformly so" (p. 14). The Panel concurs with these observations. Maintaining consistency in quality should be an important center goal.

In the research area, the Indicator Series project has generated several high-quality data outputs and a few highly regarded studies. The number of publications of ISNAR and its staff has increased over the years (from 695 for the 1986-90 period to 837 for 1991-96). The ISNAR publications list shows an average of 19 journal articles per year over 1991-95. This includes notes submitted to trade journals and articles which appeared in a special issue of
Evidence on the quality of ISNAR’s services comes mostly from comments of clients on the services provided. In some cases, such as IBS, there are comments on quality in the ICER. In this case the professionalism of ISNAR staff is applauded.

Client satisfaction with ISNAR’s services varies by service and service provider. In the case of INFORM, for example, there is both evidence of high satisfaction as well as early reports of implementation difficulties—the latter stemming, in part, from the perceived inflexibility of the management information package. The Panel’s interviews with stakeholders showed that there are some queries about the cost-effectiveness of the ISNAR-developed tools for resource-poor NAROs. Lowering costs would be desirable so long as quality can be maintained.

Comprehensive institutional development activities on which case studies or an ICER exist (such as Kenya, Morocco, Uganda, and Uruguay) illustrate that time spent in understanding the circumstances of the client (and involvement with a client over a long period) improve both the quality of the service as well as the implementability of the recommendations. This holds true particularly in cases where participatory approaches are used.

In the case of training, the Panel commends ISNAR for stressing professionalism in the conduct of training events by establishing a training unit. However, not all training projects make use of this available capacity. Also, it is surprising that participant evaluation data are available for only 28 percent of the 162 training events carried out over the last five years (as noted by the Panel that conducted the training function ICER).

A general impression of the Panel on the quality of ISNAR’s work is that, as expected, excellence is linked with work by specific individuals. When one of these individuals leaves, the institution is left with a major void. The challenge for ISNAR is to widen excellence so that the center gains robust institutional competency in its priority areas. For this, ISNAR needs to recognize, reinforce, and elevate excellence throughout the organization on a regular and systematic basis. People with excellence should form the “intellectual pillars” of the organization. Such people often attract other people of excellence to join or be associated with the organization. Continuing links with other centers of excellence also strengthens institutional competency. With these means, the institution can extend the perimeters of excellence beyond the endeavors of a few individuals.

### 4.2 Quality Management Process

The Panel notes that quality can be enhanced best by establishing an institute-wide “quality mindset”. This means that the organization—from the Board to the individual staff member—regards quality management as a significant responsibility. The Panel recognizes that ISNAR has taken several steps over the review period to improve the quality of its work. However, more needs to be done to instill a “quality mindset” to the whole institution.

**On the positive side**, the Panel observes the following as notable quality-enhancing measures taken by ISNAR over the review period:
Ensuring quality is explicitly recognized as part of the responsibility of the program directors.

ISNAR has initiated an anonymous peer review of all official center publications. This includes external reviewers identified by a centerwide committee. Publication requires prior approval by this committee.

As noted above, ISNAR has initiated a system of ICERs. The Panel regards this as a potentially useful step towards establishing a centerwide “quality mindset”. A number of additional observations are made on the ICERs below.

The Panel considers the establishment of the training unit as a quality-enhancing action, as noted earlier.

ISNAR has initiated a technical seminar series which facilitates peer feedback. Also, the annual internal program review serves, in part, as a forum for discussing quality concerns.

**Areas requiring attention in enhancing quality** include the following:

- As noted above, the Panel commends ISNAR for initiating **internally commissioned external reviews**. However, the ICERs should be exhaustive in terms of covering the major areas of ISNAR’s work. ICERs on ISNAR’s research activities (in the areas of both policy and management) conducted by internationally recognized experts on institution building and research management, for example, are a strong need. Similarly, periodic ICERs on key areas of service and internal administration and management would also be useful.

In addition to their subject matter, the quality of the ICERs can also be improved. The ICER on impact commented on ISNAR’s ICER mechanism and makes a similar recommendation. In particular, it is noted that each ICER should be conducted along the lines of clear terms of reference that spell out the foci and expected outputs of the review. In addition, the Panel suggests that future ICERs also have a focus on the quality of the work of the center, not just its effectiveness.

- ISNAR’s **performance assessment process** can be improved to reinforce quality. ISNAR needs to demonstrate clearly to staff that “quality counts”. When advancement is automatic—or is seen to be automatic—there is less institutional value attached to quality.

- **Quality management** should be an integral part of every activity at ISNAR. This means work plans should also spell out what would be done specifically to reinforce and monitor quality. The internal reviews should devote considerable time to discussion of quality. Likewise, the Board should take steps to ensure that the center has in place adequate quality management processes. The Board, in particular its Program Committee, should play an important role in the quality monitoring process.

- The Panel observes that when work is individualized (as compared with team-based), self-motivation rather than peer pressure acts as a driving force in quality enhancement. In such cases the institution needs to reinforce self-motivation through its **incentive structure**, the **performance management process**, and a strong **learning culture**. Client feedback is an essential component of such a culture and ISNAR has made several improvements in this area. Feedback from professional peers is equally important.
In conclusion, the Panel notes that ISNAR should bring quality management to the forefront of all its endeavors. While the steps it has taken in this area over the review period are significant, more needs to be done.
5. MANAGEMENT

An important task of the review Panel was to review the center’s governance and management in order to assess the degree to which ISNAR manages its affairs efficiently and maintains structures and systems which are supportive of its mission and mandate.

The Panel’s overall impression is that ISNAR is an efficiently managed institution, with sufficient administrative and control procedures to insure that resources are utilized as intended and to guarantee that work plans and output objectives are met. The Panel notes the significant improvement in staff morale and reduction in turnover rates during the past two years, following a period of rapid organizational change. Management is commended for having introduced numerous organizational innovations, including an improved performance appraisal and enhancement system, significant advances in office automation and information technology, and the introduction of project-based budgeting and control. The Panel expresses some concern regarding the continuing difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified women to positions on ISNAR’s internationally recruited staff, and regarding some aspects of the center’s human resource management policies and procedures.

During the Panel’s visit to ISNAR, it was impressed with the quality of the various administrative control procedures, and the soundness of the center’s budgetary planning and control systems, including the organization and management of the finance and accounting function. The Panel noted that some widely accepted principles of modern management, including performance-based reward systems, empowerment, and career development, appear not to be widely practiced at ISNAR.

The Panel examined the areas of governance, leadership, organizational climate, and management systems and procedures, all of which are briefly commented upon in the following paragraphs and discussed more extensively in Annex A-4 on Governance, Management, and Administration.

5.1 Governance

The Panel feels that ISNAR’s Board has been generally effective in the execution of its oversight function. Board committees meet with relevant members of the programs and management on a regular basis to review program plans as well as administrative functions, and evidently spend considerable time discussing program- or management-related issues with ISNAR’s senior staff. The Panel noted, however, that some members of the Board did have significant concerns regarding various aspects of the center’s work, including issues related to strategic planning and priority setting within ISNAR, the composition of the professional staff, publication policies, and the center’s organizational structure. These concerns were expressed both during a formal board meeting and in interviews with the Panel. The fact that such expressions of concern have not resulted in the desired changes suggests that the Board may not have been sufficiently demanding in its requests for changes or improvements and may not have exercised its oversight function in sufficient depth in areas such as strategic planning and professional staffing.
5.2 Leadership

Since 1990, ISNAR has been led by Dr. Christian Bonte-Friedheim, who will end his term as Director General in early 1997. Dr. Bonte-Friedheim is recognized both inside and outside ISNAR for his dynamic personal leadership and dedication to the cause of the NARS. The Panel was impressed during its visit to ISNAR, as well as during its discussions with representatives from national agricultural research systems, donor organizations, and members of the Board of Trustees, with the high degree of personal loyalty and affection for Dr. Bonte-Friedheim, as evidenced by his election during ICW 96 as recipient of the Nyle Brady Award for Leadership. The Panel is convinced that much of the credit for the CG system’s increased awareness of and attention to the cause of the NARS is due to the tireless efforts of Dr. Bonte-Friedheim on their behalf. The Panel joins ISNAR's staff and worldwide associates in recognizing Dr. Bonte-Friedheim for his personal contributions to strengthening the global agricultural research system.

5.3 Organizational Climate

During the period under review, the center undertook two major structural changes. The first, partly in response to suggestions made in the last EPMR, involved the establishment of a more complex organizational structure for ISNAR and the creation of additional levels of management. Whether due to the structure itself or to the personalities of those involved, this change led to a period of decline in organizational morale and may have contributed to the departure of several of the center’s valued senior staff. Among the reasons cited for some of their departures was an ambiguous sense of direction in the center’s work, a perceived lack of regard for research quality by some program directors who seemed to be more oriented towards advisory services, and a cumbersome and overly bureaucratic structure which seemed to limit individual initiative and creativity, especially among more junior members of the professional staff.

Fortunately, staff morale had significantly improved by the time of this review. A new, flatter organizational structure was introduced three years ago, with simplified processes for planning, budgeting, and project approval. While the structural changes introduced three years ago have been of great benefit, some elements of the organizational climate left over from the previous period may still be present. A significant number of staff members raised issues in the Staff Survey of Issues for the EPMR regarding human resource management and staff relations, and culture and staff morale. Some staff members interviewed by the Panel also mentioned the need for improvement in areas including teamwork and cooperation; communication and staff involvement in decision making, and, in some instances, interpersonal relations, which may well be a by-product of ISNAR’s multicultural environment. The Panel is unable to judge how widespread or valid these concerns are. The Panel also interviewed numerous members of the support and professional staff who did not mention such concerns, and who indicated a high level of satisfaction with the degree of teamwork, staff involvement, and interpersonal relations.

ISNAR has experienced significant staff turnover during the period under review. As indicated above, during the 1992-94 period, a number of organizational factors led to especially high rates of turnover, which averaged 18% of the international staff per year, 21%
for supervisory staff, and 31% for support staff. Turnover has been significantly reduced during the past two years at the international and supervisory levels, although it continues high at an average of 19% among the support staff.

5.4 Management Systems and Processes

5.4.1 Human resource management

ISNAR’s human resource management policies became an area of concern to the Panel due both to the critical role played by human resource management policy in such issues as staff turnover and organizational climate, and to the number of problems brought to the Panel’s attention by members of the center’s staff, either directly or via the Staff Survey of Issues for the EPMR.

In the area of recruitment and selection, the Panel notes with concern ISNAR’s difficulty in attracting qualified women into its ranks of internationally recruited professionals, and encourages ISNAR to continue its aggressive approach to identifying and attracting qualified applicants. It also recognizes the difficulty in surmounting barriers such as restrictions on spousal employment, which might contribute to the difficulty in bringing more women into its senior ranks.

ISNAR explicitly espouses a philosophy which does not favor long-term career development within the center and argues that its mandate is “to get the best . . . it is not a mandate to develop people”. While an argument can be made in favor of this approach, its implications on staff motivation and ultimately on staff retention and turnover are serious. Many elements of ISNAR’s human resource management system, including its job classification scheme, salary structure, and the performance assessment and enhancement system, all have their philosophical roots in this approach towards long-term career development. Current policies at ISNAR do not establish a mechanism for career development of international staff through promotions to levels of greater recognition and responsibility, nor do they include any direct linkages between salary increases and performance appraisals. (Opportunities for career development and promotion are available at the level of the support staff.) The Panel feels that staff will be more valuable to ISNAR in both the short and long term if they feel that they are motivated, recognized, and encouraged to grow at ISNAR. The Panel recommends that ISNAR encourage long-term professional growth by adopting an explicit staff promotion policy which offers professional staff the potential for increased recognition and responsibility. The Panel also recommends that ISNAR explicitly link its salary administration policy to the annual performance appraisal and establish within ISNAR a culture of reward for performance.

5.4.2 Finance and accounting

ISNAR’s accounting and financial management function appears to be well managed, with appropriate attention paid at the highest levels of management to securing donor funding and with prudent financial resource management policies which have resulted not only in accumulated reserves sufficient to weather minor funding shortfalls, but also sufficient cash balances to survive temporary delays in fund disbursements.
An issue of growing concern to ISNAR as well as its sister IARCs is the shift in funding patterns from unrestricted donations to restricted grants. In addition to the obvious disadvantages of this move in assuring support for the center’s entire research agenda, ISNAR must also insure that funds continue to be available to finance overhead expenses under an increasingly restricted funding environment. As unrestricted funding becomes less and less available to finance project overhead costs which are not paid for through project funding, it will become increasingly important for all project grants to include adequate funds for overhead expenses. A portfolio of funded projects which only pay for direct costs may result in financial crises faster than unfunded projects in an otherwise fully funded project portfolio.

5.4.3 Information and computer services

One especially praiseworthy feature of ISNAR’s administration is its computer services unit, which stands among the leaders in the CG system in the application of information technology to issues of office automation and communication. ISNAR not only has (and actively uses) electronic mail, but has a fully functioning “intranet” on which various multiple-user data bases and other information sources are made available at each staff member’s desktop. ISNAR’s computer service unit has also played a leading role in the development of the systemwide integrated voice and data network (IVDN) and the CGNET, which have been designed to facilitate inter-center communication and collaboration.

The potential of information technology for the global agricultural research system is only now beginning to be appreciated, and it is likely that the demands from NARS for the sort of specialized expertise available from ISNAR’s computer services will only increase. It is important that ISNAR develop a clear policy regarding the role the unit should play in research and services in this area.

5.4.4 General administration

ISNAR’s central filing system was designed in an era of paper communication and still attempts to control the flow and filing of written communications with the support of administrative circulars regarding routings and filing procedures for paper copies of virtually all forms of written communication. In an era in which nearly all outgoing and most incoming written communications are in electronic form, ISNAR should thoroughly reexamine its needs in this regard and reengineer the flow and storage of written communication to make best use of advanced forms of information technology.

General services, including purchasing, building maintenance, room scheduling, safety and security, etc., are the responsibility of a two-person supplies and services unit which, at the time of the Panel’s visit, was down to a single individual due to disability leave. By only listing the responsibilities given to this currently one-man unit, it is evident why some staff may express concerns with one aspect or another of this unit’s service due to inevitable delays and conflicting priorities. The Panel notes the widespread appreciation for the individual currently carrying out these functions but suggests that efforts be made to shift some of the tasks to other units or outsource them to vendors.
5.4.5 Legal status and host-country relations

Relations between ISNAR and the Government of The Netherlands have always been cordial and constructive, and host-country representatives appear to be willing to cooperate to facilitate the center’s work. On recent occasions, ISNAR management has been encouraged to call on various resources within the country to assist it in its mission.

Against this backdrop of a positive host-country relationship, issues regarding elements of the host country agreement do exist and continue to have an influence on ISNAR’s operations as well as staff morale.

At the time the host-country agreement was originally signed, ISNAR was granted several important privileges, including exemption from Dutch income taxes for all staff members’ ISNAR income. However, other privileges enjoyed by some professional staff of other international organizations headquartered in The Hague are not enjoyed by ISNAR staff. Furthermore, the lack of clear visa status and an appropriate passport visa (in lieu of a visa, ISNAR staff and their dependents carry a government-endorsed identity card which is not widely recognized in other European Union countries) have traditionally caused difficulties for the center’s non-European staff.

Efforts to resolve these difficulties have been underway since 1990 and have recently resulted in several important improvements. ISNAR staff members’ tax liability to the Government of The Netherlands on their non-ISNAR income has been clarified such that their ISNAR income shall not be taken into account when assessing income tax on income derived from other sources (a practice consistent with most other IARCs and other international organizations). The center has also established a final arbitration procedure for staff grievances through the International Labor Organization.
6. The Future

Major changes have taken place in the external environment of NARS since the last External Program and Management Review of ISNAR was completed in 1991. An assessment of these changes along with our review of ISNAR's experiences with its programs over the past five years provides a useful basis for looking ahead at the corrections and directional changes ISNAR needs to consider for the next five years. New environmental challenges are likely to change the nature and scope of the problems confronting NARS and will necessitate new approaches and methods to address them. The lessons of ISNAR's experience could be used to finetune these approaches and to avoid some of the pitfalls of the past. Most of the ideas presented below have been influenced by the Panel's discussions with different staff groups and reinforce some of the initiatives that are already under consideration by ISNAR.

6.1 The Changing Environment

We highlight below five notable environmental changes, the implications of which are likely to be significant for ISNAR's future work.

1. Developing countries are rapidly coming to terms with the multiplicity of players in NARS and with the new roles and functions being assumed by them. The monopoly status enjoyed by the public sector is being eroded under the pressure of globalization even though the interrelationships among the different players remain to be clearly defined. The rigid research boundaries between agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and other natural resources are breaking down. Much is being expected of the private sector, NGOs, regional fora, and universities, and of the broadened agenda for research in the new regime, but without any clarity about the institutional arrangements and incentive structures necessary to make the new system work effectively.

2. In relative terms, financial resources are expected to be available more with private-sector players than with the public-sector institutions. The Panel recognizes that there will be wide differences among regions and countries in the role of the private sector and the responsibilities of the public-sector institutions. In the future, therefore, it is likely that the strong public-sector control over research that used to characterize developing-country research environments will no longer prevail.

3. The availability of and access to new research products/processes of advanced agricultural technologies and biotechnology are undergoing major changes because of new sources of supply, largely in the private sector, and because of the changing rules of the game, including intellectual property rights and trade in technology products.

4. While the relative financial outlook for NAROs may look less favorable than before, the human resource capabilities of NAROs in many countries have begun to improve, largely because of the growing availability of trained manpower. This, however, may not be true of the weakest among the NARS where other players such as the private sector, NGOs, and universities also have limited capabilities.
5. Capabilities for providing many routine consulting and training services that NARS need are increasingly in evidence in many developing countries today. Private consultants, local training institutes, NGOs, and in some cases, foreign consultants are available for assistance to NARS in several countries. Here again, their availability and the country capacity to absorb such services are perhaps most problematical in the poorer countries. Donors claim that there is increasing competition in the delivery of consulting services to NARS.

6.2 Lessons from the Past

ISNAR's recent experiences with its programs offer a number of insights which need to be drawn upon in rethinking its mission and future thrusts.

1. The demands on ISNAR's limited resources are large and diverse, and ISNAR has tried to respond to them in most cases. It is possible that constraints on core funding have made it necessary for ISNAR to respond to highly disparate types of requests for assistance. A predictable consequence of this approach is that scarce resources are spread thinly. And for the organization, the transaction costs of providing small inputs to numerous clients tend to be prohibitively high. Under the circumstances, it has been difficult for anyone to identify and appreciate the "niche" that ISNAR is trying to fill.

2. A further consequence of this approach is that learning from its ongoing activities and institutionalizing this knowledge has received low priority in the organization. Clearly, intensity of the workload alone cannot explain this tendency. Other aspects of internal planning and management are no doubt factors that may have contributed to it.

3. The mismatch between the requirements of the research/service agenda and the mix of skills available to deliver them has been a barrier to increased effectiveness. The resulting misallocation of resources and the limited impact of these interventions are the price the institution and clients pay for the persistence of this mismatch. When, for example, staff with formal training in management are very few, research and services in that problem area may not have the relevant knowledge and practices upon which to draw. There is an appreciation of this problem within ISNAR and steps are being taken to remedy it.

4. Long-term capacity building at the country level is yet to receive priority attention in ISNAR. Strengthening NARS is often sought to be achieved by directly solving their problems or providing them with specific tools and services. Most of the services and research of ISNAR is of this nature. While this approach to strengthening local capacity through direct provision of services from far away is often the only way to start, a major problem is that this is a never-ending task, and one for which a small international center is an inadequate instrument. ISNAR's experience with developing and adapting tools for NARS has clearly shown the difficulties faced by its clients in using these aids. Their use and impact will depend a great deal on the context, skills, incentives, and other features of the clients involved. It is difficult and expensive for ISNAR to respond to these types of problems on a global basis. The alternative is to see that local capabilities are built up to absorb and adapt the tools. Forging alliances to facilitate the needed human resource and institutional capabilities is also likely to be more cost effective. In other sectors of the
economy, there are several successful examples of this approach. If the main thrust of strengthening NARS is seen as helping NARS to strengthen themselves, then capacity building at the country level should assume greater importance. Sustained improvements in NARS will come about only when local capabilities are created and utilized.

6.3 The Niche

The emerging changes in the operating environment of NARS and the lessons of ISNAR's recent experiences discussed above have important implications for the "niche" ISNAR needs to carve out for itself. The redefinition of one's mission or niche is not an admission of failure or inadequacy. Rather, it is a recognition of the need to reposition the organization in order to be effective and relevant in a changing and complex world. In the Panel's view, ISNAR should develop a distinctive competence in the years to come to lead in (1) the production, acquisition, and delivery of knowledge and information about the policy and institutional environments of NARS, and (2) the provision of services based on this knowledge to improve the management of the organizations, partnerships, and linkages of NARS in the poorest countries. ISNAR can thus create a niche for itself, provided that in the performance of these tasks, it makes use of strategic alliances both to leverage its influence and to facilitate local capacity building. The implications of working towards a niche of this kind are far reaching. It implies, for example, that ISNAR will not only generate new knowledge, but also identify and integrate knowledge available elsewhere that is relevant to the understanding of the policy and institutional environments of NARS. It asserts that ISNAR has or can build a comparative advantage in this area of research. It means that the hallmark of ISNAR's services will be its close links with this research and that service provision will not be an ad hoc matter. Furthermore, it will require ISNAR to expand its influence and impact by jointly undertaking these tasks or working out a division of labor with partners, on both the supply and demand sides of the activities.

The production of the knowledge and information referred to above results in international public goods that can be widely shared and used by all NARS. Comparative information on the policy and performance of NARS, and on the institutional and regulatory environments affecting them, are useful inputs for the policy-making process. Knowledge about new approaches and tools can aid the management of their organizations. ISNAR's familiarity with NARS and links with the academic world give it a unique advantage in generating this knowledge. Its service function in relation to the weaker NARS, on the other hand, entails a customized approach and must clearly be a selective one. Its justification lies in the limited options available to the poorer countries and the limited resources available to ISNAR. By the same token, ISNAR should progressively withdraw from this function as and when alternative sources of service become available to this target group. Over time, its service role in all countries should, for the most part, be limited to strategic alliances for capacity building involving local institutions that will be responsible for service delivery. The power of this combination of public-goods production and limited customized service is derived from the potentially synergistic effects of the research, advisory, and institution-building activities of ISNAR. It can create a niche for ISNAR that can be sustained for the foreseeable future. It is a direction towards which ISNAR ought to move. What is proposed here will call for a sharper focus and greater willingness on the part of ISNAR to set priorities and stay on course.
Reccomendation: The Panel recommends that ISNAR define and interpret its niche both to guide its own future planning and to improve the understanding of its role by its clients and the donor community.

6.4 Looking Ahead: Pointers for Action

ISNAR needs to review its research, service and training thrusts to be sure that they are consistent with its niche. The suggestions given below are not meant to be prescriptive, but rather illustrate the kinds of changes that might strengthen ISNAR’s relevance, quality, and impact.

6.4.1 Research

ISNAR’s contributions to agricultural research systems have been noted above. Most of this research has focused on the policy environment of NARS. The work on indicator series, financing, planning, and priority setting are largely in this area. While these are useful contributions, ISNAR’s current focus on the policy environment is perhaps somewhat narrow. The political economy of policy-making, barriers to research utilization, and other related issues need to be probed more systematically. The ability to identify and deal with emerging issues viewed from a client perspective is a strength that needs to be cultivated. The external environmental changes discussed above call for a broadening and deepening of ISNAR’s research. The rationale is that NARS leaders and the policymakers with whom they interact will need a better understanding of both the policy and institutional environments in which they operate.

- Policy research should increasingly examine the regulatory and related institutional issues emerging from the expanding role of the private sector, and of the widening access to new technologies through trade. The changing rules of the game pertaining to intellectual property rights, and their implications for NARS and for the regulatory frameworks and incentive structures within national and global systems may deserve special attention. If others are already working on these issues, ISNAR may need to select carefully the segments of this policy area in which it has a potential comparative advantage.

- ISNAR’s policy work has paid considerable attention to the different performance dimensions of agricultural research. It can deepen the understanding of research performance by initiating research on the determinants of research performance by focusing on the organizations involved and other appropriate units of analysis. The same approach may have to be adopted for the study of NRM in different regional contexts. Comparative case studies can enrich knowledge creation in this area. Organizational issues such as leadership, structures, and processes, mechanisms such as networking, and strategies of change lend themselves to be probed through this methodology.

- ISNAR can probably do more to integrate research and service by adopting an action research mode, especially where tool development and adaptation are involved. This would entail a deliberate plan to work with a selected set of countries where there is evidence of high-level interest in the utilization of results and of a willingness to follow through on the work. It would give ISNAR an opportunity to observe the progress of the
work in real time, to make adaptations jointly with partners, and to assess the impact being made. It would, of course, call for commitments on ISNAR’s part too. The lone-ranger approach to technology transfer would have to be abandoned, with much greater participation on the ground and with some continuity. The research output here would be both refined and adapted tools and the learning-by-doing of the partners involved.

- ISNAR has invested heavily in tool development and adaptation in the past few years. As noted above, action research is one way to increase the probability that ISNAR’s tools are utilized. If this mode is not feasible, the alternative is to ensure that favorable conditions for adopting these tools exist in the country. A willing and motivated client is a prerequisite for adoption. High-level political commitment is, therefore, an important requirement. An information system will succeed only when there are important users of the information being gathered. Equally important is the fit of the new tool with the rest of the systems and practices of the organization. Ill-fitting tools are likely to be rejected.

- The dissemination of research results needs to receive greater attention in the future. ISNAR has received high marks for some of its scholarly publications. But if it is to impact the NARS audience, it is important to craft suitable vehicles for the delivery of the research messages and their implications to the intended audience. ISNAR’s briefing papers are a useful beginning in this regard. But there are other options to consider too. *Harvard Business Review* is a good example of how this has been done for captains and managers of industry. Most of its articles are research based, but presented in a way that is most readable and understandable to this audience. Some of them are based on a comparative analysis of cases. Periodic flagship seminars for dissemination, held on a regional basis, is another option. This is not to imply that a journal should be started or that certain types of seminars should be held. The important thing to note is that ISNAR should be continually in search of improved ways to communicate effectively with its different publics.

### 6.4.2 Service

- The Panel has already underscored the importance of focusing the service function of ISNAR more sharply on the weaker NARS. The translation of this policy into practice will require a good deal of rethinking. Selectivity will no doubt entail having to say “no” to some requests, especially when it is obvious that response to them cannot possibly add much value. ISNAR is already doing this to some extent. But a more proactive approach will be to develop proposals anticipating the needs of the weaker clients (e.g., packaging them as action research) and getting them to join as partners in efforts from which they stand to benefit. Some of the tool development work could be claimed to have been of this genre, but it has suffered from the adoption problem discussed above. For a small center, it will not be easy for ISNAR to keep in close touch with its far-flung clients and to update needs assessments. Nevertheless, client needs can be better met through exercises such as categorization of NARS and of their contexts.

- Since ISNAR’s resources are limited, there is something to be said for a strategy of doing a few things of high visibility and impact, rather than numerous minor things. This is not to say that such choices are always easy or readily available. Nevertheless, a deliberate search for such opportunities may help. At a time when major changes are taking place in
the external environment of NARS, there may be opportunities to assist NARS and, in particular, NAROs, in restructuring and reorienting themselves to perform their new roles and functions in the changed context. This could start out with seminars at the regional level and go on to in-depth exercises for some NAROs in their country contexts. Needless to say, ISNAR should first equip itself to do this through its own research and reflection, drawing upon the studies/experiences of others in this field. In the field of business, this is a major service that consulting firms offer to top management. It is often in the wake of such restructuring and reorientation that the adoption of specific tools and methods takes place in large organizations.

- Institutionalization of the capability to deliver services is important. When services are based on the skills of one or two persons only, both skills and memory tend to move out with them. The small size of the center does make this a difficult problem to cope with. But client needs can be adequately met only when the services provided are based on sustainable institutional rather than purely personal competencies.

- The excess demand for ISNAR’s services is partly a function of the “free good” nature of this activity. For NARS who cannot be classified as weak, or have access to other resources, there may be a case for levying “user charges” both to test real interest and commitment and also to recover some of the costs involved. A distinction should be made between services demanded by clients and partnership efforts such as action research from which both ISNAR and the clients expect to benefit.

6.4.3 Capacity building

- ISNAR was established by the CG system to fill a major gap that was identified in respect to agricultural research policy and management. By definition, responding to this challenge required ISNAR to work on a global basis. Considering the limitations under which it operates, ISNAR has done a creditable job of creating widespread awareness of the need to improve agricultural research policy and management, as well as contributing to an expanding knowledge and service base to strengthen these functions in NARS. A centralized approach to meeting this need in the developing world, however, is not a sustainable option. Multiple centers and groups with excellence in this area and in closer proximity to NARS need to emerge over time as, indeed, is the case in other fields of research, consulting, and training. In order for this to happen, there has to be a realization that investment in capacity building for this purpose should take place in different countries and regions of the world. Although this may look like helping the competition, there is no option but to take up this challenge if the mandate of strengthening NARS is to be met on a global basis.

- In the Panel’s view, this implies a major shift for ISNAR from its focus on training as the primary means for human resource development to long-term institutional capacity building in the sense of enhancing the supply of institutional competence (outside NARS) to deliver not only training but also services and research to NARS in developing-country contexts. Training linked to specific research, or service projects and seminars to disseminate new knowledge, will certainly be required. But on balance, ISNAR should recognize that its direct outreach capabilities in this area are limited and can be expanded only at the cost of other valued functions. Other ways have therefore to be found to
leverage its impact. There is no implication here that long-term capacity building of this kind can or should be done in all countries simultaneously.

- The research-service-training mix of functions that ISNAR has promoted can be multiplied globally only through the participation of large numbers of trained resource persons available in close proximity to the NARS. The development of these capabilities may call for an investment in a long-term faculty development program with a focus on research management. This is a potential vehicle to augment the supply of well-trained experts who could become resource persons for the NARS in all regions in training and service delivery. In order to strengthen local institutional capabilities, candidates should be selected from the faculty or resource persons already working with existing local institutions. A critical mass of young persons trained in this manner could well become the core of the competence in the training centers, universities, and management institutes to which NARS could turn for help. Thirty years ago, an international teachers program of this kind played a similar role in the field of business management. It was managed by a consortium of schools, and the products of this program are the leaders of many business schools in developing countries today. Similar examples can be found in the health policy and management field, too.

- ISNAR could act as a catalyst in the development of the program mentioned above and it may help extend its own work globally. But to be able to lead this endeavor, ISNAR must be seen as a center of excellence and as a reliable and substantive partner by others who might collaborate on this front. Programs of this kind will call for the integration of multiple and complex inputs such as curricula and training material development, faculties of good quality, careful selection of candidates, field contacts and follow-up work, financing and logistical support at different levels. There are good institutions in both developed and developing countries that could mount such a program. But the role that ISNAR should play in this initiative needs to be carefully thought through.

- As implied above, there is yet another way in which ISNAR can assist in long-term capacity building for agricultural research management in developing countries. The focus here is on the development of institutional capabilities in countries outside of NARS so that the mix of research, service, and training that ISNAR offers could become available on a large scale in the settings in which NARS operate. Capacity building here refers to the development of the capabilities of institutions such as local or regional organizations, academic centers, etc., that could become the focal points for these functions in proximity to NARS. Apart from faculty training and upgrading, this will call for the creation of new or existing centers with the capacity to plan and deliver the kind of services referred to above. Some of the larger NARS have already established or are likely to establish their own specialized centers for research management mainly to meet their internal training needs. Strategic alliances with them on a selective basis can be used to strengthen them and to leverage ISNAR’s own work. The collaboration required here is not for an isolated activity or service. Rather, the endeavor should be to develop the target institution on sound lines so that its quality and relevance are enhanced in the entire spectrum of research, service, and training or a part of it. ISNAR’s role here should be that of a technical collaborator in institution building. This may well call for basing some of the staff or other experts in the institutions in developing countries that ISNAR collaborates with. A medium-, if not long-term, relationship will be called for to achieve this objective,
and funding will obviously be an important issue. ISNAR has already initiated some work in this area. The implications of this long-term task and the ability to carry this burden along with other functions are matters that deserve special attention.

6.5 Major Implications

6.5.1 Reaffirming the mission

During the period under review, ISNAR’s activities and outputs have grown substantially compared to the preceding period, and its impact on NARS has been on the whole most positive. Service has remained the major thrust of the organization. The Panel is unanimous in its conclusion that ISNAR’s mission continues to be as relevant today as it was in previous years.

6.5.2 Divesting activities

External environmental changes and a reassessment of NARS’ needs, however, may require ISNAR to review its directions more carefully. Two important directional changes are implied in the foregoing discussion of ISNAR’s future. One is the need for ISNAR to position itself in the research-based end of the service spectrum, thus leaving the less research-based part of the spectrum to other service providers. This is by no means a plea for ISNAR to leave the service arena. Rather, it is a recognition of the need to exploit more fully the comparative advantage of ISNAR and its role as a provider of public goods, and as a response to the increasing competition by others to deliver the less research-based services to NARS.

The second is the need to move upstream in terms of developing-country capacity building, which, in turn, will limit ISNAR’s role in direct service delivery to NARS. While in the short run, this may seem like a contradictory message to ISNAR, a decline in its direct service delivery role will occur only as local institutional capabilities get strengthened. Resource availability will no doubt determine the pace of progress of the latter. These new directions will require some restructuring and reorientation within ISNAR. Strategic shifts of this nature in the context of declining real resources will necessitate painful choices as to the activities and functions that need to be divested or limited over a period of time in order to create space for new and more relevant tasks. This has implications for the way staffing requirements and budgets should be assessed and restructured. It is clear that decisions of this kind need to take into account the types and intensity of competition that are emerging in ISNAR’s area of work. The Board and Management should be clear about the trade-offs involved and plan for the transition so that dislocations are minimized.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that ISNAR move more towards the research-based end of the service spectrum, gradually leaving the less research-based part to other service providers.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that ISNAR move up in the capacity-building ladder, concentrating more on building institutional capabilities both within and outside NARS in countries and regions so that the functions/services
being provided by it from a distance could be increasingly performed by appropriate organizations/groups in closer proximity to NARS.

6.5.3 Influencing the agendas of donors

ISNAR, as well as other centers, rightly argues that constraints on core funding and the need to seek special project funding on a continuous basis make it difficult to plan coherent programs and adhere to priorities. Given the current international scene, it is unlikely that this trend will be reversed in the foreseeable future. Under the circumstances, it is best for ISNAR to see how the donor agenda and interests could be made to reinforce the work that it would like to undertake. One implication of this is that ISNAR should try to influence donors at the stage at which they formulate their agenda and initiatives, and not after they have announced their plans and priorities. If potentially useful concepts and needs are conveyed to donors at the agenda-planning stage, there is a greater chance of their influencing the donors' final agenda, which, in turn, could make it easier for ISNAR to mobilize funds in support of its own priorities. This, however, would require ISNAR to invest in its own R&D as a basis for generating new ideas.

6.5.4 The need for a supportive mix of skills and structures

The Panel has already commented on the need for ISNAR to work towards a more suitable mix of skills and experience to adequately match institutional tasks. This should not be viewed in the context of service delivery alone. Professionals with the right skills and backgrounds are also necessary to draw upon emerging knowledge in relevant fields and to link up with world-class experts. If productive alliances with outstanding centers of excellence are to be formed, partners should be able to communicate well with their ISNAR counterparts and value the linkages. Entry into the area of upstream capacity building may call for professional expertise that is not in adequate supply in-house.

The organizational structures created to facilitate professional work are seldom fully satisfactory in any institution. Often, both organizational and personal or historical factors tend to influence the choice of structures. In an organization that faces a rapidly changing environment, while some fluidity has to be maintained, a constant watch has to be kept on the coherence of the themes and staff working on them, and on how well the structure facilitates cooperative behavior and group learning.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that ISNAR reformulate its strategy in light of the changes in its environment and its assessment of the emerging challenges, review the activities/functions it needs to divest in order to address the new challenges and tasks it plans to undertake, and specify the changes in the mix of skills it will attempt to put in place in support of its strategy.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Panel sincerely thanks the Board, Management, and staff of ISNAR for their excellent support during all stages of the Review. Particular thanks are due to the EPMR preparation team that consisted of Mirela Breedveld, Claudia Forero, Helen Hambly, Douglas Horton, Willem Janssen and Warren Peterson. The documentation provided was simply excellent and always timely, and the support as well as the logistical arrangements could not have been better. Kathleen Sheridan, ISNAR editor, assisted the Panel in the final polishing of the report, and staff of the Computer Unit were also very helpful at varying stages of the review. To all, the Panel was very grateful.

The Panel would like to express special appreciation to the Director General, Dr. Christian Bonte-Friedheim, for his personal support and full cooperation throughout the period of the review. He and his wife Judy were also marvelous hosts and made our stay in The Hague a much more pleasant one. We are also grateful to the many NARS leaders and representatives of research and development organizations who gave generously of their time to talk to us.

Thanks are also due to Jane Garrioch and Irmi Braun of the TAC Secretariat for their logistical support from Rome.

Finally, the Panel would like to say a very special word of thanks to Melina Tensen and Claudia Forero of ISNAR who assisted the Panel in preparing this report. Their support was invaluable and well beyond the call of duty. Their efficiency, hard work, and patience, particularly during periods of stress, as well as cheer and good humor, were greatly appreciated by the Panel.
ANNEX A: ASSESSMENTS

1. RESEARCH POLICY AND SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

1.1 Introduction

ISNAR has targeted its Research Policy and System Development Program (in short, Policy Program) activities towards senior and high-level policymakers concerned with agricultural research. Although not explicitly stated, it would appear that the objective of the Policy Program is to improve the relevance of policy on agricultural research. The thrust of the program on the whole is couched within the evolving environment in which research is carried out. This environment consists of liberalizing economies, with some undergoing structural adjustment programs, and the globalization of research, all of which require NARS leaders and policymakers to situate their systems strategically within regional and international agriculture.

The design of the Policy Program has been an evolutionary and complex process, and refinements are on-going. For instance, towards the end of 1996, the number of themes was reduced from four to three. At the time of the Internal Program Review (IPR) in September 1996, the themes were research policy analysis; system development; strategic planning, priority setting, and impact assessment; and new challenges. By December 1996, these were re-grouped into three themes: policy development, system development, and new challenges.

Up to 1992, it would appear that the then Research Policies and System Strategies program was composed of several activities which were not necessarily organized into specific themes or sub-programs. Between 1986 and 1994 a total of 22 issues had emerged, and in 1994 these were all merged into the Policy Program's agenda (see section by H. Tollini in Medium-Term Plan 1998-2000, November 1996).

1.2 Scope of Work and Program Activities

The program is now divided into three themes, and discussion in this section is based on each of the three themes.

1.2.1 Scope of work

Each of the three thematic areas is subdivided into three sub-themes, and each sub-theme is essentially a grouping of projects. The themes and sub-themes, however, do not represent administrative boundaries. Each theme has a technical committee for brainstorming and discussion. Committees have rotating chairs.

The structure of the program is summarized below by theme and sub-theme.
Policy Development
- linking research with national policies;
- resources for research, including information technology;
- priority setting and impact assessment.

Research System Development
- strategic planning;
- system design;
- transnational cooperation.

New Challenges
- biotechnology;
- natural resource management;
- agro-industries and market orientation.

Table A1.1 provides a more detailed breakdown of the main activities in each thematic area of the Policy Program. The Policy Program, however, has a total of 68 projects.

1.2.2 Objectives, strategies, and priorities

Because of the way the program is structured, each theme and sub-theme has a set of projects. In this section, therefore, discussion is focused at the thematic level, and objectives, strategies, and the main project activities are examined at that level.

The Policy Development theme has three sub-themes:
linking research with national policies, resources for research, and priority setting and impact assessment.

- The major objective of the linking research with national policies sub-theme is to provide relevant information for policymakers whose decisionmaking processes have a direct impact on the national research system. There are 11 projects under this sub-theme. On this issue, the most important research project is on structural adjustment. This study looked at six "early-adjusting" countries, including Burkina Faso, Chile, Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico, and Sri Lanka. The study found that structural adjustment did not automatically lead to spending cuts on research, but rather that the pressure was on increasing the accountability of the research system and its effectiveness as a development tool. Several publications resulted from this work, including a book published jointly with the World Bank. Under the same sub-theme, several workshops and policy-type seminar activities were completed. In addition, a recently recruited staff member is developing a policy research agenda around the issue of unstable financing of NARS.

- The resources for research sub-theme has a total of eight projects, three of which are under the Indicator Series, three on the financing of research, and two on information technology in the Indian Council for Agricultural Research and the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development. This work on information technology is at a higher policy level and not related to the information work under the Management Program. The major objective of this sub-theme appears to be the redressing of the slowdown in public agricultural research expenditures and access to
knowledge. The important projects under this sub-theme are the Indicator Series and the research financing projects. The Indicator Series has been on-going since the mid-1980s. The initial data collection effort was focused on sub-Saharan Africa, and the effort has now shifted to Latin America and the Caribbean. This work has led to several important publications containing useful data and quantitative analyses. The most important project under the financing of research work is the current compilation of a Research Finance Sourcebook.

- The **priority setting and impact assessment** sub-theme comprises 11 projects, mostly outreach projects in various parts of the world, including Bangladesh, Benin, and Kenya, as well as some regional support projects for Eastern and Southern Africa. The target is basically to institutionalize priority-setting tools that assist in better allocation of research funds. There has also been a welcome broadening of the application of priority-setting tools to include a natural resource management project on multi-purpose trees, one on livestock priority setting, and another on integrating biotechnology. The history of priority setting at ISNAR suggests a gradual shift from an emphasis on complex quantitative methods towards simpler scoring methods. More recently, ISNAR has assisted ASARECA and SACCAR, the regional agricultural research associations for Eastern and Southern Africa, respectively, with their priority-setting efforts. Although there is a stated intention to work on the impact assessment of research, there is as yet no project on this aspect.

The **System Development** theme has three sub-themes: strategic planning, system design, and transnational cooperation.

- The **strategic planning** projects are more country based, and in 1996 a total of 10 projects were underway in several countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Eritrea, Lebanon, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, and Togo. In most cases, the projects aim at developing a strategic plan for the research system.

- There are 13 projects under the **system design** sub-theme and these fall into two main categories. One part is concerned with issues of organizational structure and governance and this work is executed on a case-study basis. The other part is the linkages work. Farmer linkages and university linkages are the main projects. The farmer linkages work has five projects, all in sub-Saharan Africa, and the objective of this work is to strengthen the farmers' voice in the research process. This work has had a useful spin-off in a project with the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP); ISNAR is developing a training module for this farmers' organization. The strategy of the linkages projects combines research with outreach. This also applies to the university linkages project, which is also essentially an African-based project. Co-funded by BMZ and in collaboration with a German university department, this project provides guidance to national systems on linking universities with the national research system while at the same time allowing for valuable Ph.D.-level field research training.

- The sub-theme **transnational cooperation** has four projects, of which the West Africa G4 (Research Management Network) is the main one. The objective on the sub-theme is to foster international spillovers at the regional level. The G4 is pursuing this objective by coordinating research on management issues in four West African countries: Burkina
Faso, Mali, Niger, and Togo. Each of the four countries in the group coordinates a theme, and under this arrangement Burkina Faso coordinates planning, monitoring, and evaluation; Mali, information; Niger, physical resources management; and Togo, technology transfer. This approach is being assessed as yet another approach that ISNAR can use to package its services.

The **New Challenges** theme is the most recent addition to the Policy Program and has three sub-themes of biotechnology, natural resource management, and agro-industries and market orientation. The objective is to expose NARS to new technological areas of strategic importance through sharing information with NARS on these strategic issues.

- The **biotechnology** sub-theme has a total of seven projects, all under the Intermediary Biotechnology Service (IBS), all in support of new or potentially new users in Africa, Asia, WANA, and Latin America. For governments and organizations, and ultimately, for technology users to procure potential benefits of agricultural biotechnology, new technologies must be matched with appropriate economic policies, infrastructural development, and support services and education in order to incorporate them into the productive sector. This is the kind of advice service that the IBS is providing.

- There are 10 projects under the **natural resource management** (NRM) sub-theme. The objectives of ISNAR's NRM sub-theme are to assist NARS policymakers to clarify the NRM issues at a conceptual level, provide scientific measures of the importance of the problem or opportunity, and explain the consequences of alternative actions. ISNAR has the advantage of being an independent advisor to NARS on this issue. NRM research has a policy dimension involving decision makers at various levels concerned with issues of (a) spatial equity, or who captures the gains and bears the cost of resource exploitation, (b) intertemporal equity—protecting the resource base for future food security, and (c) productivity or opportunity costs of investing in low-potential areas. NARS leaders struggle with these issues as much as the CGIAR itself. ISNAR's guiding principles on these strategic issues are welcomed at a time of shrinking resources for NARS.

- The sub-theme **agro-industries and market orientation** is the most recent addition to the sub-theme of new challenges. There is only one project at the moment and greater activity is expected after a recent recruit joins the staff. The objective of this new sub-theme is to capture the broadening research agenda as it is influenced by developments in those industries that process agricultural products. More and more, market forces are also expected to be factored into the agricultural research agenda.

### 1.3 Assessments

#### 1.3.1 Outputs and impacts (1991-1996)

**Publications**
The Policy Program staff have been active in publishing relevant and useful information. The accomplishments of the Policy Development work has largely been a series of publications of which the most significant are the *Agricultural Research Policy* publication of 1991 and the
Science under Scarcity book of 1996. The Financing Sourcebook, still to be finalized, promises to be a major publication. There are several other valuable publications as well:


*Agricultural Research Plans in sub-Saharan Africa* is a research report compiled in collaboration with IITA and synthesizes experiences with agricultural research master plans. It has been reviewed and revised and is now in the ISNAR Publication Unit for editing and production. Another series of useful publications produced by the Policy Program are on relevant issues for agricultural research managers and their users. The basic information generated by the Linkages Project has been utilized to produce high-quality, relevant training modules, valued by NARS and by farmers' organizations. ISNAR should be praised for its timely publications on strategic issues such as biotechnology, natural resource management, and private-sector participation in agricultural research.

**Service**

The priority-setting projects have been a major activity of the Policy Program and have provided lessons for both the NARS and ISNAR. ISNAR has recorded its greatest impact with priority setting in a number of countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, and Uganda. Some of the recorded lessons, however, include the importance of priority setting as an internal process, and the fact that the process has to be consistent with organizational capacity and resource base, including human resources, if these tools are to be widely used. Very few priority-setting exercises have led to verifiable changes in resource allocation because the activity is delinked from resource allocation. ISNAR has apparently experienced that, with the exception of a few cases, the priority-setting exercises they support have insignificant legitimacy in terms of local influence on actual priorities or research agendas. There is as yet no evidence of how sustainable the priority-setting techniques are after initial adoption.

ISNAR has assisted both SACCAR and ASARECA with priority-setting efforts at a regional level, and this is expected to impact positively on national systems. On transnational cooperation, however, some lessons include the relatively high cost of delivery through
transnational cooperation; there are some reservations, as well, about the financial sustainability of regional organizations (see L. Zuidema's paper for the IPR 1996).

With regard to the IBS, a mid-term evaluation of 1995 provided useful insights. The evaluators concluded that IBS had impressive achievements in terms of activities (interactive policy seminars) and outputs (database and technical publications) during its two-and-a-half years of implementation. Furthermore, IBS has developed the capability to consolidate its activities and output into potentially useful decision-making tools applicable to biotechnology management. IBS has also successfully established its visibility among potential clients, which include developing countries as end users and international biotechnology programs as intermediary users.

The Policy Program staff have been very active undertaking advisory service missions. The ICER on ISNAR’s impact, however, alludes to the lack of systematic records on service activities, their outputs and impacts. This in itself would suggest, the ICER concludes, that a substantial effort has to be undertaken by ISNAR staff to provide information on advisory work.

Training
The Policy Program has also had some achievements in the area of training, although this has not been one of the Policy Program’s stronger activities. According to the ICER on ISNAR’s impact, ISNAR documents reveal that in the policy realm most outputs have been in the form of publications, and little training has been done (Exhibit 7). Although ISNAR’s clients rate training as its most valuable product (Exhibit 10), training within the realm of the Policy Program is very limited. However, several (in-house) seminars, conferences, and symposia have been held to exchange information in these areas (Table A1.2). Most of these activities may not be regarded as formal training, and the subject matter is wide ranging—from macro-policy issues of structural adjustment to narrow issues of cocoa biotechnology. This, however, is a good indication of the kind of training and information networking activities that the Policy Program has embarked upon. The most important formal training activity at the regional level is the agricultural research management training project of SADC, in Southern Africa. This program is currently under external review. Significant progress has been made, however, in institutionalizing this in the region.

1.3.2 Quality considerations

The Policy Program has accumulated several books of high quality, as well as several articles in internationally known journals (Table A1.3). There has also been an improvement in the quality of publications since the last EPMR (Table A3.1), with a clear separation and peer review process for various quality levels of publications. This comment is made relative to the negative impression given by the last (second) EPMR. ISNAR, however, has the challenge to classify its publications in a way that facilitates readers’ identification of thematic areas of interest. Beyond the Briefing Paper series, ISNAR may also need to improve quality and relevance of publications by adopting a more concise, client-oriented format, in as simple a language as possible. Not enough Guidelines or Guiding Principles types of publications are published. ISNAR should also continue its efforts to define, disseminate, and utilize in a consistent manner, concepts and vocabularies in technical fields.
1.3.3 Program staffing

In 1996, the Policy Program had 68 projects grouped under the various sub-themes, most of which are run by individual persons. Some projects, however, involve teamwork, as well as collaboration with the Management Program. The 68 projects are shared among 20 persons, and this suggests a severe dispersion of staff. The Policy Program is composed of 30 staff members, of which 22 are professional staff. Most of them, 16/22, have a Ph.D. degree and the rest, 6/22, have a Masters degree or are in the process of pursuing a doctoral degree. On staff discipline mix, 15/22 have an agricultural economy background; the rest are specialized in different disciplines, such as agronomy, plant breeding, ecology, and various social sciences.

In terms of allocation of staff by region in 1995, Latin America has been allocated the highest staff time (26%), followed by Africa (24.3%), Asia (7.4%) and WANA (3.5%). The remaining 38.8% of allocated staff time is taken up by global issues.\(^5\)

In terms of staff time allocation by function (research, training, and service), data available for 1995, shows that research has received the highest share (38.4%), training (31.3%), and advisory services (30.3%). The program contributes to 48.5% of ISNAR’s working days.

Most of the staff are located at headquarters. Two staff members are presently outposted, one in Kenya at KARI and the other in Syria at ICARDA.

1.3.4 Comments on the Policy Program research agenda

The theme on Policy Development has, arguably, developed ISNAR’s most pronounced research agenda. This is largely the work under the resources for research sub-theme with the Indicator Series and structural adjustment projects. The sub-theme on resources, however, has no clearly stated framework for integrating these individual projects. This weakness is observed in all the themes under the program. Nevertheless, the Indicator Series and the structural adjustment projects have particularly had impact on the international community. The ICER on the Indicator Series also alludes to the positive contributions of this project, as well as the potential benefit that may follow a broadening of focus as well as more extensive analysis and interpretation of data. The Research System Development theme is fragmented, with the sub-theme strategic planning out of place alongside system design and transnational cooperation. Examining the projects under the system design and transnational cooperation sub-themes, one finds no real common thread. The Linkages projects on farmers and on universities have a significant "action research" component, and lessons are gathered for future use as the projects continue. This aspect is positive. The weakness of the Linkages work is that each project focuses on only one part of the national system at a time with no conceptual framework that leads to greater understanding of how the national system functions.

On the whole, however, the Panel feels that the Policy Program needs to improve and strengthen its approach to providing a research-based service. The compelling reasons for this observation are as follows:

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\(^5\) Source: ISNAR project and staff time allocation in 1995. Project Management Information System.
There is no coherent research agenda that seeks to provide new knowledge so as to fill knowledge gaps in a manner that enhances the effectiveness of services. ISNAR has experienced, for instance, that priority-setting exercises are not as effective because of the delink with the resource allocating process. It follows, therefore, that research on the political economy of resource allocation at the national level is vital for the effective institutionalization of these techniques.

There is no substantial evidence of a progressive accumulation and/or synthesis of lessons across projects.

In conclusion, however, the Policy Program has considerable scope to transform and offer more effective services supported by a more focused research agenda. There is some evidence of movement in this direction but this will not be a successful transformation without a new and clearer overall ISNAR strategy.

1.4 Conclusions and Recommendations

The Research Policy and System Development program attempts to address the major concerns of policymakers at national and international levels. The program was established in response to a recommendation of the second EPMR in 1991 for a more formal organizational structure and has evolved over a number of years. The program is still a broad amalgamation of a large number of projects widely differing in scope. Over the recent years since its establishment, however, the program has made commendable progress in narrowing its scope and developing a more problem-oriented agenda under the three unifying themes. Some of this work is of high quality and relevance, as also testified, for example, by the ICERs of the Indicator Series and the Intermediary Biotechnology Service. The program activities on priority setting and strategic planning appear to be well appreciated by the NARS involved, although the sustainability and ultimate value of these activities are still a question mark. The other themes or sub-themes are still relatively new and it would be early to derive any conclusions on their relevance and impact.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that the Policy and System Development Program further take steps to:

- focus on a related set of problems and issues in a more integrated manner;
- develop a research agenda that leads to better identification and understanding of key policy factors affecting the overall performance and effectiveness of the research system;
- build capacity to integrate lessons drawn from other parts of the program, from the Management Program, and from other sources, and contribute all this to ISNAR's institutional memory;
- improve quality through better conceptualization of research, better research design and teamwork, and in particular, interdisciplinary research;
- improve targeting of publications for policymakers;
- develop strong allies, both regional and international, including long-term outposting and secondment of staff, where this accelerates learning and/or implementation;
• improve the staff mix of scientific disciplines in relation to major problems and issues identified.

All this work may have to keep in view the broad environmental context of the low priority that is generally assigned to agriculture and agricultural research in developing countries. The EPMR Panel recognizes that ISNAR is generally aware of many of the changes in strategic direction that may be required, as evidenced by the draft proposals for their 1998-2000 Medium-Term Plan. The challenge for ISNAR will be to translate these proposals into reality as it will require the development of a more coherent strategy.
Table A1.1: Examples of activities in each thematic area of the Policy Program

1. Policy Development

1.1 Linking Research and National Policies
   a. Strengthening research policies in Latin America
   b. Policy and NARS instability
   c. Policy workshop series (South Africa, Tanzania)
   d. Research financing sourcebook
   e. Structural adjustment

1.2 Resources for Research
   a. New information technologies
   b. Indicator Series (Africa Overview Book)
   c. Research Finance

1.3 Priority Setting and Impact Analysis
   a. Priority setting in livestock
   b. Priority setting in Benin
   c. Priority setting in Morocco
   d. Integrating biotechnology in agricultural research
   e. Multipurpose tree priority setting (50 %)
   f. Regional Africa Network for ASARECA

2. System Development

2.1 Strategic Planning
   a. Lesotho: review and planning
   b. Indonesia: strategic planning
   c. Togo: review and planning

2.2 System Design
   a. Alternative models of organization
   b. Agricultural research network (ARNET)
   c. Linkages between research and farmer organizations
   d. Applying linkage lessons
   e. University-NARS (Phase II)

2.3 Transnational Cooperation
   a. Approaches to NARS-NARS cooperation (G4)
   b. ASARECA (regional priority setting)
3. New Challenges

3.1 Natural Resource Management
   a. Closing the Loop: NRM-oriented agricultural research policy formulation
   b. Kenya: NRM-based research programming
   c. Ecoregional initiatives
   d. Planning NRM Research

3.2 Biotechnology
   a. Integrating biotechnology in agricultural research
   b. IBS

3.3 Agro-industries and Market Orientation
   a. Market orientation of agricultural research in sub-Saharan Africa
### Table A1.2: 1995 Policy Program In-house Seminar Series

<table>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
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<td>Reviving working groups</td>
<td>R. Contant</td>
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Table A1.3. ISNAR external publications by authors in the Policy Program

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ANNEX A: ASSESSMENTS

2. MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

2.1 Introduction

ISNAR’s purpose is to help strengthen national agricultural research capabilities in developing countries. Stronger research capabilities in developing countries are essential for attaining the CGIAR goal of contributing to sustainable agriculture for food security in developing countries. ISNAR’s Management Program (MP) contributes to the ISNAR goal by focusing specifically on the NAROs in developing countries and helping strengthen their management capabilities. The program sees its primary clients as individuals playing key management roles in NAROs, such as directors, managers, administrators, program leaders and scientists with managerial responsibilities. The program is organized around the following three themes:

1. **Managing research programs** aims to enhance the effectiveness, relevance and quality of research programs and projects through development of new tools and approaches or adaptation of existing tools.
2. **Managing resources for research** is geared towards sustaining improvements in the management of human, financial, and physical resources in NAROs.
3. **Managing research organizations** aims to generate sustained improvements in NAROs’ organizational performance.

2.1.1 Program staffing

The program is composed of 22 staff members, of which 14 are professional staff. Data on staff time allocation by theme show that, over the last five years, management of research programs has been receiving an increasing share of staff resources, rising from 30% in 1995 to 51% in 1996. A major contributor to this is the intensive activity associated with PM&E projects. By contrast, management of institute resources has always had the lowest share of staff resources (around 10%).

In terms of allocation of effort by region, Africa has been allocated the highest staff time (about 35%), followed by LAC (30%), Asia (11%), and West Asia-North Africa (11%). The remaining part (13%) reflects work on global concerns.

Most of the staff are located at the headquarters. Two staff are currently outposted in Ecuador in connection with the PM&E project (until December 1997). Over the last five years, four other program staff were outposted for stays of up to five years—two in connection with CID work in Uganda, one for general support to NARO management and INFORM-related work in Tanzania, and one for mainly MIS-related work in Bangladesh.

In terms of time allocation by function (research, training, and service), the available information is either *ex ante* from plans or *ex post* based on staff declarations of time spent by function. Data available for the last five years show that research has received the lowest share
(about 20%), with advisory services receiving the highest share (70%), and training the remainder (10%). According to staff reports for the last six months, the share of research has increased to 35%.

2.1.2 Training

Over the past five years the program has organized about 50 training events and training-related workshops (with an average of 15-20 persons per event). Of the 118 training weeks in 26 countries during this period, INFORM-related training has received the most time (54 weeks), with PM&E much less (25 weeks). A number of the training events were in the form of training of trainers to generate multiplier effects. Table A2.1 provides detailed information on training events.

2.2 Description of Activities

ISNAR has begun to operate in a project mode. This is not yet fully operational, as the information about the projects has not been built into a management information system. Project-related information is available for the last two years. It shows that, over the period, the Management Program has been involved with 70 projects, over half of which were in the third theme on managing research organizations. Many of the projects in this theme cut across the other theme in the Management Program, as well as those in the Policy Program. Table A2.2 provides a more detailed breakdown of the main projects under each sub-theme.

The Managing research programs theme has been involved with 23 projects. Most of these cover management information systems (INFORM, 13 projects) and planning, monitoring, and evaluation (PM&E, 8 projects).

- **Planning, monitoring, and evaluation** projects focus on the LAC region, with two staff outposted in Ecuador. The PM&E projects are strongly based on a participatory approach. The objectives are to analyze a region’s experiences with PM&E, sensitize top-level managers, prepare practical guidelines on PM&E, introduce and disseminate PM&E methods in the region (a sourcebook on monitoring and evaluation was published in Spanish and English as well as a baseline study on PM&E in 13 organizations), and, in process now, establish integrated PM&E systems in research organizations of the regions. Programs to strengthen PM&E are being implemented in Costa Rica, Cuba, Panama, and Venezuela. The approach has taken a strong training component.

- In Morocco, ISNAR and INRA Morocco jointly developed a program planning method (*Programmation par Objectif*, PPO) which aimed at creating a methodology for planning applied research activities.

- **Management information systems**. This sub-theme is aimed at developing a computer-based management information system that provides agricultural research managers with the facts they need for priority setting, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation. INFORM is the product ISNAR has developed for this purpose. The system covers information on inputs to research (people, finance, and physical resources), the research program, and research outputs (improved technologies and reports on experiments and impacts).
INFORM is an example of a tool developed by ISNAR over a long period (11 years), integrating research on tool development with training and advisory service. Twenty-six countries are known to have made some use of the system to a greater or lesser degree. An intense training program (54 weeks over the last five years) has been associated with INFORM, and in this respect there is a collaborative undertaking with the National Academy of Agricultural Research Management of Hyderabad, India. ISNAR has prepared a new version (called INFORM-R) based on the lessons learned. A history of INFORM was commissioned to record the wide range of activities to date.

This sub-theme also includes several other activities:

- research program management (2 projects): regular training events for research program leaders;
- developing participatory techniques to involve farmers in program design.

The Managing resources for research theme. This second major thrust of the management program is comprised of three domains of activities: human resource management, financial management, and management of physical resources. Six projects were in implementation over the last two years. The activities include the following:

- human resource assessment and development for ASARECA in Guinea, and gender-related issues (4 projects);
- assessing researcher performance and linking performance evaluation to the reward system (a sourcebook);
- a self-learning module/handbook on research station management, a manual and training package on personnel management;
- an integrated model for a planning and budgeting system;
- financial resources (2 projects);
- strategies and approaches for fund raising and alternative funding mechanisms;
- a manual on the design of research facilities (produced in 1993).

The Managing research organizations theme. The rapidly changing environment makes it essential for NAROs to change at an accelerated pace. Over the last two years, 41 projects have been associated with this theme. These include the following:

- Comprehensive institutional development (CID). Started in 1992, there are 13 projects for the two past years related to Uganda and Ecuador. CID is an approach ISNAR uses to assist a limited number of NARS in a holistic way through a wide range of activities in order to improve the performance of the NARO. The key objectives are to develop effective and efficient NARS and improve understanding of institutional development. The Uganda and Ecuador CIDs both focused on a number of components to be strengthened. In Uganda, the components were information management, monitoring and evaluation, training needs assessment and developing appropriate financial management procedures. In Ecuador, the components were design of a management information system, PM&E, human resource development and planning, transfer of technology, and extension linkages. These CID projects are jointly carried out with staff from the Policy and Systems Development Program.
Some CID-like experiences in Morocco (1 project), Uruguay (4 projects), and Benin with the build up of a master plan.

Managing change (4 projects). These are in the form of cross-country analyses. Preliminary work was done using an in-depth cross-country analysis of NARS a few years ago. This covered synthesis work in three clusters of countries: French-speaking countries, English-speaking countries, and Spanish-speaking countries. The results were never published. Busch and Bingen utilized the materials for their publications on "Organization and Structure of National Agriculture Research" and "Restructuring Agricultural Research: Some Lessons from Experience".

Benchmarking (1 project). "Recruiting and Hiring Managers: A Successful Example from Argentina" provides useful information from Argentina that can serve as a benchmark.

Global or specific diagnostic work on NAROs to assess constraints. Fifteen projects: in Cyprus (1), Eritrea (5), Paraguay (3), Mali (2), Tanzania (2), Indonesia (2).

Strategic planning and on-farm research, in order to establish a decentralized research system through the creation of regional centers in Indonesia.

Development of participatory approaches to institutional change.

Organizational performance assessment.

Guidelines for strategic planning at the organizational level.

2.2.1 Publications

The staff of the program have published a number of country reports, discussion and working papers, training materials, and Briefing Papers during the review period. Staff also participate in conferences, symposia, workshops, etc. Publications by program staff include the following:

Books:

Discussion paper N° 93-20 (September 1993) and Briefing Paper N° 13 (May 1994).
Publications in international journals with referees:

- Peterson and Perrault. Agricultural Research Organizations: the assessment and improvement of performance. Accepted for publication in Knowledge and Policy.

Chapters in books with scientific editors:


The total ISNAR external publications by author in the Management Program is given in table A2.3

2.3 Assessment

2.3.1 Overall organization of the Management Program

The Management Program is organized around the three themes noted above. The themes provide three different perspectives for examining organizational performance: at the level of the entire organization taken broadly, at the level of the resources (inputs) used by the organization, and at the level of the programs and projects that package these inputs and generate the organizational outputs. This simple breakdown is useful as an organizing framework for ISNAR activities in the management area.

In terms of disciplinary composition, about half the professional staff have been trained at the graduate level in economics or fields of agriculture. There are eight Ph.D. holders. Only two staff have their training in business administration or finance (not at the Ph.D. level). The rest of the Management Program staff are trained in sociology, anthropology, or education.

Although there are several examples of teamwork, program staff work for the most part individually on the projects assigned to them (which averages about five projects per professional staff member). This project workload can limit complementarity in research and experience. In the case of research projects, weak teamwork constrains multi-disciplinary research. Also, dispersion of efforts into several projects constrains the concentrated, in-depth work required for most research. In both service and research, institutional memory is restricted by individualized work.
2.3.2 Managing organizations

This theme includes ISNAR’s “holistic” projects on NAROs, including the recently completed CID work in Uganda and similar work in Morocco, and the long-standing involvement of ISNAR with Kenya. An ICER is available on the Uganda work. ISNAR’s interventions in Uganda date back to 1986. Referring to the early years of ISNAR’s involvement with Uganda, the ICER notes that “research leaders are unanimous in giving high marks to the quality of support they have received from ISNAR” and that “the major institutional changes could not have been achieved without that cooperation. They also are convinced that the staff ISNAR outposted to Uganda contributed significantly to these developments.”

The CID work covers only the last two years, where ISNAR activities ranged from development of a research management system for the NARO to installation of management information systems (INFORM) and work to strengthen monitoring and evaluation practices. The Panel that conducted the ICER gives ISNAR mixed marks in terms of generating change during this period—the most visible outcome being the development of a research management system. It notes (p. 12, Uganda ICER):

...the program components included under the CID approach form a sound basis for strengthening the holistic development of NARO and its associated institutes, thus enabling them to plan, implement and follow up their activities in a coordinated manner. However, despite this overall positive outlook, problems have been encountered during implementation. Several components/sub-components have either not been implemented or implemented poorly. Failures are due to neither NARO nor ISNAR alone. It is indicated by NARO management and staff that a higher level of success could have been achieved if program implementation had been started with adequate preparation in terms of availability of adequate staff, funds and facilities

There are also three case studies (Kenya, Morocco, and Uruguay) conducted by a member of the team that conducted the impact assessment ICER, which sheds light on the outcomes of ISNAR’s CID work. These case studies illustrate that ISNAR’s involvement with the NARO generally helped clarify research policies at the government level, in addition to introducing changes in organizational or management processes of the NARO.

The Morocco case study notes significant impact from ISNAR’s work on the NARO: “This case study found that ISNAR has had and continues to have a substantial impact on INRA, the principal public NARO in Morocco. This impact is evident in changes and improvements in the latter’s environment, motivation, capacity and performance to varying degrees” (p. 5). The Kenya case study recognizes the importance of close partnerships for the success of the intervention.

The Panel considers that managing research organizations is an area in which ISNAR could build unique competence. This would require assigning significant priority to research on the subject, particularly regarding determinants of organizational performance. Management of organizational change in research organizations is another area where case studies and other research are needed, particularly at these times of significant change in the roles of public and private research organizations. This was confirmed by NARS leaders during the Panel’s interviews. ISNAR’s advice on organizational matters would be regarded as much more
credible if they were grounded in directly relevant research conducted by ISNAR staff and their partners. The Panel notes that the PM&E project in LAC has moved beyond training to the management of change, particularly in Costa Rica, Cuba, Panama, and Venezuela. The Panel encourages ISNAR to document these experiences carefully.

A final note on two recent ISNAR initiatives. First, the Panel applauds ISNAR for initiating benchmarking studies. Such studies of practices in both public- and private-sector research organizations will help in the transfer of experiences, not only internationally, but also between these two sectors. Second, ISNAR’s work in the area of fisheries in Mozambique is a sign of useful diversification of ISNAR’s portfolio.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that ISNAR expand its work on benchmarking, particularly with respect to experiences from the private sector.

2.3.3 Managing programs

Over the last year, more than half of the Management Program’s resources have been devoted to this theme. Three projects, INFORM, PM&E in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and program planning in Morocco, are the most prominent activities. ISNAR has commissioned ICERs on the first two projects.

The ICER on INFORM was completed two years ago. At that time, it had been implemented in 16 countries. The ICER concluded as follows: “Results have been mixed. Some countries are making good progress in implementation of INFORM, yet none can be said to have fully operationalized it through its integration into the programming, monitoring and evaluation cycles” (p. 1). After describing the problems hindering more rapid progress, the ICER notes that “a key weakness of INFORM is that the databases do not include information that can be used in the assessment of the quality of the research nor the usefulness of research findings” and makes several recommendations for improvement.

ISNAR has made several improvements in INFORM over the last two years. A new version was tested in Zambia and a French version is in preparation. There are several signs of its use by others. For example, a UK consultancy company assisting Ghana’s National Agricultural Research Council has chosen INFORM as the tool for their management information system. Similar use is made of INFORM by Winrock International in a project in Pakistan. In India, NAARM adopted INFORM for use in its MIS training for ICAR in 1990. Now, NAARM is interested in the new version of INFORM.

The Panel has examined neither the alternatives to INFORM that are in the market, nor the cost effectiveness of INFORM in developing-country conditions. The ICER does not provide answers to these questions, but suggests that ISNAR should consider what role, if any, it should play in the implementation of INFORM.

In the Panel’s view, ISNAR needs to consider carefully what its future role should be in the development of management information systems. Investment in information system development requires long-term commitment because the developer is expected to provide continuous updates and service. This is an area where the private sector is very active.
An option ISNAR should consider is to link with an organization that is in the business of developing information systems.

**Recommendation:** The Panel recommends that ISNAR define clearly what its future role would be in the development and implementation of information systems, in the light of developing-country needs, the availability of alternative suppliers, and other demands for ISNAR services.

The **PM&E project** was evaluated in 1994 by Helio Tollini, then at EMBRAPA, and Carmen Siri, former manager of the information program at CIP, using a model to analyze the context, inputs, processes, and products of the project. The assessment gives excellent marks to the project both in terms of its outputs and the participatory process used in executing it. The outputs include over 100 managers trained, training materials on PM&E, a sourcebook on M&E (in Spanish and English), 18 persons trained as trainers in PM&E, and case studies on the status of PM&E in 13 organizations. These are all valued outputs, and surveys of NARS and stakeholders have singled out this activity as one of the most useful carried out by ISNAR.

The Panel considers the 13 case studies as very important in measuring change over time in PM&E capacity in organizations. By designing the project to include baseline data collection, ISNAR is demonstrating how before-after measurements can be used to monitor and assess change. The Panel notes that, had a similar approach been used by ISNAR in relation to its other interventions over the years, baseline data would have enabled ISNAR to assess change more objectively (and facilitate the work of external reviewers like us.)

While it could be questioned if assistance in this area is most needed in the LAC region, the project attracted several interested donors (led by IDB) and provided an opportunity to experiment with a new intervention strategy. This effort has generated a number of lessons that ISNAR is now using in other interventions (e.g., Benin).

The **program planning** project was developed at the request of INRA Morocco as a novel approach for planning applied research activities for commodity-based and production-system-based research programs. Staff from INRA-Morocco participated closely with ISNAR in the design of the planning approach. There was close collaboration and participation between the staffs of INRA and ISNAR from 1989 to 1994. The success of the effort is largely attributed to the quality of the relationships between the staff of the two parties. The resulting program planning tool is used by INRA and other NAROs. Since 1990, 12 out of INRA’s 18 research programs have been planned using this method. Several African countries have shown interest in using the methodology. The publications are in French and in English under the institutional logos of INRA and ISNAR. Several documents, guidelines, and articles have been published, some in refereed journals. With the support of INRA staff, a number of other countries, including Benin, Mali, Senegal, and Tunisia, have begun or are beginning to apply the planning approach.

### 2.3.4 Managing resources

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*Programmation par objectif (PPO) or Program Planning.*
Only about 10 percent of the program’s resources have been devoted to this theme. The primary focus has rightly been on human resource issues in research organizations. A regional human resource development strategy was developed for ASARECA, a number of sourcebooks have been published, and training needs surveys are being conducted.

The Panel considers the performance of researchers, particularly in developing-country settings, to be a little-understood phenomenon. This is a research question ISNAR could focus on in cooperation with other research institutions. Increased ISNAR expertise on organizational performance issues would be a plus for studies on researchers.

The Panel considers that increased ISNAR research in this area would generate, as a by-product, training materials that could be used by other organizations in courses on agricultural research management.

2.4 Future Directions of the Management Program

2.4.1 Needs, priorities and objectives

It is not clear to the Panel what criteria have guided ISNAR’s choices on resource allocation across themes, or on priorities within themes. INFORM and PM&E address important needs, but it is not obvious why these received higher priority and resources than, for example, research on organizational performance. One answer is clearly the availability of non-core funds, and another is the expression of demand from clients and potential clients. These raise fundamental questions on the extent to which one can design and maintain a coherent program of research, service, and training in the management area. If demands and resource availability continue to dictate the directions of the program, ISNAR may never have the opportunity to channel its efforts into activities of the greatest need to developing countries.

ISNAR has recognized the need to enlarge the scope of its work to include other related sectors besides agriculture. However this is yet to be reflected in the actual program or work. Clearly there is a case for broadening the coverage of its research work.

It is important for ISNAR to have a clear notion of what types of interventions could have the highest payoffs in terms of upgrading NARO management capacities in developing countries.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that ISNAR plan its future activities in the management area through rigorous needs assessments and priority setting.

2.4.2 Is the service provided by ISNAR research-based?

This is a question the Panel has grappled with since the start of its work. The concept of ISNAR operating as a research-based service was put forward during the first External Program Review ten years ago. The concept was also endorsed by the second EPMR in 1991.

The Panel’s impressions of the rationale for a research-based service are as follows:
An organization providing services in the area of policy or management needs to ground the service it provides in a sound knowledge base.

Some of this knowledge base is available in the existing literature on international development, public policy, organizations, management, etc.

To the extent that the existing knowledge base is insufficient for designing and delivering services effectively, there would be value in investing in research that could fill in the gaps. By conducting its own action research with active involvement in a few NAROs in the needed areas, ISNAR would contribute to global knowledge about the performance of research systems and institutions and enhance the effectiveness of its own services and the services of others who would rely on the newly generated knowledge.

In addition, by incorporating research and learning into its service activities, ISNAR would gradually build a knowledge base rooted in its own service activities. This new knowledge would also be an ISNAR contribution to knowledge and would help increase the effectiveness of future service activities.

ISNAR reports that 34% of staff time in the management program was devoted in 1995 to research (as compared with about 20 percent in 1991). A considerable portion of the time reported by staff as having been devoted to "research" clearly refers to time spent in designing an intervention or researching the circumstances of a client prior to or during service delivery. Of the 70 projects included in the portfolio of the program in 1995 and 1996, only six had research as their primary objective, i.e., in the form of free-standing research projects. These included (1) a synthesis of experiences of IARCs on performance appraisal, (2) a synthesis of experiences in the Uganda CID, (3) a literature review on management of change, (4) a sourcebook on planning, monitoring, and evaluation, (5) a paper on assessing organizational performance, and (6) a sourcebook on planning agricultural research.

This does not imply that research built into design or delivery of a service is less important than free-standing research or research synthesizing experiences from service delivery. However, the latter type of research could be of wider use (i.e., more of a public good than a private good).

Although ISNAR has taken some positive actions in this direction and achievements have been reached in this mode of operation, the Panel feels that further strengthening of the Management Program as a provider of research-based services is required. The Management Program should develop a clear strategy for developing the "research-based service" dimension of its work.

2.4.3 The issue of alliances and multipliers

In assessing ISNAR's work in this program, the Panel posed two other questions:

1. What kinds of service should ISNAR deliver itself, and in what areas should it encourage others to deliver it (or leave it to the market to deliver)? There are many management training or consultancy organizations around the world who are specialized in management (but may not have sub-specialties in research management or agricultural research management), who could potentially deliver training or other services for
NAROs. This is particularly true for middle-income countries where there is a relatively well-developed training and consultancy sector.

2. How much has ISNAR linked with others through alliances that expand ISNAR’s limited capacity in designing and delivering training and other services, or in conducting research on management? This is particularly significant for tapping expertise on regions and cultures, as well as on emerging management disciplines.

It appears that, regarding the Management Program, ISNAR has made a beginning in both of these areas, but the progress has been very slow. One reason mentioned is the shortage of “core funds” during the period under review. It is not entirely certain that the future funding environment of the CGIAR and of ISNAR will be much different than in the recent past. The Panel is optimistic that, were ISNAR to develop collaborative projects with strong potential for building alliances or developing multipliers as part of a concerted strategy, such a strategy could have sufficient programmatic appeal to reduce funding as a major constraint for progress in this area.

In the Panel’s opinion, ISNAR’s comparative advantage should lie more in the generation of public goods in the form of research or tools others can customize for specific clients. Involvement with design and delivery of private goods (services or training for a specific client) could have payoffs in terms of spillovers to other beneficiaries and increased understanding of solutions to management problems. However, when there are alternative sources for supplying the private goods needed, or if ISNAR can help build or strengthen these alternative sources, it should curtail its involvement with the provision of private goods.
Table A2.1: ISNAR Management Program training events (1991-1996)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of event</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Duration (in days)</th>
<th>No. trained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field Seminar—Use of PRA-Methods</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Field Seminar—Use of PRA-Methods</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field Seminar—Use of PRA-Methods</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Field Seminar—Use of PRA-Methods</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting of NARU finance officers</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
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<td>ISRA/ISNAR workshop for INFORM operators</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integration of MIS into INFORM Framework</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>Data Collection for INFORM</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization, Structure and Decentralization of Agricultural Research</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management Training at DSE Biotechnology Course</td>
<td>Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop for agricultural research management (TOT)*</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
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<td>Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluating of Agricultural Research (TOT)*</td>
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<td>Monitoring and Evaluating Agricultural Research</td>
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<td>Informative workshop on strategic planning</td>
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<td>Regional Workshop for Training Change Agents (TOT)*</td>
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<td>Workshop on the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation of Agricultural Research</td>
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<td>Communications skills development and management: s'organiser pour communiquer</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
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<td>Individual managerial performance assessment workshops</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
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<td>ICRISAT/SADC Sorghum and Millet Planning Workshop</td>
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<td>Training workshop for AIAT managers (Indonesia Project)</td>
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<td>Workshop for Uganda CID sub-project: Improving Library and Information Services</td>
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<td>Information Strategy Seminar and Presentation Draft Strategy to Policy Makers and Senior Managers</td>
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<td>Workshop on Scientific Writing and Presentation (TOT)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop on Scientific Writing and Presentation</td>
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<td>INFORM Demonstration</td>
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<tr>
<td>INFORM Data Capture &amp; Liaison</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>INFORM Demonstration</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
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<td>INFORM Implementation</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
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<td>INFORM workshop on a management information system for agricultural research</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>12</td>
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### Table A2.1 (cont.): ISNAR Management Program training events (1991-1996)

<table>
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<th>Title of event</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Duration (in days)</th>
<th>No. trained</th>
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<td>INFORM Data Capture Workshop</td>
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<td>INFORM Data Capture Workshop II</td>
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<td>INFORM Training Workshop</td>
<td>Bhutan</td>
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<td>Theme Workshop on Management Information Systems for Agricultural Managers</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
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<tr>
<td>INFORM Seminar</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second workshop for INFORM practitioners</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
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<td>INFORM workshop Uganda</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>INFORM workshop</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementation of a Management Information System for Agricultural Research (3 of 3): INFORM</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>Training Workshop on Regional Databases and Information</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
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<td>Short-term fellowship in MIS</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
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<td>INFORM Implementation (no. 3 of 5 interventions)</td>
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<td>INFORM-R workshop</td>
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<td>Course in INFORM</td>
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<td>INFORM workshop Tanzania</td>
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*TOT = training of trainers*
Table A2.2: Management Program current active projects

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Time Allocated (days)</th>
<th>By Theme (% of total time)</th>
<th>By Function (% of total time)</th>
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<td>Mgmt of Research Programs</td>
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<td>MOR50400</td>
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<td>IR501500</td>
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<td>MP000800</td>
<td>Sourcebook IARC Performance Approval</td>
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<td>NER00300</td>
<td>Niger - Training</td>
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<td>PDS01700</td>
<td>Gender Workshop</td>
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<td>PS500806</td>
<td>ASARECA Human Resource Development</td>
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<td>PS500806</td>
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<td>SEN50300</td>
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<td>IR000500</td>
<td>Management of Change</td>
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<td>IR600200</td>
<td>Benchmarking for NAROs</td>
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<td>RLA00100</td>
<td>ISNAR-IICA-FAO Collaboration</td>
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<td>MP000100</td>
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<td>UGA50205</td>
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Table A2.2 (cont.): Management Program current active projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Time Allocated (days)</th>
<th>By Theme (% of total time)*</th>
<th>By Function (% of total time)*</th>
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<td>Mgmt of Research Programs</td>
<td>Mgmt of Organizations</td>
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<td>Ecuador - INIA PM&amp;E</td>
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<td>MP000700</td>
<td>Methodology for Managing Institutional Change - NRM</td>
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<td>Paraguay - Structure</td>
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<td>Uruguay - INIA Case Study Uruguay</td>
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<td>GHA50300</td>
<td>Ghana - INFORM Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>IR000900</td>
<td>INFORM-R (Relational)</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>KEN51104</td>
<td>KARI - INFORM Phase 2</td>
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<td>80</td>
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<td>INFORM Zambia</td>
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<td>Benin Consultation for Phase</td>
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<td>CDI00100</td>
<td>Intercenter Research Management Training Work</td>
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<td>Eritrea Program Planning</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Management of Change and MIS</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>KEN50500</td>
<td>Kenya - KARI - ISNAR Collaboration</td>
<td>94</td>
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<td>Eritrea Mission</td>
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<td>MP000500</td>
<td>Management Training for DSE Biotechnology Course</td>
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<td>34</td>
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<td>MP001200</td>
<td>INFORM - History</td>
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<tr>
<td>MP001300</td>
<td>Management of Organizational Culture in NAROs</td>
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<tr>
<td>MP001500</td>
<td>Caribbean Country States/ CGIAR/IARC’s Partners</td>
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<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(regional forum)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP001700</td>
<td>Sourcebook on Planning in Agricultural Research</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(preparation phase)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MP001800</td>
<td>Tunisia - Assistance to IRESA in Research PM&amp;E</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>MP001900</td>
<td>French INFORM-R (Relational)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>75</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Where percentage of time across themes or functions does not add up to 100, it is because some time was allocated to Policy Program.
Table A2.3: ISNAR external publications by authors in the Management Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>Baur</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dagg</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horton</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kramer, Ch.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peterson</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perrault</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANNEX A: ASSESSMENTS

3. Specialized Services

Following the reorganization of ISNAR in 1994, four “Specialized Services,” each intended to support the work of ISNAR’s two major programs, were organized under the supervision of the Office of the Director General. Each of these services (computer services, library, publications and training) had previously existed, although its organizational position and reporting relationship to the various programs was less well defined.

A second innovation was the creation of an Information Management Sub-committee to the Management and Program Coordinating Committee (MPC). This sub-committee, which is chaired by the Deputy Director General, includes the heads of the four specialized services, two representatives of the programs, and the Director of Administrative Services. While its formal functions are primarily focused in the area of publications, it also serves as a mechanism for coordinating the activities of the various specialized services.

The Panel was impressed with the overall quality of each of these four units, and feels that their position as service units to ISNAR’s two substantive programs is the appropriate positioning for them. While some of these services have, in the past, offered services directly to external clients, management’s general policy is that these four services focus their efforts primarily on serving their internal clients (and, in the case of computer services, CG-systemwide issues related to information technology) rather than offer services directly to ISNAR’s external clients. In the paragraphs that follow, each of the four services is briefly described along with some of its achievements and quantifiable measures of output. Questions regarding the substantive nature of their output (especially regarding publications and training) are discussed here as well as in the annexes focusing on the programs themselves.

3.1 Computer Services

ISNAR’s Computer Services Unit stands among the leaders in the CG system in the application of information technology to issues of office automation and communication. ISNAR not only has (and actively uses) electronic mail and full Internet connectivity, but has a fully functioning “intranet” on which various multiple-user data bases and other information sources are made available at each staff member’s desktop. The unit has also been extensively involved with inter-center issues related to information technology, and it has played a leading role in the design of the integrated voice and data network and the CGNET, as well as in the organization of systemwide discussions and conferences on future aspects of the CGIAR information strategy. ISNAR also played a leading role in the negotiation of the first CGIAR systemwide software license (for GIS software).

The achievements of the Computer Services Unit during the period under study are many, due only in part to the rapid pace of technological change which characterizes this field. Major areas of change include a complete renewal of the center’s entire computer network: hardware
and software from an old WANG system to a network based on Windows NT, Windows 95, and Microsoft Office Suite.

In addition to systems maintenance and the planning, selection, and installation of software, the computer services unit conducts frequent staff training programs in order to insure that all staff, including newly hired members, are familiar with both the network and the individual applications packages available.

The unit has played a smaller role with regard to the direct provision of services to NARS. While members of the unit have successfully participated in selected projects, and have provided assistance to some NARS in the design and development of their own information systems, the unit's mandate and resources do not allow it to play more than a peripheral role in externally focused activities.

The Panel believes that information technology will play an increasingly important role in NARS, and that the demands for the sort of specialized expertise available from ISNAR's computer services unit will only increase. It is important that ISNAR develop a clear policy regarding the role the unit should play in research and services in this area.

### 3.2 Library

ISNAR maintains a library primarily for use by its own staff, with over 23,000 books and monographs, including gray literature, information on countries and institutions, manuals and other training documents. The Library also receives some 140 journals and newsletters. Consistent with the accelerating trends towards electronic access to information, the Library is well connected to major data bases for both bibliographic searches and full-text retrieval. ISNAR's library budget for purchase of books and journals totals approximately $45,000, which is divided nearly evenly between these two categories.

In addition to maintaining its collection, ISNAR librarians (one full-time professional with two half-time assistants) routinely assist staff members with literature searches and interlibrary loans. Many such searches involve extensive use of the Internet, and the Library staff has not only developed its own skills in this regard, but has also developed a "road map" of Internet sites of interest to ISNAR staff, which is available on the center's "Intranet." Approximately 50% of staff requests for information are filled from the library's own collection, while the remainder must be filled either through interlibrary loans or through electronic means from external data bases.

The Library has also participated directly in external projects, although this has occurred only on an occasional basis and is not expected to increase. Any substantial increase in requests for direct assistance to NARS should be evaluated, as in the case of computer services, in the light of ISNAR's overall strategy.

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*The center is exploring mechanisms to permit librarians to charge time to individual projects for which they provide a significant amount of service. This move will allow the center to more accurately calculate (and recover) the direct costs of projects and reduce the amount of overhead. The Panel applauds this effort and urges the center to generalize the practice.*
The Panel was unable to provide an in-depth independent evaluation of the quality of the Library’s resources or user services but is of the impression that significant improvements have been made in both the Library’s collection and its management, and that its users are satisfied with the level and quality of service provided.

3.3 Publications

The Publications Unit was the subject of considerable attention during the last EPMR, which made several recommendations regarding policies, organization, and quality control. These recommendations (as well as many additional recommendations contained in an internally commissioned review of ISNAR’s publications which was also carried out in 1991) have been fully implemented, with the creation of both the Information Management and the Publications Review sub-committees to the MPC, and the establishment of policies and procedures governing ISNAR publications, including policies regarding the categories of ISNAR publications, quality control, and peer review.

3.3.1 Publications categories

Faced with a general criticism in the last EPMR regarding publication quality and focus, ISNAR has designed and launched new series of publications, each with its own purpose, target audience, and design and content parameters. The different categories of publications in the new series range from Briefing Papers to Research Reports, and appear to be an intelligent response to the need to segment ISNAR’s “market” for publications by user group and need. Table A3.1 presents brief descriptions of each category of publication in the current series. Table A3.2 presents data comparing the number and categories of publications during the periods under review of this and the last EPMR. Strict comparisons between the two periods are difficult, as new series replaced older ones and peer review (see below) was implemented beginning in 1993.

3.3.2 Policies and procedures

A Publishing Policies and Procedures document, last revised in March 1996, was developed by the Information Management Committee and contains detailed descriptions of the various categories of publications, specifics regarding publishing policy, instructions for peer reviews, and specific guidelines and parameters for each of six categories of official publications subject to peer review, plus policies and procedures for unofficial documents (which are generally considered as works-in-progress which are not subject to peer review).

In response to the need for a greater degree of quality control, a Publications Review Sub-committee to the MPC was created with the specific purpose of administering the publications review policies established by the Sub-committee on Information Management. A review process has been established and implemented, and consists of peer reviews as well as final approval by program directors for each official ISNAR publication.
3.3.3 Electronic publication

A recent new area for the Publications Unit involves electronic publishing. ISNAR’s Internet home pages are established, and the Publications Unit is now working on converting publications into electronic format for posting. All but a few briefing papers have now been converted, and several public relations texts are also available via ISNAR’s Internet home page. The goal is to have materials on line as research organizations in developing countries acquire access to the Internet.

Without commenting here on the substantive content of ISNAR’s publications, it is the Panel’s impression that the organization and management of the Publication Unit during the period covered by this review, has successfully resolved the issues raised in the last EPMR, and has created and implemented the reforms required to insure that both the focus and the quality of ISNAR’s publications meet the needs and expectations of its various user groups.

3.3.4 Public awareness

In addition to its normal functions related to editing and publishing ISNAR’s various publications series, the Publications Unit also works closely with the Director General in the design and execution of the center’s public-awareness/public-relations activities. This function has never been as explicitly recognized at ISNAR as it is at most of its sister centers in the CGIAR system. However, there is a growing feeling within the Publications Unit that additional emphasis should be given to the job of telling ISNAR’s story to its various publics, including donor organizations and their constituencies, as well as NARS leaders. This is especially important due to the difficulty in describing ISNAR’s achievements in ways that are as powerful as those of ISNAR’s commodity-oriented sister IARCs. The difficulty in conveying an image of service to NARS is argument in itself for the need for professional assistance. Recent failures to achieve expected coverage in various systemwide publications have heightened ISNAR’s awareness of the need for focused attention in this area.

Although the Publications Unit currently employs one part-time staff member who is trained in communications and devotes part of her time at ISNAR to public-awareness activities, additional focused attention and professional assistance may be required.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that ISNAR develop and implement an explicit public-awareness strategy with the assistance of qualified public-relations professionals.

3.4 Training

ISNAR’s training function was the subject of an internally commissioned external review in June of 1996 (see figure A.3.1 for the Executive Summary of this Report), which also included a subsidiary review of one major training project. This review will comment on the

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9 An audit of public-awareness capabilities of CGIAR centers was carried out in early 1996 and pointed out the need for improved public-awareness strategies for the system as a whole. A specific assessment of ISNAR’s public-awareness activities is forthcoming.
conclusions of the two ICERs, but will refrain from engaging in a more in-depth review of the
training function at ISNAR and refer the interested reader to the ICERs. (A statistical
summary of ISNAR’s training activities, including data breakdowns by region and type of
event by year for the period covered in this report, is included as table A.3.3.)

An important observation made in the ICER on ISNAR’s training function, and confirmed by
this review Panel, is that while the quality of the services provided by the Training Unit is
perceived to be very high, many training events which are conducted by ISNAR’s substantive
programs do not take advantage of these services and are frequently presented without any
sort of communication or coordination at all with the Training Unit. Various reasons have
been provided for this lack of coordination, including reference to a lack of clarity concerning
the boundaries between training events, seminars, workshops, and conferences, as well as
differences of opinion regarding the need for the unit’s services in some of the latter
categories.

The center’s management has wisely refrained from forcing the Training Unit on the two
substantive programs, preferring to let the unit create its own demand through the perceived
value of its services to the programs. While the Panel endorses this approach, it does feel that
some degree of coordination is required for all events in order to maintain the Training Unit’s
data base and assure the collection of consistent quality measurement data.

The Panel suggests that a formal statement of policies and procedures regarding training,
analogous to those developed by the Publications Unit and described in a preceding section,
be developed and implemented.

A second observation, made in the subsidiary ICER on the training program at KARI and
mentioned elsewhere in this review Panel report, concern the relationship between training
and other aspects of institutional strengthening and development. It was observed in the ICER
on the KARI project that:

Although there are several positive changes and accomplishments, limited progress
has been made in the area of integration of training activities and institutionalization.
To get the maximum impact, training should be integrated within an overall capacity
building and institutional development framework...

The implications of this observation are dealt with in other sections of this report.

With these caveats, the Panel endorses the conclusions reached by the ICER on ISNAR’s
training function and commends the Training Unit on the quality of its work since its most
recent re-organization.
Table A3.1: Publication categories/series

Official Publications: Official ISNAR publications fall into seven categories/series. Target numbers of publications per year and suggested maximum numbers of pages are indicated for each:

- **Research Management Guidelines**: 100 pages A4. Three per year.
- **Research Reports**: 100 pages B5. Six per year.
- **Country Reports**: Variable length, A4. Three per year, depending on ISNAR’s contractual obligations to NARS.
- **Briefing Papers**: 4–8 pages A4.
- **Reports of Meetings** (Highlights or Summaries): 16–40 pages A4. Two per year. Full proceedings will only be produced in exceptional cases.
- **Full-length books**: Variable length and format. One per year.
- **Corporate publications**: Annual Report, Newsletter, Publications Catalog, brochures, PR materials.

Discussion Papers: Supporting the seven categories of official publications is the informal Discussion Paper series (replacing Staff Notes). The series is intended as a means of recording preliminary ISNAR work or results and of soliciting critical comment. Discussion Papers are for limited distribution. They are not formally peer reviewed, are not official ISNAR publications, and may not bear the ISNAR logo. They are reproduced by photocopying.

Informal Reports: Where the use of a Discussion Paper may not be an appropriate vehicle for disseminating information, program or service directors may produce Informal Reports, under their own authority. They may, for example, be used to report on a meeting or to provide an update on an ISNAR project to collaborating institutions and individuals. Like Discussion Papers, they are not formally reviewed and are not edited by Publications Services, but they may bear the ISNAR logo. The interior pages are reproduced by photocopying, but the cover may be printed.

Training Documents: A policy covering training materials has yet to be set by the Information Committee.
Table A3.2: ISNAR publications and documents

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Formal (Official) Publications</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Country Reports¹</td>
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<td>Books²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Briefing Papers³</td>
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<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training Series⁴,⁵</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference Reports (Proceedings &amp; Highlights)¹</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Corporate Publications</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Reports⁶</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters (English)¹</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters (French)³</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public affairs documents (brochures, etc.)¹</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Working Papers⁴/Research Reports³</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Management Guidelines³</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special project documents⁷</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td><strong>Unofficial (Informal) Publications</strong></td>
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<td>Staff Notes⁴/Discussion Papers³/Statistical Briefs³</td>
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<td>17/74/30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other documents of limited distribution (project-related proceedings, fliers, etc.)</td>
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<td><strong>External Publications</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Journal articles,⁸ book chapters, conference papers,⁹ etc.</td>
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<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Other¹⁰</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>695</td>
<td>1062</td>
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**Note:** The database prepared for the impact study and the EPMR has a cut-off date of 1 September 1996.

1. Series continued.
2. Books and monographs published by outside (commercial) publishers on behalf of ISNAR or by ISNAR itself.
3. New series; started in 1993. The new categories were designed to reach a better defined audience, to undergo more stringent peer review, to encourage publication of higher quality materials with fewer total numbers, and to give ISNAR's publications an identifiable corporate image. Note that they are not completely comparable to the old series.
5. This is an older series that is entirely unrelated to the new training modules developed by the PM&E project or the training unit. The new training materials are not included in this table.
6. An entirely separate annual report was previously done in English, French, and Spanish. In 1993, only one annual report was done-in English with a summary translated into Arabic, French, and Spanish and bound into one volume.
7. Special projects include OFCOR, RTTL, Small Countries.
8. Externally published papers are self-reported for the annual report. This process has not yet started for 1996, so the number of externally published papers reported here is for 1991 through 1995 only.
9. Inclusion of miscellaneous papers in the officially reported category has become more stringent. They must now be in published works in order to be listed. Conference presentations and papers in unpublished works are included in the "other" category (see below).
10. The numbers for 1986-1990 are the officially reported numbers that were published in the annual report and in the quarterly reports for the BOT. There are a large number of documents included in the database prepared for the impact study and the EPMR that are not included in the "official" numbers. These extra categories include speeches made by the DG, papers presented at meetings and workshops (but not included in published proceedings), mission reports and country documents, evaluation reports, etc.
Figure A3.1: Executive summary of ICER on ISNAR’s training function

The subject of this ICER, ISNAR’s training function, refers to complex issues that are related to training at ISNAR, ranging from policy views regarding present and future training, to organizational aspects, such as the mechanism and institutional structure to ensure good quality and efficient use of resources. Training interventions aim at the sustained improvement of NARS and their organizations.

Over the years, training at and by ISNAR has developed into a comprehensive and varied package of activities. During the review period, training accomplishments feature clearly: the number of training events has grown by 20% with an obvious increase in the number of participants and a good number of workshops focusing on training-of-trainers; didactic tools and training materials have been developed to enhance the learning process and facilitate multiplication of the training effort by trained trainers; modules on various aspects of agricultural research management have been produced.

The majority of training activities is conducted within the framework of the Management Program and the Policy and System Development Program.

The Training Unit mainly conducted training in the context of special externally funded projects. Also, didactic and methodological support was given to a number of training activities that were conducted by the programs. A further integrating of the training function into the programs is required, covering all those activities that are considered as training according to the new definition of training at ISNAR.

The Panel observed within ISNAR an overall recognition of the vital importance of training as an integral part of its services to NARS. However, the process of institutionalization of ISNAR’s training function has to be sharpened. Ongoing developments and the increasing demand for training in the fields of agricultural research management call for improved strategic planning for the whole of ISNAR, including training.

The Panel observed within ISNAR an overall recognition of the vital importance of training as an integral part of its services to NARS. However, the process of institutionalization of ISNAR’s training function has to be sharpened.

In the context, the following recommendations were made:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Recommendation of the ICER on ISNAR’s training function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>That it be recognized both within the CGIAR system and within ISNAR management that, in view of the special mandate of ISNAR, training will for the foreseeable future be a major function. That the training function at ISNAR should be maintained and reinforced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Plan</td>
<td>That a Corporate Plan for ISNAR be developed, highlighting training as one instrument in conjunction with research and advisory services in achieving overall objectives of the Programs. The Corporate Plan should ensure that:</td>
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<tr>
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<td>- the training activities be jointly planned with the Programs which will set the long term priorities;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- appropriate mechanisms be installed for follow-up, including monitoring and evaluation, technical backstopping and quality and impact assessment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selection of Criteria</td>
<td>That ISNAR clearly define its criteria for delivery of core as well as contracted services, taking into consideration</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- geographical equity for service;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- systematic analysis of need for research management services by NARS;</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- full cost-recovery for contracted services;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- training being part of an overall institutional development plan of the client organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues</td>
<td>Recommendation of the ICER on ISNAR’s training function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization and Management</strong></td>
<td>That the Training Unit be retained as an organizational unit within Program Support with additional staff resources. That—until the Corporate Plan has been worked out—an Interim Training Group be installed with the function of coordinating all training activities. This group should be compromised of the Head of the Training Unit and the two Program Directors and be chaired by the DG. This interim group will replace the present Training Committee. That all Program staff have the responsibility to involve the Training Unit for didactic and methodological inputs in all their training activities; this should be included in the performance assessment of staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Follow-up</strong></td>
<td>That follow-up technical support in the implementation and institutionalization of training should be given proper attention, e.g., through outposting of staff where appropriate.</td>
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</table>
| **ISNAR Expertise for Service Delivery** | That ISNAR should take a more pro-active role to ensure its high standard in the field of agricultural research management:  
- Subjects for training and training materials development to be implemented by ISNAR should be linked to priorities and backed up by innovative research.  
- Development of training materials should aim at flexibility at facilitating wide usage by others.  
- For other relevant subjects within the research management area ISNAR should consider the position of ‘clearing house’, using world-wide available expertise. |
| **Multiplier Effects** | - That ISNAR strengthen institutional and human capacity within selected MDI’s, universities and selected NARS.  
- Training by means of modern electronic communication is to be developed. |
| **Future Training Plans** | If a flagship-course is to be organized, then this should be an outcome of the corporate planning process and meet the criteria of excellence, unavailability elsewhere and project the corporate profile of ISNAR |

*Source: ICER on ISNAR’s training function, 1996.*
Table A3.3: ISNAR training events, January 1991 - June 1996

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Category of Training Events*

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Category of Training Events*

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<td>648</td>
<td>714</td>
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</tbody>
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Management

| Programs      | 2    | 13   | 17   | 22   | 24   | 17   | 95    |
| Training Unit | 4    | 0    | 3    | 8    | 17   | 1    | 33    |
| TOTAL         | 6    | 13   | 20   | 30   | 41   | 18   | 128   |

Note: Information from the ISNAR Database of Events. Note that participant information is only available for approximately two-thirds of the listed training events.

*Course: formative event (few participants); workshop: "hands-on" learning through interactive exercises; seminar: informative event involving mainly plenary discussion.
ANNEX A: ASSESSMENTS

4. Governance, Management, and Administration

4.1 Legal Status and Host-Country Relations

ISNAR was established in 1979 as an international organization under the auspices of the CGIAR. A headquarters agreement with the Government of the Kingdom of The Netherlands was signed in June 1980, which recognized the center’s international status and granted to it certain privileges and immunities.

Relations between ISNAR and the Government of The Netherlands have remained cordial, and the center has received significant support from the government in the form of contributions to core unrestricted income as well as paying the rental cost of ISNAR’s headquarters offices. Panel members visited with representatives of the Government of The Netherlands, who indicated their satisfaction with the relations with the center and offered to facilitate additional collaboration with various Dutch organizations.

4.1.1 Legal status

Some lack of clarity regarding the exact legal status of ISNAR in The Netherlands had existed from the time of its founding until recently when, through the efforts of ISNAR, it was accepted by the Government of The Netherlands that ISNAR exists as an inter-governmental organization, created with the co-sponsorship of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the United Nations Development Program, and as such is covered by treaties signed by the Government of The Netherlands regarding the establishment of the United Nations and its specialized agencies. This clarification of ISNAR’s legal status in The Netherlands has important implications for ISNAR staff regarding their tax obligations to the Government of The Netherlands, by establishing that ISNAR income shall not be taken into account when assessing income tax on income derived from other sources. It has also facilitated the establishment of an avenue for grievance resolution through the International Labor Organization.

While this legal clarification is an important step forward, several areas regarding legal status continue to be of concern to ISNAR’s staff:

4.1.2 Visa status

ISNAR staff and their dependents carry an identity card issued by ISNAR and authenticated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of The Netherlands, which is designed to facilitate entry into the country, in lieu of a passport visa. Unfortunately, this identity card is not widely recognized by immigration officers, especially in other European Union countries through which ISNAR staff must frequently pass. Frequent airport delays and questioning have been experienced by members of the center’s non-European staff and especially by their unaccompanied dependents.
The Government of The Netherlands has announced that these identity cards will be replaced in 1997 with another document which will be more widely recognized. Nevertheless, it will be important for ISNAR to resolve the problems faced by non-Western European staff and their dependents, and especially those members of its staff from Africa, Eastern Europe, the Near East, and South Asia, in traveling to and from The Netherlands and other European Union countries, and to make such additional arrangements for appropriate travel documents as may be necessary.

4.1.3 Spousal employment

The issue of spousal employment was discussed in the last EPMR and continues to be a problem. ISNAR spouses are not granted an exemption from the need for working papers (as are ISNAR staff), and are subject to Dutch law regarding employment outside of ISNAR itself or other international organizations. Under Dutch law, work permits are difficult to obtain for non-European Union members, and applicants must first have a firm job offer which cannot be filled by an equally qualified European. While some employers are willing to go through the necessary paperwork to hire a non-European citizen, most would prefer to hire people who already have or do not require working papers. An exception exists in the case of international organizations (of which there are several in The Hague) which are able to hire staff without regard to national origin.

The need for spousal employment opportunities is a binding constraint on ISNAR’s ability to attract qualified international staff, and the Panel learned of instances in which offers for employment at ISNAR were turned down due, among other reasons, to the lack of spousal employment opportunities. In other cases, staff members have left ISNAR after their spouses were unable to find employment.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that ISNAR benchmark best practices regarding spousal employment at other international organizations operating in The Hague and actively search for a solution in order to enhance the center’s ability to attract and retain the quality of professional staff it requires to fulfill its mandate.

4.2 Board of Trustees

ISNAR is governed by a 14-person Board which currently is composed of seven people from developed and six from developing countries (there is currently one vacancy). Two members of the Board are women. Details of the current Board’s membership, including committee assignments and terms of office are presented in table A4.1. The center makes a concerted effort to achieve a balanced Board in a number of dimensions, and maintains a database of potential candidates for this purpose. Despite such efforts, it has continued to experience difficulty in attracting Board members with formal training and experience in management as a discipline (it does include several highly experienced agricultural research organization managers).

The ISNAR Board meets formally twice a year, at which time its various committees also hold meetings. Individual Board members also attend other ISNAR events, including the
Among its activities, the Board conducts an annual self-appraisal in which each Board member provides his or her opinions on a questionnaire regarding the Board as a whole, his/her views regarding his/her personal role on the Board, and individual activities on behalf of ISNAR. Noteworthy results of the most recent questionnaire were the high degree of social ease and rapport with staff and management, and the high level of involvement and interest in the Board discussions. Of particular concern is a relatively low level of concurrence to the statements "The members of the Board demonstrated understanding of the mission of ISNAR and how that mission is achieved by the program" and "The Board formulated specific goals to guide its work". The Panel is impressed with the quality of the survey data and encourages the Board and management to work together to use the results to improve its effectiveness.

The Panel feels the Board has been generally effective in the execution of its oversight function. Board committees meet with relevant members of the programs and management on a regular basis to review program plans as well as administrative functions, and evidently spend considerable time discussing program- or management-related issues with ISNAR’s senior staff. The Panel noted, however, that some members of the Board did have significant concerns regarding various aspects of the center’s work, including issues related to strategic planning and priority setting within ISNAR, the composition of the professional staff, publications policies, and the center’s organizational structure. These concerns were expressed both during the formal board meeting and in interviews with the Panel. The fact that such expressions of concern have not resulted in the desired changes suggests to the Panel that the Board may not have been sufficiently demanding in its requests for changes or improvements and may not have exercised its oversight function in sufficient depth in areas such as strategic planning and professional staffing.

The Panel was especially concerned to learn that the Board had not carried out any sort of a formal performance evaluation of ISNAR’s Director General, as called for in the center’s Board-approved staff procedures, during the period under study (this was also mentioned in the last EPMR).
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**Board Committees: Acronyms**

- **C** = Chairman
- **V** = Vice-chairman
- **M** = Member
- **BOT** = Board of Trustees
- **AC** = Audit Committee
- **EC** = Executive Committee
- **NC** = Nominating Committee
- **PC** = Program Committee

* Members are considered to begin their mandate immediately after the annual meeting at which they are elected and serve through the annual meeting according to the term for which they were elected (1 to 3 years). The Board meeting in the second semester of the year shall be considered as the "annual board meeting".
4.3 Organizational Structure and Climate

During the period under review, the center undertook two major structural changes. The first, partly in response to suggestions made in the last EPMR, involved the establishment of a more complex organizational structure for ISNAR and the creation of several additional levels of management. Whether due to the structure itself or to the personalities of those involved, this change led to a period of decline in organizational morale and may have contributed to the departure of several of the center’s valued senior staff. Among the reasons cited for some of their departures was an ambiguous sense of direction in the center’s work, a perceived lack of regard for research quality by some program directors who seemed to be more oriented towards advisory services, and a cumbersome and overly bureaucratic structure which seemed to limit individual initiative and creativity, especially among more junior members of the professional staff.

A new, flatter organizational structure was introduced three years ago, with simplified processes for planning, budgeting and project approval (see figure A4.1). The Panel has expressed concern elsewhere regarding the definitions and distinctions between the two major programs. While the Panel does not regard ISNAR’s current organizational structure as an impediment to the planning and execution of its work, as ISNAR reviews and revises its strategy, it may find that additional adjustments or modifications to the organizational structure are required.

While the structural changes introduced three years ago have been of great benefit and staff morale had significantly improved by the time of this review, some elements of the organizational climate left over from the previous period may still be present. A significant number of staff members raised issues in the Staff Survey of Issues for the EPMR regarding human resource management and staff relations, and culture and staff morale. Some staff members interviewed by the Panel also mentioned the need for improvement in areas including teamwork and cooperation, communication and staff involvement in decision making, and in some instances, interpersonal relations, which may well be a by-product of ISNAR’s multicultural environment. It should be noted that the Panel is unable to judge how widespread or valid these concerns are. The Panel has also interviewed numerous members of the support and professional staff who have not mentioned such concerns and who have indicated a high level of satisfaction with the degree of teamwork, staff involvement and interpersonal relations.

Finally, ISNAR’s organizational climate is influenced by a philosophy that is perceived not to favor long-term career development within the center, and argues that its mandate is “to get the best . . . . it is not a mandate to develop people.” It is suggested that were ISNAR to offer opportunities for career development, it would become a “closed shop” with all promotions from within, and would therefore not be able to bring in the “best” from elsewhere.

The implications of this philosophy are that staff at the professional level are rarely if ever promoted to higher grades or levels of responsibility, and opportunities are not actively sought.

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10 "ISNAR’s Evolution and Response to Internal and External Forces" a paper prepared by Howard Elliott for this review, was found by Panel members to be especially helpful in understanding the evolution of the center’s structure over time.
to recognize and reward achievement (other than an occasional reward for "outstanding performance"). Furthermore, few long-term career-development opportunities are offered to the internationally recruited professional staff, nor are other efforts made to "invest" in their development. The assumption is that ISNAR staff will not be interested in making a career at ISNAR and that the center will always be able to attract outstanding talent as departing staff are replaced.

The Panel feels that this policy should not stand in the way of retaining truly outstanding staff at ISNAR when other opportunities become available.

It is noted that both promotions and opportunities for training and development are much more prevalent at the support-staff level, and include tuition reimbursement for university and even post-graduate education, as well as shorter training courses.
4.4 Management of Human Resources

Many concerns have been raised, both in interviews with Panel members and in the survey of staff issues conducted in preparation for the EPMR, regarding aspects of the center’s staff turnover and organizational climate (see previous section). Panel members interviewed staff responsible for the design and implementation of the center’s human resource management policies and procedures, as well as numerous members of the professional and support staff who are directly affected by them. The Panel had neither the mandate nor the resources to investigate individual personnel-related issues but did take note of the pattern of such comments in drawing conclusions regarding the general areas of problems.

ISNAR has experienced significant staff turnover during the period under review. As indicated in the previous section, during the 1992-94 period, a number of organizational factors led to especially high rates of turnover, which averaged 18% of the international staff per year, 21% for supervisory staff, and 31% for support staff. Turnover has been significantly reduced during the past two years at the international and supervisory levels, although it continues high at an average of 19% among the support staff.

Human resource management systems which directly affect staff turnover and the organizational climate include recruitment, selection, and placement; staff classification and promotion; performance assessment; salary administration; and mechanisms for addressing workplace issues including, but not limited to, gender discrimination. The human resource management structure, including its organization and staffing, constitutes a final area of importance.

4.4.1 Recruitment, selection and placement

The Panel notes what may appear to be a high number of support staff, and especially secretarial staff. Panel members were told that secretarial loads in some parts of ISNAR may be lower than elsewhere due in part to a lack of word-processing (typing) skills among some members of its international staff. Given the high cost of secretarial support and trends in some countries to increase secretarial loads by making optimal use of office automation technology, the Panel would encourage ISNAR to benchmark staffing and support practices in other institutions, and continue to insure that all staff resources are being utilized as efficiently as possible.

International search procedures appear to be rigorously observed regarding international staff, and extra efforts are routinely made to identify and short-list qualified female and developing-country applicants. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, ISNAR’s international staff includes only three females (7%) in its internationally recruited professional staff of 41. Thirteen internationally recruited professional staff (32%) list developing countries as their nationality.

The Panel expresses its concern regarding the low percentage of women in the center’s internationally recruited professional staff and, while recognizing the efforts which are currently being taken, is forced to point out that the results are still not satisfactory.

(The issue of spousal employment, covered elsewhere in this annex, is again emphasized as an important factor influencing international recruitment.)
4.4.2 Staff classification and promotion

ISNAR uses a five-grade professional staff and a three-grade support staff classification scheme. As discussed previously, ISNAR philosophy does not contemplate career development, and professional as well as support grades are described in terms of staff positions rather than levels or stages of professional development. Staff are recruited and appointed to specific positions within ISNAR; any changes of position would require the applicant to participate in an international search process.

Nationally recruited staff may be appointed to one of three support positions, plus one professional position (P-1: Research/Program/Administrative Assistant). Some members of the locally recruited professional staff have voiced frustration at their inability to be promoted to higher grades, while carrying out tasks which, in their opinion, are similar to those assigned to the lowest grade of internationally recruited staff (P-2). Furthermore, some members of the highest grade on the support staff (S-3), especially those who have university degrees or higher, report that they are often asked to carry out duties normally assigned to professional staff members at the P-1 or P-2 levels. (Not all staff see that as an imposition: some members of the support staff expressed their satisfaction at being offered an opportunity to engage in non-secretarial tasks regardless of their formal grade status.)

ISNAR’s management is aware of the problems of assigning responsibilities at the S-3 and P-1 levels and is contemplating a change in the professional grade classification system to allow two grades of nationally recruited professional staff. The Panel endorses this change.

The Panel also would encourage ISNAR to reconsider the implications of a position-based classification system on its career development policy at the professional level. If a more developmental approach is elected, changes regarding the classification system and promotions policy will be called for.

4.4.3 Staff composition

As may be seen in table A4.2, ISNAR’s total staff has grown by approximately 10% during the period under review, with most of the growth at the research assistant level. Regionally, there has been a small increase in European internationally recruited staff, with 27 of the center’s 41 internationally recruited staff from either Europe or North America. Table A4.3 presents data regarding the post-graduate academic preparation of ISNAR’s staff. As is noted elsewhere in this report, only one member of ISNAR’s staff has formal training in management at the post-graduate level, and none have doctorates. At the other extreme, the center counts five staff at the Masters level, and 14 at the Ph.D. level in economics and development studies.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that ISNAR make every effort to attract internationally recruited staff with advanced degrees in management.
Table A4.2: ISNAR staff composition 1991 vs. 1996

### 1991 STAFF COMPOSITION

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<tr>
<td>sub-total, professional staff</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-3 (Sr.Sec./Clerk/Techn.)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-2 (Sec./Clerk/Techn.)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-1 (Jr. Sec./Clerk/Techn.)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sub-total, national staff</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sub-total, support staff</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total ISNAR staff</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
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### 1996 STAFF COMPOSITION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAFF GRADE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P-5 (DG/ DDG)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-4 (Directors, Sr. Officers)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-3 (Res./Prog./Adm. Officer)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-2 (Res./Prog./Adm. Assoc.)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>sub-total, international staff</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-1 (Res./Prog./Admin. Asst.)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sub-total, professional staff</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-3 (Sr.Sec./Clerk/Techn.)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-2 (Sec./Clerk/Techn.)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-1 (Jr. Sec./Clerk/Techn.)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sub-total, national staff</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sub-total, support staff</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total ISNAR staff</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
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### LENGTH OF SERVICE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>&lt;2 YRS.</th>
<th>2-4 YRS.</th>
<th>5-10 YRS.</th>
<th>&gt;10 YRS.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N. AMERICA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUROPE</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFRICA</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. EAST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. AMERICA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCEANA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;2 YRS.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4 YRS.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 YRS.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10 YRS.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A4.3: Fields of study of ISNAR program staff with graduate degrees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of Study</th>
<th>MA/MSc</th>
<th>Ph.D.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economics (including Development Studies)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural or/and Environmental Science</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Science/Sociology/Anthropology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/Human Resource Development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Science</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management/Public Administration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Excludes administrative staff and staff with BA or BSc degrees.

4.4.4 Performance assessment

ISNAR’s Performance Assessment and Enhancement (PAE) system was extensively revised and improved in 1993. The approach taken in the performance assessment and enhancement form is decidedly developmental, with narrative but not categorical assessments made of numerous aspects of each staff member’s performance, opportunities for response by the staff member being evaluated, and recommendations for future improvement, including recommendations for further training and career development.

The performance assessment and enhancement system is not directly linked to either pay increases or other forms of recognition, such as bonuses or awards, which management feels would introduce an unwelcome element of contentiousness into both the performance assessment process and the salary administration system, and would reduce its effectiveness as a developmental instrument. (A limited number of extra step increases, as well as one-time cash payments are awarded to staff each year for outstanding performance, and are based in part on the annual performance process.)

When questioned about the Performance Assessment and Enhancement system, staff members reported an uneven implementation pattern, with some parts of the center adhering more rigorously to assessment procedures and calendars than others. Some staff expressed concern that there was no follow-up or consequences to the PAE, and that the lack of follow-through was resulting in a decline of its importance at ISNAR. Other staff reported strict adherence to PAE guidelines, but also mentioned a lack of consequences—either positive or negative—to the assessment process.

The Panel notes that the use of performance appraisals as a basis for the awarding of merit increases or other performance-related rewards is widespread in many industries, and that “pay-for-performance” has gained in currency in public and non-profit organizations as well as in the private sector. The Panel also notes that the performance assessment process generally is taken much more seriously by staff and supervisors alike when real consequences are associated with the outcome, and that it can be a very positive source of motivation by offering a periodic opportunity to recognize and reward performance.

Given comments from staff regarding lack of recognition for their work (especially from support and lower-level professional staff), the Panel feels that steps should be taken to link the results of the annual performance appraisal to tangible outcomes, including salary
increases, in order to provide recognition and motivation to as large a percentage of the staff as possible (see recommendation following next section).

The Panel also feels that additional performance and career review mechanisms might be introduced at ISNAR, including more formal end-of-project or end-of-contract reviews, which might be better able to assess a staff member’s professional contribution.

4.4.5 *Salary administration*

ISNAR staff compensation policies are clearly described in the staff regulations manual and include base salaries plus various allowances, depending on a staff member’s formal status within the organization (domestically or internationally recruited and Dutch or alien). All staff are exempt from Dutch income taxes on their ISNAR income, although they are required to pay an equivalent income tax to ISNAR. In practice, base salaries are calculated and paid on an “after-tax” basis, although gross salaries, including an imputed amount paid to ISNAR, are to be used for purposes of calculating a staff member’s tax liability on non-ISNAR income. The gross salaries are also used as a basis for calculation of contributions to staff retirement funds managed by the Association of International Agricultural Research Centers (AIARC) or TIAA/CREF, a practice begun in 1991 and followed as well by at least three other centers in the CG system. (At the time this practice was initiated, ISNAR staff were asked to forgo the annual salary increase, in partial recognition of the increased cost to the center of the increase in retirement fund payments.)

Current, consistent, and comparable data regarding professional and support compensation levels were unavailable to the Panel, which was thus unable to arrive at an objective assessment of overall compensation levels. Subjective and anecdotal data suggest that, given the high cost of living in The Hague (where the cost-of-living index, as calculated by the US Department of State is 210—Washington, D.C. is 100), international staff are able to live comfortably but are not overpaid. Support staff receive a level of net compensation which may be significantly higher than the local market but appears to be competitive with other international organizations operating in The Hague.

Base salary levels are determined by a staff member’s position classification and grade within that classification. Each classification includes from 14 to 19 (professional) or 10 to 12 (support) salary steps of equal size, and under normal circumstances a staff member is awarded a one-step increase after each year of employment. Step increases are officially described in ISNAR publications as consisting of a combination of “increased seniority and inflation.” Since promotions from one staff classification grade to another are not routinely made, the salary steps in each salary scale overlap, generally by more than 50%, with the next higher scale. In a minority of cases (less than 10%), two-step increases may be awarded to outstanding staff whose salaries are below the mid-points of their respective classification grades.

While the use of a seniority-based salary schedule is easy to administer and avoids confrontational issues related to pay-for-performance schemes, the Panel notes that such systems are generally discouraged in organizations which prize staff initiative and creativity, and wish to avoid simply rewarding organizational survival.
The Panel feels that the need to motivate and recognize performance, and to discourage simply rewarding longevity, outweigh the administrative simplicity of a seniority-based pay system.

**Recommendation:** The Panel recommends that ISNAR develop mechanisms to link the annual staff performance appraisal to tangible forms of recognition and reward, and to replace the current seniority-based pay system with one which explicitly links pay increases to performance.

### 4.4.6 Mechanisms for addressing workplace issues

Workplace issues of a personal nature which affect either individuals or groups of staff may be addressed through a number of different official and unofficial channels, depending on their nature and, in many cases, a staff member’s personal preferences.

In addition to communicating with management either directly or through the personnel assistant (see next section for a description of duties), staff issues may be brought to the attention of management through the Staff Advisory Committee on Administration, or either of two gender counselors. A voluntary gender committee also exists at ISNAR as a forum for discussion of gender-related concerns, but not as a formal mechanism for communication between management and staff.

Members of the Staff Advisory Committee on Administration (SACA) are selected from both professional and support staff by the Director General from candidates presented to him by the committee itself. While theoretically serving as a two-way conduit between staff and management for issues of widespread interest, it has been criticized by both staff and management as being overly representative of the other, and in general for its lack of transparency and visibility. Due to its nature as an appointed committee, SACA does not play an advocacy role, which in the eyes of some staff may have hindered its effectiveness in bringing workplace issues to the attention of management.

A recently conducted staff survey regarding concerns and opinions on SACA, together with other recent efforts to increase SACA’s visibility through communications in the *ISNAR Staff Bulletin* may combine to raise the committee’s effectiveness. Although opinion appears to be evenly divided on the issue of whether SACA should be an appointed or elected committee, its ability to function as an effective mechanism for addressing workplace issues may always be hindered by its non-representational nature and its non-advocacy role.

A Gender Committee was established through staff initiative in 1991 as “an informal committee that consciously remains ad hoc. Its primary goals are to strengthen staff morale and make ISNAR a ‘gender friendly’ place to work.” Unlike SACA, it’s main function is not to act as a conduit between staff and management, but rather to conduct on its own initiative, activities including workshops, movie screenings, etc., designed to increase the general level of awareness of workplace issues, especially those involving gender. (Most of the issues it deals with involve relations between predominantly male professional staff and predominantly female support staff, making such staff issues gender issues as well, and *vice versa.*)
Gender issues have been recognized at the CG level since 1991, and ISNAR management and staff have actively participated in gender-related events at the CGIAR and ISNAR. However, due to the organizational turmoil of the early 1990s and its possible residual effect on ISNAR’s workplace climate, the role of the gender committee continues to be an important mechanism to improve working conditions and relations between supervisors and support staff.

Finally, at the initiative of the gender committee, two senior professional women have been officially recognized as gender counselors, whose role is to provide an additional conduit between staff and management for staff issues, and to provide a mechanism by which individual staff members might address their own problems related to the working environment at ISNAR. While gender issues as such are not mentioned in the terms of reference of the gender counselors, many workplace issues generally have gender-related overtones.

All three of these mechanisms for addressing workplace issues seem to be needed and appreciated in ISNAR’s current environment. Panel members questioned, however, to what extent the gender committee and the gender counselors are substituting for roles which could be more appropriately carried by a formal human resources (or personnel) officer, or SACA if it were to become a more truly representative body by being elected rather than appointed. The role of a gender committee at ISNAR (and all other centers) is of great importance in bringing about long-term change in attitudes as well as policies and practices, and should not be confused with a mechanisms for resolving short-term workplace conflicts.

4.4.7 Human resource management administrative structure and staffing

In the absence of a personnel officer, the Director for Administrative Services is ISNAR’s chief personnel officer and, together with the Director General, assumes responsibility for the design and implementation of all human resource-related policies and practices.

The personnel assistant is ISNAR’s only professional-grade (P-1) staff whose responsibilities are entirely within the area of personnel administration. As such, she has responsibility for contract and salary administration, insurance, recruitment, staff induction and training, overseeing the implementation of the performance assessment system, and maintenance of all personnel files. In addition to these duties, the personnel assistant is available to hear staff concerns and complaints regarding workplace issues.

While the Panel feels that the personnel assistant is an appropriately trained and experienced professional who effectively discharges her multiple duties, it also feels the need for a more integrated human resource strategy, designed in consonance with ISNAR’s overall institutional goals and objectives. Such a strategy would integrate the center’s policies regarding staffing, recruitment and selection, classification, performance appraisal and recognition, training and development, salary and benefits administration, and staff communication. The Panel feels that additional professional resources are required, at least on a temporary or part-time basis in order to design such a strategy and implement the necessary changes.
Recommendation: The Panel recommends the design and the implementation of an integrated human resource management strategy at ISNAR with the benefit of input from a qualified human resource professional with experience in similar organizations.

4.5 Planning and Review Process

Formal elements in ISNAR’s planning processes include the development of the center’s strategy, the medium-term plans, annual funding requests, the annual operating plan, and project budgets. The review process involves the intervention of groups at various different levels, and includes reviews by the Board and by TAC of the center’s strategy, medium-term plan and annual funding request; reviews by the Management and Program Coordination Committee (MPC) of program funding requests during the development of the annual funding request, and review and approval of all project proposals; and monthly monitoring by the Office of the Director General as well as finance and accounting of project expenditures against budget.

Additional elements of the overall review process include the annual Internal Program Review, periodic and selected internally commissioned external reviews, and a five-year External Program and Management Review.

The Panel recognized the improvements made in the planning and review process, although as discussed elsewhere in this report, it has raised concerns about the content of the strategic plan and about the center’s success in selecting projects which effectively pursue the overall strategy.

4.6 Management of Financial Resources

During the period under review, ISNAR was able to avoid significant financial crises such as those experienced in other CG centers, thanks to an aggressive approach to fund-raising and prudent financial planning and management, including the accumulation and maintenance of reserves sufficient to permit the center to weather minor funding shortfalls without resorting to unplanned staff curtailments.

4.6.1 Fund management

As may be seen in table A4.4, ISNAR’s total income, as well as the percentages of unrestricted and restricted incomes, have remained nearly constant during the period under review, fluctuating between a low of $10.4 million in 1993 and a high of $11.6 in 1995. Due to the systemwide funding crisis in 1993, ISNAR experienced a decrease in core as well as total funding of 8%. Given the experiences of most other centers during this period, ISNAR’s ability to retain its basic funding pattern throughout the period is to be recognized and highly commended. It is also noteworthy that ISNAR has managed its affairs in such a way as to produce a very modest surplus during four of the five years of the period under review. A forecast funding deficit during 1996 is the direct result of the cancellation of an expected...
unrestricted donation in November, and is clear evidence of the need for a financial cushion. ISNAR is to be commended for its prudent financial management.

Table A4.4: ISNAR income and expenditure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US$</td>
<td>% of</td>
<td>US$</td>
<td>% of</td>
<td>US$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>000's total</td>
<td></td>
<td>000's total</td>
<td></td>
<td>000's total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INCOME</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted (core)</td>
<td>6,518</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
<td>5,989</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
<td>6,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted</td>
<td>4,096</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>4,235</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>4,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>10,935</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>10,666</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>11,562</td>
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<td><strong>EXPENSES</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>5,986</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>6,007</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>5,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility Expense</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies &amp; Services</td>
<td>1,862</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>1,837</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>1,898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>1,655</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>1,312</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>1,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>10,713</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>10,323</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>10,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SURPLUS</strong></td>
<td>222</td>
<td></td>
<td>137</td>
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<td>575</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Trends in funding**

ISNAR, like all other centers in the CG system, relies on a combination of core and restricted grants to fund its research agenda, and is observing a steady shift by donors from unrestricted core to restricted project funding. While this tendency has yet to show up on ISNAR’s overall financial statements, its effect is being felt in negotiations with donors, who are increasingly requesting that their donations to the center’s core (unrestricted) budget be “earmarked” for special use, making them, in effect, restricted funds. This change in the funding pattern has a number of important implications for ISNAR (as well as all other centers), involving not only the funding of the complete research agenda, but also funding of the center’s institutional overhead. As unrestricted funding becomes less and less available to finance project overhead costs that are not paid for through project funding, it will become increasingly important for all project grants to include adequate funds for overhead expenses. A portfolio of funded projects that only pay for direct costs may result in financial crises faster than unfunded projects in an otherwise fully funded project portfolio.

**Project planning and management information**

Consistent with the increasing importance of specially funded projects in ISNAR’s funding pattern, the center operates an Office of Project Planning and Management Information, reporting to the Office of the Director General and staffed by a senior member of the international professional staff. Duties and functions of this office primarily involve providing guidance and assistance to staff members in developing project proposals, and monitoring project implementation in order to insure compliance with commitments to donors. (Numerous reports, including Back-to-Office Reports, Progress Reports, and Completion Reports, are used as part of the project management function.) In carrying out these functions, the office maintains several large databases of contracts and other agreements, and works with the finance and accounting office to develop and fully implement project-based management throughout the organization—see further discussion below.
Uses of funds
As may be seen in table A4.4, approximately 56% of ISNAR’s total funds are used to pay salaries, which is equal to the systemwide average. The second largest expense item, supplies and services, actually includes all project-related expenses, often involving outside consultants and training costs, and is largely paid for with restricted project funds. This item also includes the cost of all external reviews.

4.6.2 Cash flow and asset management
ISNAR’s cash flow management policies and practices involve the development of cash flow estimates based on donor expressions of interest in elements of the annual funding request and on firm donor commitments for the following year’s funding as they are made. Efforts are made to encourage all donors to disburse their donations as early in the calendar year as possible, and the Financial Officer maintains personal relations with enough of his counterparts so as to generally insure timely disbursements and avoid cash-flow shortfalls. During the past year and a half, ISNAR has been able to maintain, due to prudent cash-flow management and the contribution of modest operating surpluses to its Operating Fund, an average cash balance equal to approximately two and one-half month’s expenses. ISNAR also maintains a standby credit facility which it has never been forced to utilize.

Due to the mix of currencies in which ISNAR receives most of its income (60% US dollars and approximately 40% European currencies) and that of its expenses (60% Dutch Guilders and 40% Dollars), the center carries limited currency exchange risk, which at present is not covered. (It also assumes a limited risk regarding pledged donations in other currencies, such as the Japanese yen.) While the currency risk exposure is relatively small, the issue of currency management is one which should be understood by the Financial Officer, and Board-approved currency risk management policies should be developed and implemented.

4.6.3 Financial planning, budgeting and control
The financial planning process at ISNAR begins almost a full year prior to the start of the fiscal year, with the development of program budgets and their consolidation into the center’s annual funding request. Program directors, as well as the heads of Specialized Services and other operating divisions prepare budget requests based on the medium-term plan, their current level of activities, and guidelines from the Office of the Director General regarding overall levels of increase or decrease. Program budgets are based on a combination of strategic direction and the research agenda, as expressed in the medium-term plan, as well as estimates of donor interests and possible sources of funding. Individual budget requests are consolidated in the Office of the Director General, adjusted to fit within overall levels of expected funding, and submitted to the ISNAR Board and to TAC for approval. Fundraising activities based on the request for funding take place prior to and during the annual International Centers Week, at which point the center should have a fairly accurate idea of its actual level of funding for the next year. Program and project budgets, as well as individual work plans, are developed and adjusted immediately prior to the beginning of the new year.

ISNAR’s accounting structure is in the process of moving towards the full implementation of project-based accounting and management, in which all ISNAR activities will be charged to pre-approved projects which may be funded with unrestricted or restricted funds. The
movement towards project-based management has organizational as well as accounting implications, as all project managers will be held accountable not only for the quality of their projects' output, but also for the allocation and use of resources to achieve the output. Working together with the director of the project office, the Financial Officer has begun a center-wide effort to acquaint all current and potential project managers with the implications of their new responsibilities, and to design and distribute the accounting information necessary for them to carry out their jobs.

The Financial Officer is aided by a package of computer software (the Ross system) which is currently felt to be most appropriate for the task. (Previously, questions had been raised regarding the suitability of this software to an organization as small as ISNAR; with the accumulated experience in working with the Ross system, management now feels comfortable with the software and does not contemplate a change.)

4.6.4 Finance administration and accountability

ISNAR's finance and accounting function is carried out by a staff of four people (2.9 full-time equivalents), including the Accountant and Financial Officer who reports to the Director of Administrative Services and routinely maintains a close working relationship with the Director General. As the center is too small to permit a complete separation of treasury and accounting functions, the active oversight and participation of the Office of the Director General is required to maintain strict financial accountability. As ISNAR's top management functions are transferred to the incoming Director General, it will be important to insure that such direct oversight is maintained.

As a routine part of the review process, Panel members met with ISNAR's external auditors who indicated their satisfaction with ISNAR's accounting and financial management, and who concurred with the need to continue to move towards a fully implemented project-based accounting structure. The same external auditors have been retained by ISNAR to audit the center's 1996 financial statements, and their audit report will be presented at the March 1997 Board meeting.

While ISNAR does not have a full-time internal auditor, one senior member of the professional staff devotes part of his time to carrying out major audits of selected areas of ISNAR management, which are reported on to the Director General and Board and forwarded to relevant management for comment and implementation. The Panel feels that this process has functioned well and encourages management to continue the practice.
4.7 General Administration

4.7.1 Central files and telecom

Detailed administrative procedures requiring all mail to be circulated first to the Office of the Director General and then to the addressee, plus routing protocols for internal communications and approval and signature authority for outgoing communications, are contained in an administrative circular on ISNAR Communications Protocol. Central to the protocol is the role of Central Files, which maintains an elaborate system for receiving, recording, distributing, and filing all incoming written communications, including mail, faxes, and e-mail, and for circulating and filing all outgoing written communication.

While it is beyond the scope of this review to conduct a complete process-flow analysis of the work of Central Files, evidence does suggest that some simplification of the communications routing and filing procedures is needed, especially since much of the incoming communications and virtually all outgoing communications may be both circulated and stored in electronic format.

In addition to their correspondence circulation and filing functions, Central Files also manages ISNAR's telephone exchange and fax facility, and maintains centralized databases of telephone numbers, addresses, etc. Although its three full-time and two part-time employees each have their own primary areas of responsibility, Central Files personnel are frequently asked to cover the phones when regular switchboard staff are absent.

Complaints of work overload by the Central Files staff appear to be motivated partially by the requirement that they fill in for absent telephone operators, and partly by the increasing difficulty of administering a system designed to manage the flow of paper correspondence in an environment increasingly characterized by electronic communication.

Recommendation: The Panel recommends that a formal work process reengineering study be carried out with regard to Central Files in order to understand ISNAR's needs regarding the circulation and filing of written communications in today's environment, and to design, utilizing today's advanced information technology (which is readily available from ISNAR's computer services unit), a more appropriate system to satisfy the center's needs.

4.7.2 Services and supplies

The Services and Supplies Unit at ISNAR operates under the supervision of the Director of Administrative Services and consists of two support staff (one of whom was on disability leave at the time of the Panel's visit). The functions of this unit include security management (building entrance, after hours security protection, security logs, etc.), asset registration and control; administration of purchase orders; vetting of principle suppliers; coordination of office and conference room assignments and reservations, housing and international transfers, general office safety procedures, and oversight of building maintenance and recycling.

It is apparent from the above list of activities that the diversity of tasks, together with the level of hands-on work, as opposed to supervisory or administrative work, virtually assures that
tasks must be prioritized and that there will occasionally be some internal clients who have concerns with one aspect or another of this unit's services due to inevitable delays and conflicting priorities. The Panel suggests that efforts be made to shift some of the tasks to other units or outsource them to vendors.
# ANNEX B

## 1. ISNAR RESPONSES TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LAST EXTERNAL REVIEW (JULY 1991)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The Board should always have in mind that several members of the Board at any time should have experience and expertise in agricultural research management.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>It proves difficult to find research management expertise, especially in developing countries. Nearly all Board Members have agricultural research management experience, either in universities or in research institutes or institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>The Board should give serious consideration to reducing the size of its Program Committee.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>In spite of serious and well-founded objections, the Board of Trustees has reduced the size of its Program Committee, which used to be a Committee of the Whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>ISNAR should take appropriate steps to involve the NARS early on in the process of strategic planning.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>ISNAR has involved NARS leaders in the preparation of the annual funding requests for 1996 and 1997. ISNAR has used regional associations and other regional fora to identify needs and to assist in setting its priorities. For the Medium-Term Plan 1998-2000, ISNAR is involving many NARS and regional associations in the process of strategic planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>ISNAR should develop a more effective scheme for setting priorities among countries and regions according to the stage of development and needs and opportunities of the different NARS.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>At present, ISNAR, in collaboration with others, is working on typologies of NARS which can also be used for setting priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>There should be one Deputy Director General (as the structure is being significantly changed, this should be recognized as a new position, internationally advertised).</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>ISNAR has only one Deputy Director General.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Three of four Program Directors should be introduced with line responsibilities for staff and budgetary authority.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Including Administration, there are 3 Program Directors with necessary delegated authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>ISNAR should promote an institutional approach, as distinct from an individual approach, to the measures required to strengthen the NARS that seek its advisory services; in this regard, more attention should be given to synthesizing ISNAR's country experiences.</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>ISNAR, in its proactive approach, favors institutional strengthening. At the same time ISNAR needs to test and improve certain tools and approaches. A number of NARS insist on the provision of specific tools only. So far, one synthesis has been developed, covering ISNAR's country experience (Bush and Bingen, 1994).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>ISNAR should more systematically address the important role of universities and schools of agriculture in developing-country NARS.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>ISNAR has implemented Phase I of a linkage project with universities and NARS, a second phase has just started. So far, ISNAR has not sufficiently collaborated with universities in its training efforts. ISNAR is investigating the possibilities of involving universities and schools of agriculture in training. ISNAR, in collaboration with NATURA, is promoting a proposal for EU funding to offer a Master's degree in agricultural research management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>In determining its research priorities, ISNAR should give more weight to the research needed by the advisory service to provide appropriate management tools for NARS.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>ISNAR must also be proactive and identify issues and possible problems of future importance which require early research. Collaboration with universities and farmers' organizations are typical examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>The Training Unit should be given the responsibility and authority to ensure that - basic procedures for training are followed for all ISNAR training events, and - procedures for monitoring and evaluation of training events are established.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>The Training Unit provides program activities with its services and collaborates in coordinating training activities with the programs and their projects. It does not have sole responsibility and authority over training events. Training is also the responsibility of ISNAR programs. ISNAR's Training Committee and its TOR were established in 1993. Regular meetings were held as of February 1995. Monitoring and evaluation procedures have been established for all training events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ISNAR should actively pursue a training strategy that:</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Partial</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- emphasizes a multiplier effect by developing training packages that can be used by intermediary institutions,</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- or used in a region through a network of competent trainers who can begin to provide much of the direct training services to middle-level managers in NARS.</td>
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<td>8.2</td>
<td>ISNAR’s Training Strategy was produced and approved in 1993.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ISNAR has developed training modules and ‘mini-modules’ since the last review, in order to address the need for stimulating a multiplier effect in training.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ISNAR’s training modules are being used by intermediary institutions (e.g., SACCAR, ESAMI, other CG Centers, etc.) Furthermore, strengthening of the private sector and management development institutes (MDIs) is needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>ISNAR should review and rationalize its Publications Policy, so that its publications are appropriate for ISNAR's goals, especially the goal of serving the needs of its primary clients: NARS leaders and managers.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Most of ISNAR's publications are addressed to its primary clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>A new Publications Committee should be established with the authority to control quality and enforce ISNAR's Publications Policies and Procedures.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>The Committee has been established and is chaired by the DDG.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>The Head of the Publications Unit should be given managerial authority over its operations, including its own budget.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>This has been implemented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>ISNAR should establish guidelines for staff assessment/rewards that reflect the changes to be introduced in the organizational structure and reinforce institutional goals.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>The guidelines have been established for staff assessment. ISNAR is working on the development of CGIAR system-wide guidelines for rewards which can be also be applied by the NARS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>The Director General should play a greater role in the guidance and oversight of human resource planning, management, and development at ISNAR.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>This has become one of the DG's major responsibilities, but also the DDG's, and the Program Directors are fully involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>CGIAR, recognizing the central role of ISNAR in institution building, should increase its actual core funding by not less than $ 2 million in 1993 with some continuing growth thereafter.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Instead of an increase in core funding, the actual core contribution to ISNAR developed as follows. (in thousands) 1991 = $ 7,783 1992 = $ 7,036 1993 = $ 6,065 1994 = $ 6,175 1995 = $ 6,309</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANNEX B

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR PANELS CONDUCTING EXTERNAL REVIEWS OF CGIAR CENTRES

2.1 Background

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) aims, through its support to international agricultural research, to contribute to promoting sustainable agriculture for food security in developing countries. The CGIAR has charged its Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) with the responsibility of ensuring that the programs supported by the Group are of high quality and relevance. TAC discharges this responsibility, in part, by organizing External Program Reviews of the Centers. The CGIAR has assigned a responsibility to its Secretariat for conducting External Management Reviews of the Centers to complement the External Program Reviews. TAC and the CGIAR Secretariat normally discharge these responsibilities by commissioning a joint panel to conduct an External Program and Management Review (EPMR). Such reviews are conducted for each center approximately every five years.

EPMRs are a cornerstone of mechanisms of accountability within the CGIAR System. As each center is autonomous, reviews provide a measure of central oversight. They inform the donors that their investment is sound, or recommend means to make it so. EPMRs are both retrospective and prospective, and thus serve as an essential component in the CGIAR’s integrated planning and review system. They help ensure the centers’ excellence, relevance and continued viability, and the System’s coherence.

2.2 Purpose

The broad objectives of an EPMR are to:

- provide members of the CGIAR, in particular the donors, with an independent and rigorous assessment of the health and contribution of a center that they are supporting; CGIAR members need to know whether the center is doing the right work, and doing it efficiently;
- provide the center and its collaborators with assessment information that complements their own efforts;
- provide principal partners, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders of the CGIAR with information about the health and contribution of the center.

With these general objectives in mind, the Panel is specifically charged to:

1. assess the continuing appropriateness of the center’s mission and evaluate its strategy and priorities in the context of CGIAR strategies and priorities, and comment on needs for change;
2. assess the recent accomplishments and impact of the center, and comment on the
effectiveness and potential impact of the center's work-in-progress;
3. assess whether the center is managed efficiently and suggest ways of enhancing the
center's overall performance, in particular, comment on the systems in place for ensuring
quality.

While the Panel is free to address any topic relevant to the purposes of the review, it may wish
to use the list of broad topics (Attachment I) as a guide in organizing its effort. The Panel is
expected to make a thorough and independent appraisal of the center and its activities, in
accordance with the Guidelines to Panels Conducting External Reviews of CGIAR Centers.

2.3 The Report and Recommendations

The Panel is required to prepare a succinct report in plain language, in which descriptive
material is the minimum necessary to set the analysis and the conclusions in context. The
report should focus on noteworthy features, including recognition of the center's
accomplishments where appropriate, and issues of major concern, with recommendations and
suggestions for change. Recommendations should be justified by analysis and reflect the
consensus view of the Panel; any recommendations for increases in staff or activities should
include a discussion of resource implications.

The report should be as brief as possible. It should include a summary with qualitative and
quantitative information following a standard format (Attachment II). Upon completion, the
Panel Chair should formally transmit the document to the TAC Chair and CGIAR Executive
Secretary.

2.4 The Response and Follow-up

The Board and management of the center under review should submit a response to the
review, addressed to TAC and the CGIAR Secretariat. TAC then will discuss the report in the
presence of the Panel Chair and representatives from the center, and prepare a commentary, in
collaboration with the CGIAR Secretariat, including recommendations for follow-up action.
The CGIAR will discuss the report in light of the center's response and the commentary or
commentaries from TAC and the CGIAR Secretariat, and agree on follow-up action.
3. PANEL COMPOSITION

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Panel Secretary: Guido Gryseels  
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Email: guided.gryseels@fao.org
ANNEX B

4. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Samuel Paul (India) is a former Director of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad. He has been an advisor on public sector management at the World Bank in Washington, Chief Technical Advisor to the International Labor Organization, senior advisor to the United Nations Commission on Transnational Corporations and a consultant to many organizations. He has taught at both Harvard and Princeton Universities, is the author of several books and numerous professional articles, and was a member of the first EPMR of ICLARM. He is presently the Chairman of the Public Affairs Centre in Bangalore, India.

Jacques Brossier (France) has a degree in Agricultural Engineering from INA in Paris and a Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics from the University of Dijon. His main research interest is in the area of farm management and farming systems. He also leads a multi-disciplinary research team on the relationships between farming practices and underground water quality. He is the Director of the Institut National de Recherche Agronomique (INRA) regional center in Dijon, and regularly serves as a consultant to the World Bank, FAO and GTZ.

Kenneth L. Hoadley (U.S.A.) is an independent consultant specializing in international management education and development. Most of his work in recent years has focused on helping organizations in the public, private and non-profit sectors of developing countries to improve their institutional capabilities through management education programs and other forms of direct intervention. From 1986 until 1994, Dr. Hoadley was Dean of the Arthur D. Little School of Management in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Prior to this he served as Associate Academic Director at the Central American Institute of Business Administration (INCAE) in Costa Rica, and as a member of the faculty of IPADE in Mexico City. Dr. Hoadley has served as a member of four external review Panels (for either internally or externally commissioned reviews) in an equal number of CGIAR centers. Dr. Hoadley received both his Master’s and his Doctor of Business Administration degrees from the Harvard Business School. He currently resides in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, U.S.A.

Roberto Vazquez Platero (Uruguay) works as an international consultant and is a member of the editorial council of Uruguay’s newspaper El Observador, the National Academy of Economics and the Board of Governors of the Christian Brothers College. He was previously Minister of Agriculture of Uruguay, President of the Inter-American Board of Ministers of Agriculture, member of the House of Representatives of Uruguay and President of the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Representatives. He was a Fulbright scholar and a Kellogg and Ford Foundation fellow. He received his degree as Agricultural Engineer from the University of the Republic of Uruguay, and his Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics from Texas A&M University.

Jesus Moncada de la Fuente (Mexico) is an independent consultant on agricultural research. Previously, he served as Chief Executive Officer of the National Institute for Forestry, Agriculture and Livestock Research (INIFAP), and Director General of the National Institute for Agricultural Research (INIA) in Mexico. He was a member of the Board of Trustees of
CIMMYT and ICRISAT, and served as a consultant to USAID, Winrock, IICA, IDB and SPAAR. Dr. Moncada has a Ph.D. in Soils and Experimental statistics from North Carolina State University.

**Mandivamba Rukuni** (Zimbabwe) is Professor of Agricultural Economics at the University of Zimbabwe and is Chair of the Zimbabwe Agricultural Research Council. He also served as Dean of Agriculture at the University of Zimbabwe, and has published several books and articles in the field of agricultural research and development. Prof. Rukuni served on the CGIAR Task Force for Sustainable Agriculture, the EPMR of INIBAP and the FAO Oversight Committee for its Sustainable Development Department. Prof. Rukuni has a Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics from the University of Zimbabwe and a M.Sc. from the University of Reading.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AARINENA</td>
<td>Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIARC</td>
<td>Association of International Agricultural Research Centers</td>
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<td>ARNET</td>
<td>agricultural research network</td>
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<td>ASARECA</td>
<td>Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa</td>
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<td>CG</td>
<td>Consultative Group</td>
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<td>CGIAR</td>
<td>Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research</td>
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<td>CGNET</td>
<td>Consultative Group Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>CID</td>
<td>comprehensive institutional development</td>
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<td>CIP</td>
<td>International Potato Center (Peru)</td>
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<td>CREF</td>
<td>College Retirement Equities Fund</td>
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<td>CIMMYT</td>
<td>International Center for the Improvement of Maize and Wheat</td>
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<td>DG</td>
<td>Director General</td>
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<td>EMBRAPA</td>
<td>Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuaria</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPMR</td>
<td>external program and management review</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations</td>
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<td>G4</td>
<td>“Group of Four” (West African research management network)</td>
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<td>GIS</td>
<td>geographic information system</td>
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<td>GTZ</td>
<td>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (Germany)</td>
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<td>IARC</td>
<td>international agricultural research center</td>
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<td>IBS</td>
<td>Intermediary Biotechnology Service</td>
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<td>ICAR</td>
<td>International Center for Agricultural Research (India)</td>
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<td>ICARDA</td>
<td>International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (Syria)</td>
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<td>ICER</td>
<td>internally commissioned external review</td>
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<td>ICLARM</td>
<td>International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management (Philippines)</td>
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<td>ICRISAT</td>
<td>International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (India)</td>
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<td>ICW</td>
<td>International Center’s Week</td>
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<td>IDB</td>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
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<td>IFAP</td>
<td>International Federation of Agricultural Producers</td>
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<td>IFPRI</td>
<td>International Food Policy Research Institute</td>
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<td>IICA</td>
<td>International Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (Mexico)</td>
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<td>IITA</td>
<td>International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (Nigeria)</td>
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<tr>
<td>INA</td>
<td>Institut National pour l’Agriculture (France)</td>
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<td>INCAFE</td>
<td>Central American Institute of Business Administration (Costa Rica)</td>
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<td>INFORM</td>
<td>information for agricultural research managers</td>
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<td>INIA</td>
<td>national agriculture research institute</td>
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<td>INIBAP</td>
<td>International Network for the Improvement of Bananas and Plantains</td>
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<td>INIFAP</td>
<td>National Institute for Forestry, Agriculture and Livestock Research (Mexico)</td>
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<tr>
<td>INRA</td>
<td>Institut National de Recherche Agricole (Morocco)</td>
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<td>IPR</td>
<td>internal program review</td>
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<td>ISNAR</td>
<td>International Service for National Agricultural Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>IVDN</td>
<td>integrated voice and data network</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>KARI</td>
<td>Kenya Agricultural Research Institute</td>
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<td>LAC</td>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
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<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>monitoring and evaluation</td>
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<td>MDI</td>
<td>Management Development Institute</td>
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<td>MIS</td>
<td>management information system</td>
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<td>MP</td>
<td>Management Program</td>
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<td>MPC</td>
<td>Management and Program Coordinating Committee</td>
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<td>MTP</td>
<td>Mid-Term Plan</td>
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<td>NAARM</td>
<td>National Academy of Agricultural Research Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>NARI</td>
<td>national agricultural research institute</td>
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<td>NARO</td>
<td>national agricultural research organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NARS</td>
<td>national agricultural research system(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>nongovernmental organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRM</td>
<td>natural resource management</td>
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<tr>
<td>OFCOR</td>
<td>on-farm client-oriented research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAE</td>
<td>performance assessment and evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PM&amp;E</td>
<td>planning, monitoring, and evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPO</td>
<td>programmation par objectif</td>
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<tr>
<td>R&amp;D</td>
<td>research and development</td>
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<tr>
<td>RPSD</td>
<td>Research Policy and System Development Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTTL</td>
<td>research technology transfer linkages</td>
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<tr>
<td>SACA</td>
<td>Staff Advisory Committee on Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACCAR</td>
<td>Southern African Centre for Cooperation in Agricultural Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPAAR</td>
<td>Special Program for African Agricultural Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAC</td>
<td>Technical Advisory Committee</td>
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<td>TIAA</td>
<td>Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>WANA</td>
<td>West Asia - North Africa</td>
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