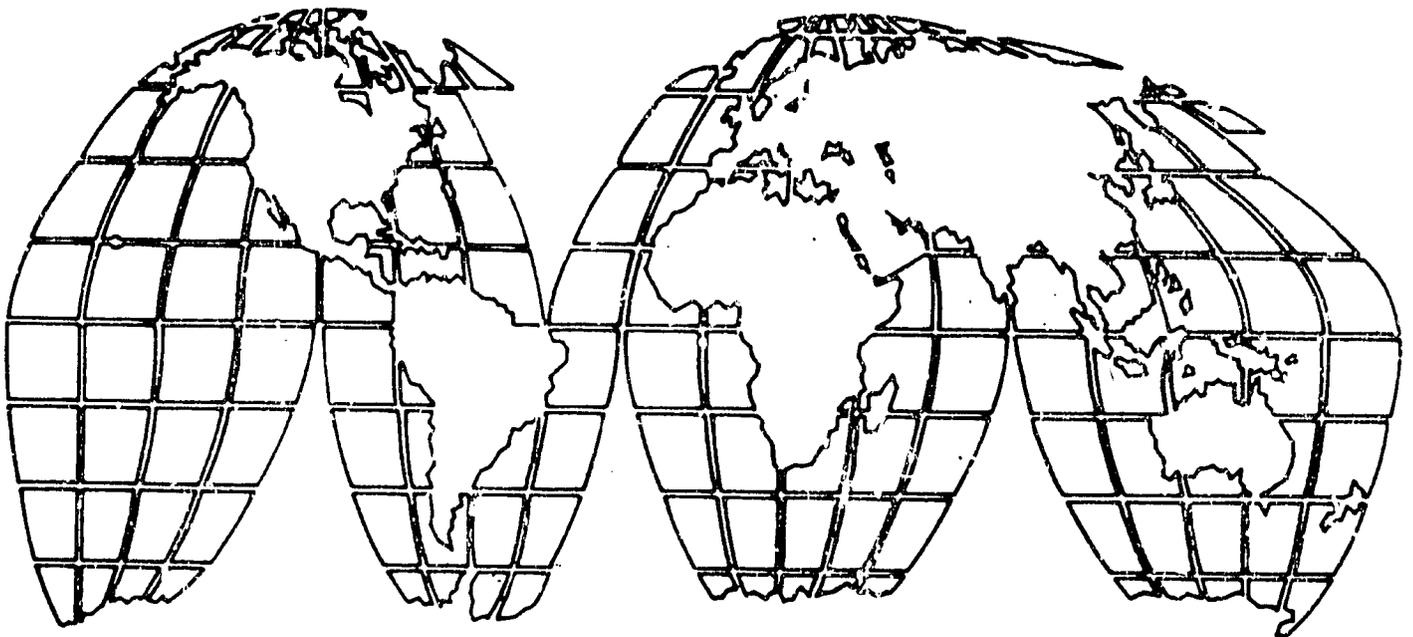


REVIEW OF THE ACTION PLAN IN A.I.D. PROGRAMMING



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CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION AND EVALUATION
BUREAU FOR PROGRAM AND POLICY COORDINATION

U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20523

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REVIEW OF THE ACTION PLAN IN A.I.D. PROGRAMMING

PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We should retain the Action Plan and Program Week as essential and productive components of the Agency's programming system.
2. We should review the A.I.D. programming system to make sure we have a coherent system that serves the Agency's interests efficiently. The guiding principle behind this step should be to preserve flexibility and the need for diversity within a common framework of requirements, terminology and practices. We should move on from what has been an important and productive experimental stage and regularize with improvements the relatively ad hoc operation we have now. The preparation of a handbook on the programming system would be desirable to establish the programming system firmly in the Agency practice and reduce the growing disparities among the Bureaus. Substantial improvements in efficiency and work loads can come from having a stable system and set of procedures and requirements that A.I.D. staff can learn and practice.
3. We should streamline the CDSS/Action Plan and Program Week procedures to reduce work loads. Yet we must recognize that their importance will continue to call for substantial demands on staff time. A more productive and streamlined system can result from a) a better statement and regularization of requirements for the Action Plan document, b) a flexible and more customized scheduling plan within a common framework, c) a better definition of issues, including any cross-cutting Bureau and Agency themes, for each country analysis before the Action Plans are prepared, d) an orchestration of the Program Week sessions to address the several sets of issues that need attention. Participation in these meetings should be limited to essential staff members from both Regional and Central Bureaus.
4. We should develop common definitions of key terms used in CDSSs and Action Plans such as for goals, objectives, targets, indicators, benchmarks, impact, etc. Similarly we should provide well thought out guidance and examples on how to use development indicators. This step is particularly important in focusing the Agency's attention on performance and accomplishments. The proposed message on development indicators is an important part of this effort and should be approved.
5. The Missions should be encouraged to use the Action Plan as their own management tool in setting and assessing their annual work programs. Several Missions are doing this with good results.
6. We should continue with the inclusion of New Project Descriptions in the Action Plans. At the same time, we need to be very precise in our guidance about what information is essential

for decisions about the consistency of the proposed project with the country strategy and Agency policies. As a general practice PIDs should be submitted to A.I.D./W with the understanding that the Bureaus may delegate PID approvals to the Missions on an exceptional basis.

7. The Central Bureaus should continue to prepare Action Plans in conjunction with their ABSs. The development of these Action Plans should include participation from the Regional Bureaus. The documents themselves should be analytical focusing on past performance, current issues and future plans and avoid comprehensive descriptions of activities. The focus should be on program not project level performance and issues.

8. The Administrator, assisted by PPC, should provide for the Bureaus and Missions at the beginning of the cycle an overview of A.I.D. development priorities, cross-cutting themes and issues. Such a message can strengthen the substantive character and responsiveness of the CDSSs and Action Plans markedly. The Bureaus should submit to the Administrator at the end of the program cycle a brief synthesis of accomplishments and issues.

THE REPORT

Introduction

Origins of Action Plans Concept

The idea of the Action Plan was first introduced in a report by Don Brown in January 1983. He envisioned the Action Plan as the means for linking the program strategy in the CDSS with "the means for carrying it out." The Action Plan would be prepared in conjunction with the CDSS and cover a three year period after which a new CDSS and Action Plan would be prepared. The Action Plan would "lay out the key actions needed to be taken by Washington bureaus (regional, functional and management) and by the field missions" and focus on mission proposals for staffing, OE budget requirements reporting systems, etc. Brown's proposal, which he says was not fully developed, placed the primary emphasis on implementation questions. Subsequently, it was concluded that the Action Plan was not the best means for addressing implementation and management questions except in general terms related to their effect on program strategies.

The first Agency guidance message was transmitted in April, 1983 adding the Action Plan to the ABS. The Asia Bureau initiated its "experiment" in decentralization in November, 1983 and introduced the ideas of a workplan and program week. There have been since then 15 to 20 additional guidance messages from PPC and the three Regional Bureaus covering both general guidance and special interests to be covered in the Action Plans.

In December, 1984 A.I.D. made several revisions to its programming system. The purpose of these revisions was to "provide additional authority to field managers. Additional decentralization allows for adapting agency policies to local conditions and is the best way to shift management attention toward implementation. It is also logical, at this stage in the Administration, to place less emphasis on centralized control over planning and program design, since field managers have extensive experience with Agency policy."

This guidance also introduced the requirement for Action Plans separate from the ABS. It specified the "field missions will submit annual Action Plans which establish program objectives for the coming year and report on progress toward objectives in previous plans."

Action Plans: a document and a process

The Action Plan is an important and necessary part of A.I.D.'s country programming system. When used conscientiously, it serves as a useful and productive management tool. It is important to recognize, however, that the Action Plan is both a document and a process. While attention is focused on the

document, it is the process and how it is orchestrated -- starting with Mission preparation through A.I.D./Washington review and response -- that affects program policy and performance. The document is only an instrument to facilitate the process.

Why is the Action Plan important to A.I.D. operations?

The Action Plan process, as it was envisioned, provides A.I.D. management with the means for translating country development strategies into practical operating programs. It is a necessary link between the CDSSs and ABSs - the link between long term development goals and project selection and resources requirements. It serves as a means of communication and agreement between the Mission and Washington on how the country development assistance strategy is to be carried out and what progress is being made.

Specifically, the Action Plan

- consolidates understandings within Missions on program priorities and action responsibilities and helps to bring about a more realistic program of work;
- provides the basic information required for Program Week reviews;
- validates the country development strategy or lays out the need for its modification;
- integrates the several program components of policy dialogues, project and non-project activity and program and management resources;
- establishes progress and performance indicators at both country trend and program levels to provide an understanding of changes (positive and negative) in country circumstances and program impact;
- provides benchmarks on implementation of the Action Plan to permit an assessment of Mission performance;
- provides the means for informing the many different program and management groups in Washington about Mission activity which they support;
- provides information for decisions on the delegation of authority to Missions to approve PIDs for new projects;
- provides the basis for decisions on budget allocations.

In brief, the Action Plan provides an opportunity to review past performance, current issues and future plans, to educate

supporting staffs and to establish agreements with the Mission on the implementation of policy strategies, sector concentrations and project selection. The Action Plan process in Program Week should culminate with a clear understanding of the Assistant Administrator's requirements on program strategy, tactics, project activity and the resource allocations (program and OE funds and staffing).

Action Plans and Central Bureaus

The Action Plan idea was originally conceived as a Mission/Regional Bureau procedure in conjunction with the move to decentralization. Subsequently, Action Plans have been prepared by the Central Bureaus - S&T, PRE, FVA (PVC, FFP, ASHA). The basic concept is also applicable to their programs although the structure of the document and the form of the reviews are necessarily different. The following discussion relates to the Action Plan for the Regional Bureaus and Missions. A separate section addresses its use in the central bureaus.

Major Conclusions

An aid to decentralization?

As noted above, the Action Plan was intended to be a key document in furthering decentralization. The Missions would have more authority and room to maneuver once their Action Plans were reviewed and approved. The development of new projects and their approval, policy dialogue agendas and tactics and other program implementation matters were then left to the Missions. The Action Plans and Program Week have provided a means for consolidating the decision-making process and reduced the piecemeal delegations that would otherwise extend over the year.

One test of decentralization and delegation is Bureau response to the New Project Descriptions (NPD) included in the Action Plans. The Bureaus have operated differently. ANE requires all PID's (with minor exceptions) be submitted to the Bureau for approval in addition to the Action Plan and NPDs. LAC and AFR delegate a substantial number of PID approvals to the Missions after reviewing the NPDs in the Action Plans (or ABSs for AFR in the off years). However, some view the NPD as relatively useless as a basis for delegating PID approvals to the field; the information in the NPD is too general and is not helpful in monitoring Mission adherence to Agency policies. The NPD does serve to guide decisions on what to include in the ABS submissions and Congressional Presentation.

Overall, the Action Plan and Program Week have not materially diminished Mission authorities or undermined the decentralization objective. They do provide a means for a tight rein on the

strategy and scope of Mission programs and potentially on performance, however.

Protecting Diversity in a Common Framework

Action Plan guidance has evolved from a common concept into a wide variety of applications. During this evolution there has been much experimentation by the several bureaus and some confusion on what is required. We are now at the point of deciding how the merits of diversity can be balanced with the need for a common framework so that the Bureaus and their Missions as well as the Agency as a whole can benefit efficiently and effectively from the Action Plan document and process.

The aim now should be to develop a common framework, set of terms and procedures and review practices balanced with the need for flexibility in their application. Clarifications of the first and simplifications of the second can go a long way toward streamlining the Action Plan and Program Week and reduce workloads and unproductive activity. The Action Plan document itself should serve to facilitate Bureau and Agency wide understandings of problems and progress.

Useful on current issues and future plans

The Bureaus found the Action Plan documents and process particularly useful in addressing current issues and future plans. The opportunity to bring out programming questions and, in most instances, reach decisions was an important product of the process. This was more successful when the Missions and their Bureaus mapped out ahead of the Program Week the principal issues to be covered. Often the document did not surface the issues though the Africa Bureau has issue identification as one of its topics in its Action Plan guidelines. The Action Plan and Program Week were effective in sorting out program strategy issues for the future. Questions of sector priority, policy dialogue concerns, and some management points bearing on overall program strategy were as a rule well examined and decisions reached. In some instances where the country program is well established there were no issues of importance and the utility of the process as an annual event was questioned. The Bureaus' reports were mixed on the question of the Action Plans and Program Week on country budget decisions. The influence was greater on decisions on how funds should be used within given levels than on the levels themselves. The restrictions of functional accounts, earmarking and overriding political preferences provide little latitude for budget decisions based on program requirements and performance.

Useful in developing common understandings

Many of the Washington staff pointed out the importance of having both in the Action Plan document and the Program Week an opportunity to become acquainted with Mission programs, issues and plans. The benefit of a relatively systematic presentation of

each country program pays off in reducing communication problems and misunderstandings which might otherwise drag out over the year. Supporting personnel need an opportunity to learn about the programs and their context to help them with their work.

Weak on accountability

The Action Plans and Program Week were not successful in getting at questions of accountability. One of the original reasons for the Action Plans was to establish a basis for holding the Mission accountable for carrying out the program decisions agreed to during the previous year. While some of the Action Plan documents attempted to provide benchmarks on Mission performance, they generally did not; and, more important, there was little or no direct discussion of Mission performance in relation to prior year understandings. While this may appear to be an important weakness, it may be that the extensive direct and incidental meetings during Program Week along with the continuous interaction between A.I.D./W and the Missions during the year served this purpose. Part of the problem relates to the next point.

Weak on performance and impact and related indicators

The three Regional Bureaus were in agreement that the Action Plans were on the whole unsuccessful in providing indicators of program performance and impact. A few of the Action Plans made a good attempt and provide possible models for the rest. But even these Plans were inadequate and needed further attention. The problem here is less with the Missions than with A.I.D./W guidance. Indicators of program performance and impact are difficult to develop and lay out succinctly. At the Country Trends level there are some generally accepted indicators such as relate to macro-economic trends. Indicators of program impact and performance are more difficult conceptually although in some sectors such as population they have been well defined. Part of the problem with these indicators is the reluctance of some Missions to be pinned down and held responsible for specified results. Clearly more work has to be done to provide Missions with practical guidance on what is wanted and how to go about preparing the data. Some of the Missions' problems may also be due to confusion on the meaning and use of terms in the Action Plan guidance. LAC has moved ahead with its indicators plan related to its 14 objectives. ANE and AFR are working on their own plans and S&T technical staffs have developed their own indicators. Agency wide guidance moving toward a common approach is still pending and would be an important catalyst.

Confused use of terms

Across the Bureaus, if not within each Bureau, there is confusion on the key terms being used for the Action Plans. Such terms as goals, objectives, targets, benchmarks, indicators are being used without common agreement on what they mean and how they are to be

applied. In some instances Program Week discussions of goals and objectives had to be deferred because of confusion on what was wanted. It is important to the Agency that we all work with common understanding and applications of basic terms if we are to advance our ability to articulate plans and accomplishments.

Weak on management issues

The Action Plan documents, and particularly the formal review process, did not provide a useful means for addressing management issues such as staffing, resource allocations, operating expense requirements. The presence of the Mission Director, however, during Program Week provided an opportunity to sort out management issues in side meetings even if not identified in the Action Plans or review process.

Workload problem for Missions and Bureaus

The most vocal reaction to the Action Plans as a document and a process including Program Week concerned the workload imposed on staff and management. For some Missions the preparation of the Action Plans was an arduous task demanded by A.I.D./W. For the Bureaus the number of Action Plans that had to be read and the number of meetings attended within a relatively short space of time were all consuming leaving little time for any other responsibilities and even insufficient time to prepare well for the reviews themselves. The Bureaus and Missions are, however, learning from prior year experience so that the process is becoming less demanding. In some instances, the criticisms of the Action Plan process expressed by the Missions seemed to be a reflection of their views of the usefulness of the Action Plans to Mission operations. Where Mission management saw the Action Plan as a useful management tool for building a consensus and work program, and many did, complaints about the process were less insistent. Also, the workload on the Missions has eased somewhat as they have gained a better understanding of the requirements and can build on prior year work and experience. Each of the Bureaus has been working to reduce the workloads and "customize" the process to fit real requirements rather than maintain an annual routine which is not productive in all situations. The workload problem will require continuing attention, however.

Senior Managements Role in Action Plan Process

Within the Bureaus, the Action Plans and Program Weeks reflected the desires and interests of Bureau management. They provided a key opportunity to influence the direction of Mission programs. The process also enabled Bureau management to introduce their own priorities and themes and build them into the discussions. This process would have been more effective if these views had been clearly outlined well before the Missions started their preparation of the Action Plans. The Action Plan process appeared to be of little or no utility to the Administrator except as important issues may have been volunteered by the Bureau management. The Administrator's guidance messages did not

articulate Agency wide priorities and concerns that may have arisen from interactions with Congress. The results of the Action Plan reviews and Program Week in general were not summarized for the Administrator to give him an overall understanding of Agency wide program performance, issues and progress.

THE ACTION PLAN AS A DOCUMENT

A.I.D./W Guidelines for Action Plans

The Agency has sent the field over the past three years some 15-20 guidance messages on Action Plan requirements. Some are from PPC, some from the Regional Bureaus and some are special interest messages. Each year the list of referenced messages in the guidance cables gets longer and less useful. The result is a growing lack of coherency in Mission guidance. Why should it be necessary to have guidelines each year on the "how-tos" of Action Plan preparation?

Fortunately, the basic structure of the principal guidelines are similar if not the same as follows:

I. Strategy and Policy

AFR: Strategy Recap and Policy Agenda (1 page)

LAC: Strategy summary and modifications (3 pages); country specific goals as specified by the Bureau (1 page form); overview of progress toward established goals and anticipated results (2 pages).

ANE: Summary of strategy goals, assessment of the validity, progress toward goals and A.I.D.'s contribution to impact, proposed new elements, major program management issues.

II. Variously identified as "Implementation or Performance and Plans, Progress and Implications" (See Annex B for suggested outline)

AFR: Overall progress and implications: policy/program evolution; major issues and implications for next two years (2 pages).

LAC: Implementation: A. For each objective pre-printed forms for objectives, performance, benchmarks, assumptions, policy dialogue actions, project accomplishments and supporting narrative; B. Special analyses covering new projects, PL 480, Local Currency, mortgage/pipeline, WID (84 pages, i.e., 6 pages per objective with 14 objectives).

ANE: Performance and Plans: program by sector by strategic goals, quantified; impact since last AP, major program and management actions planned, sectoral policy agenda, significant problems and major breakthroughs.

IIA AFR has a separate section on key program targets, progress, benchmarks, policy agenda, management steps, program agenda for two years....

III. Variously called Work Plan, Special Considerations, Management

AFR: New starts, design issues, evaluation schedule, research schedule, management improvements (program consolidation, staff alignment, use of FSNs, Peace Corp, OE savings, local currency, pipeline/mortgage, Gray Amendment.

LAC: Management: management strategy, OE Evaluation Plans, Gray Amdt (8 pages).

ANE: Special Considerations: Financial (pipeline/mortgage), obligations, deob/reob), evaluation plans, PL 480, management and workforce issues, Gray Amdt, budget tables, NPDs.

IV. AFR includes a fourth section on "Issues for Bureau Action."

As is evident from the above outline, the Bureaus are not far apart in the structure of the Action Plans. LAC, however, has overlaid the Action Plan with its MBO system making the Action Plan a more "pivotal document" in its programming. The Bureau's goals and objectives plan is incorporate in the Mission submissions. Pre-printed formats for presenting performance indicators have been provided. This approach provides a relatively uniform treatment of the data on performance and progress. The other Bureaus leave the matter largely to the Missions though dissatisfaction with the results has raised the question of more explicit guidance.

The LAC guidance envisioned Action Plan documents of 121 pages plus tables; the ANE guidance 60 pages and AFR guidance 15 pages. The results ranged from 20 to 230 pages: AFR/11 to 46, ANE/30-60; LAC/130 to 230. The longer documents tended to be excessively descriptive but also incorporated numerous tables and for LAC pre-printed forms. The documents cited as among the best also ranged widely from 20 pages for Mali to over 137 for Honduras, for example. Guidelines on length of document, thus, did not seem particularly effective. This may partly be due to the requirements demanding more than can be covered briefly. For LAC, it reflects the MBO overlay to the Action Plan process. In general, it reflects a tendency toward more description than analysis. The range of lengths also results from the relative complexity of the programs.

LAC summed up Mission views on the importance of preserving the current guidance as follows:

"The current Action Plan format and methodology should be retained, with appropriate refinements, to assure continuity in the planning process, comparability between successive plans for any country, and meaningful assessment of performance and to avoid the need for Mission and LAC/W personnel to learn new formats."

Information Requirements in Action Plans

The above outline for each of the Bureaus suggests the kind of information called for in the Action Plans. One of the areas of primary concern and weakness is related to the presentation of performance and impact. As ANE sums it up: "The general area of goals, objectives, benchmark, indicators, etc., remains murky. Efforts to focus APs and discussions on program impact were not generally successful. Agreements on what are appropriate indicators are not easily arrived at." LAC reports: "The Action Plans and review process still did not facilitate a meaningful review of program performance as a basis for judging the acceptability of the future plans... Prescribed performance indicators were frequently beyond the influence of the country program; Missions were uneasy about being held accountable for such indicators." LAC concluded: "Revise the guidelines/format to differentiate clearly between country trend indicators and program performance indicators, the latter conducive to attribution of changes to the A.I.D. country program." AFR notes the need to: "clarify guidance requirements for program performance documentation. AFR is working on a tabular format that would identify, for each major strategy objective: the long term program targets for the Action Plan period, the performance indicators to measure achievement of each target, the status of past performance on each indicator, and the key assumptions governing the choice of targets and benchmarks." Does it make sense for each Bureau to be developing independently the categories, terms and their definitions and applications?

A second area of concern is the section on management issues. This portion of the Action Plan was not used productively in many of the review sessions. In some instances the narrative was not adequately related to and integrated with the overall Action Plan. Again, it may be more a matter of reducing description and data and increasing the emphasis on issues. Clearly, there are important management questions related to the implementation of the program strategy in the allocation and use of personnel and OE funds. For example, where mortgage/pipeline questions are pertinent to overall program strategy, they should be presented here; otherwise, they should be dealt with in PIR and ABS presentations. If this section of the Action Plan is not integrated in the Program Week reviews, it will become a routine appendage and raise questions as to why it is needed.

A third aspect of the Action Plan which might require attention is the section on special analyses such as for WID, Evaluation Plans, PL 480, Local Currencies, etc. Generally, there were few concerns expressed about these items. However, it is important they be integrated with the main themes and activity defined in the Action Plan and not be looked on as perfunctory add ons. There may be no better way to handle these items but they should be closely associated with the strategy implementation and could be incorporated in the sectoral presentations in some instances.

Similarly, a fourth area of concern on information requirements in the Action Plans are the ad hoc reports on, for example, the Gray Amendment, Peace Corp/A.I.D. cooperation, etc. Since these items are largely reporting requirements, wouldn't they be better addressed outside of the Action Plan? Does anybody review these reports and summarize them for the Agency? The Gray Amendment information might more appropriately and effectively be included in the PIR reports which are directly related to actions on choice of contractors. Other such items could be handled in special reports where there is more certainty that someone will use the information provided or in ABSs. The point is not to let the Action Plan become loaded with information requirements which are not directly relevant to decisions which affect the implementation of the program strategy.

A fifth feature of the Action Plan is particularly controversial, i.e., the usefulness of the New Project Descriptions (NPD). This point is covered separately because of its relation to PID approvals and delegations.

Use of Standard Outline

The above discussion suggests the need for a standard outline for guiding the preparation of Action Plans. Understandably, there may be resistance to this idea given the investment the Bureaus have already made in their own guidelines and their application. Yet, it should be possible to develop a common framework for the Action Plan document, clarify what information is essential or can be provided elsewhere or not at all and agree on definitions of terms and their use. Within this framework the Bureaus would be free to elaborate on the specific treatment of each topic, e.g., with the expanded formats of LAC or the minimal analyses of AFR. It should be possible to prepare this common outline with the basic requirements and definitions in time for the next round of Action Plans. Not to do this will only lead to locking the Agency into a confused Agency-wide programming system.

Relation to CDSSs and ABSs

The Action Plan serves as the essential link between the broadly defined development assistance strategies in the CDSSs and the budget detail required in ABSs. It is the means for integrating the various categories of funding, project activity, policy dialogues and staffing and management requirements into a cohesive country program. It provides a work plan for defining specific actions to be taken by the Missions during the coming year and benchmarks to measure whether these actions have been taken. Finally, it provides indicators of program and country trends and progress.

Generally, the Action Plans for the past year have met these requirements and provided the necessary link. There are, of course, differences in how well each of the Action Plans met these

needs. Two areas are of particular concern: the tendency in some instances for the Action Plan to encroach on the purposes of the CDSSs and the failure in other instances to relate Action Plan decisions to budget decisions. On the first, some of the Action Plans were too elaborate and descriptive in their discussions of program strategy. While some adjustments to strategy may be necessary and can be covered in the Action Plans, a CDSS should be required instead if a major change in strategy is called for. The Action Plan structure is not well designed to address overall program strategy questions. Some of the excessive volume could be reduced if the Missions held to the Action Plan purpose and reduced to a minimum the descriptions and restatements of country situations and program strategy. More up to date CDSSs would also help in some cases.

On the second point, decisions on country and project budget allocations were made independently of the Action Plan process and not related to conclusions reached on the Action Plan itself. While this view was expressed by many, it may not be as clear cut as it appears. Certainly, those working with budget allocations are also knowledgeable about the Action Plan and indirectly influenced in their decisions. With tight Agency budgets, delays in appropriations and apportionments and the dominance of non-program factors, systematic linkage of the two may be difficult. Yet, the Action Plan process is somewhat hollow if budget decisions are made as if the Action Plan did not exist - a condition which if allowed to persist will generate some cynicism about the function of the Action Plan.

From the discussions with A.I.D. staff there were some suggestions that the guidelines for preparing CDSSs should be reexamined. The Handbook instructions are out of date and the cabled guidance heavily loaded with special requirements. Since the original CDSS guidelines were written well before the advent of the Action Plan, it would be appropriate to take another look at them as the character of the CDSS might change somewhat given the existence of the Action Plan. One thoughtful observation from a staff member points out the CDSS should give the Mission greater latitude to reflect its views of the country's development condition and assistance requirements freed from the strictures of Agency priorities. While the CDSS should provide analyses in the sectoral areas of most importance to A.I.D.; it should also allow Missions to lay out critical development issues that may not be within the range of Agency priorities. The Action Plan then becomes the means for nailing down the country strategy and its implementation following the review and approval of the CDSS. This approach would tend to make the program more sensitive to critical country development issues which might otherwise be overlooked.

In sum, it is time we looked at the system within which the Action Plan is a key component. The Action Plan was developed without carefully thinking through its effect on the CDSS and ABS and other documents and reviews. There was frequent questioning of

the usefulness of the CDSS owing to its broad coverage, or obsolescence or unapproved status. An effective Action Plan requires an up to date CDSS; otherwise, it tends to become a short hand CDSS without an adequate analytical base. In general, we may need to prepare CDSSs more frequently, i.e., every three or four years with a possible evaluation of the previous CDSS in conjunction with preparing the new one.

Action Plans and A.I.D. Records and Information Systems

Under present arrangements the Action Plan documents are handled in an informal and ad hoc manner. There is no Agency system for their processing, distribution and eventual storage for future reference. Each Bureau operates independently with whatever procedure is called for at the time. Yet the Action Plans are an important Agency document with valuable information on Mission programs and performance and over time useful information on results and impact. These documents should be provided a more official status and recognition. This would involve having them printed with a cover and distributed according to preset arrangements. They should be provided to the CDIE Document Information Handling Facility so that they can be referred to as both a current and historical reference resource. Given that the ABSs have such a short shelf-life at most one year and that they are almost entirely budget data, would it not be more efficient to use computer systems for their submission, recording and analysis and not print them?

THE ACTION PLAN AS A PROCESS

The Sequence

The sequence of events for the Action Plan involves a number of steps. These steps should be clearly in mind in order to achieve the most beneficial results. They are as follows:

1. Guidelines to the field.
2. A.I.D./W and Mission exchanges on major issues to be covered. This step has been found useful but is not applied in all instances.
3. Missions prepare and submit their Action Plans. Those Missions which have found the Action Plan particularly useful have engaged the full Mission in thinking through together the strategy, issues, performance measures and action requirements. It has served as a valuable management tool and agenda for the Director and staff. Others have simply turned the preparation of the Action Plan over to the Program Office and treated it as something to satisfy Washington but of little use to the Mission.
4. Program Week preparations, reviews and decisions.
5. Bureau cabled responses.

As a rule the time period for this sequence is roughly from October/November to February/March or for some to June; give or take a month or two about 5 to 6 months.

The Action Plan sequence fits within an overall Agency annual cycle that culminates with the Budget decisions in the summer. Some have suggested that the Action Plans could be decycled to minimize the bunching up of Program Weeks in the February - April period. There are trade offs which would have to be taken into account. Annual guidance messages would have to be transmitted earlier in the year, say August. Is this possible or can the Action Plans be prepared without this guidance? Mission work schedules are locked into a number of fixed requirements such as ABS submissions, obligations schedules and other seasonal demands. Is there any better time for the Action Plan? Also more important, shouldn't the Action Plan reviews and decisions precede fairly directly and guide the ABS submissions? This linkage should be preserved to get the full benefit from the process. Decycling, however, may be possible if the Agency shifts to a two year schedule for the Action Plans.

Scheduling and Coverage

The most important area for improving the efficiency of the Action Plan process and reduce workloads lies in the CDSS and Action Plan

scheduling and requirements on country coverage. While past guidelines called for an annual submission, this is impractical and unnecessary for all Missions each year. AFR, because of the number of country programs it manages, decided at the outset to limit the Action Plan requirements to 16 category I & II country programs and left out the small programs. The latter are handled more informally by other means. Also, AFR put the Action Plan on a two year cycle with some exceptions where country conditions were particularly turbulent. As a result AFR reviews only 8-9 Action Plans or CDSSs each year. This has proved to be manageable but still demanding in staff time. ANE processed 19 Action Plans and 4 CDSSs in FY 1987. It is reviewing this scheduling to determine how to reduce the number of Action Plans needing preparation and review each year. ANE is considering a customizing approach and will determine on a country by country basis which plans should be submitted and at what time. LAC prefers the annual submission with variations on the intensity of Program Week. It processed 16 Action Plans and 1 CDSS in FY 1987.

As an Agency-wide framework for the scheduling and coverage of CDSSs and Action Plans we suggest the following:

1. CDSSs should be prepared every four years.
2. Action Plans should be prepared within 6 months after CDSS approval and every two years thereafter. Some have objected to preparing Action Plans at the same time as the CDSSs both because of the workload and the lack of guidance on CDSS program decisions. The six months delay would ease these problems. The Egypt Mission prepared both at the same time and was pleased with the process and result.
3. ABSs should be prepared every year. In the off years when Action Plans are not required the ABS submissions would include the NPDs preparatory to PID approvals and other essential annual information requirements.
4. Project Implementation Reviews (PIRs) should be held every six months. The utility of the PIR review process could be strengthened by identifying cross cutting issues on implementation problems for consideration by senior management. Originally it had been envisioned that the Action Plans would address implementation issues but this was not feasible nor appropriate except as they relate to the overall strategy. The PIRs, however, provide a good opportunity to identify and address questions of program implementation.

Program Week

Program Week is the major event of the year for country program reviews. It is the principal opportunity for the Mission Director and key staff to present, advocate and defend their program. It is also a very intensive period during which A.I.D./W staff and

management have their opportunity to examine the program in depth - to learn, critique, modify and reach decisions on performance and future directions. It is viewed as a useful time for consensus building.

Program Week is a great deal more than a review of CDSS/Action Plans. It provides an opportunity for numerous side meetings and discussions between A.I.D./W staff and the Missions and permits exchanges, if not always decisions, on a wide range of program and administrative matters. Program Week for the Bureaus often is a two week affair when one takes into account the considerable preparatory time. Also, some Bureaus schedule PIRs before Program Week to identify issues to be raised during the Program Week reviews.

The CDSS and/or Action Plans are the key documents for focusing the Program Week agenda. They are most useful when they are used to facilitate the discussions and not become the object of the discussions. Well prepared documents are critical to an effective Program Week.

The Regional Bureaus generally follow the same approach to Program Week meetings. There are as a rule four basic meetings:

1. A preparatory session to define the issues and agenda for the review meetings. These sessions are attended by the principal bureau staff led by the Program Office. An issues paper is prepared for the Action Plan review meetings. This step gives various offices and bureaus the opportunity to present their issues and sort out those of major and minor importance. More time for this step and for the circulation of the issues papers would improve the focus and productivity of the later meetings. The preparatory meetings last about 2 hours, sometimes longer.
2. The formal Action Plan or CDSS Review meetings are often held in two separate sessions either as simply an extension of the agenda from one meeting to the next or for separate topics such as strategy issues in one meeting and management issues in the second. Thirty to forty people attend these major sessions. For some, it is an excellent opportunity to learn; for others an opportunity to discuss the issues. Holding these meetings to 2 hours per session is difficult as some participants tend to make lengthy interventions. The range of issues covered is very broad and generally useful. Occasionally, the discussions lack focus or slip into project level detail.
3. The final meeting - the wrap-up session - is restricted to the key Bureau and Mission representatives and senior Bureau managers. The Program Office prepares a draft cable on conclusions and decisions for the Bureau management to approve.

Overall, the formal Program Week meetings call for 10-14 hours of meeting time for each country. In addition, several officers require substantial time for preparation. Also, there are many

side meetings with Mission representatives on project and management issues. In some instances, separate sessions are held on the New Project Descriptions

The Bureaus will need to review the Program Week process carefully to trim off any excess workloads and meeting time. Some improvements can come from:

1. CDSS/Action Plan scheduling to reduce the number of country reviews each year;
2. divising a Program Week schedule of meetings so that the range of subjects are covered but participation is limited to topics of direct concern to the participants. Many staff waste time attending meetings waiting for their subject to come up. Would it be possible to hold a one hour briefing and general discussion meeting with the Mission Director for all comers to give them an opportunity to learn about the program and ask their special interest questions? This session could then be followed with a carefully orchestrated set of meetings on specific topics related to Mission and Washington priority interests. Attendance at these latter meetings would be limited to those who have specific knowledge of the topic and decision-making responsibilities. There is no easy solution to the time spent in Washington during Program Week. Given its importance to each country program, it is well worth this period of attention.
3. sharpening the issues for discussion so that the meetings can follow specific agendas.
4. providing more time for the review of documents and issues papers - a persistent complaint.

Bureau Responses to Action Plans and Follow Up

The Bureaus identified few problems with the process of responding with cables summarizing the Action Plan reviews and Program Week discussions. The system of having the Program Office prepare a draft cable for the final session with senior management helped to sharpen the issues and decision points. With some exceptions these cables were out within a reasonable time period - ten days - but there were some cases of serious delays and some complaints of lack of decisiveness. ANE has set up a system for follow up and monitoring Mission actions resulting from the cabled decisions.

ACTION PLANS AND PROJECT REVIEWS AND DELEGATIONS

One of the more contentious issues in the Action Plan process relates to the usefulness of the Action Plan and particularly the New Project Descriptions in informing Agency policy monitors on what is actually intended by the Missions. This concern is based on the view that only at the project level can one learn what a

country program is about and whether it is consistent with Agency policies. Many of the Agency's policies can only be given substance in the projects themselves such as positive rates of interest in credit projects, use of targets in population projects, environmental impact or use of private sector instrumentalities. And if the projects are not reviewed in Washington, then it is difficult to know how well these policies are being adhered to. The general conclusion is that the NPD does not provide enough information for this purpose. Some would argue that these points are delegated to the Missions in project design and it is up to the Mission to follow Agency policy.

The submission of PIDs for Washington review would seem to be a minimal requirement to help address this problem. And where sensitive policy issues appear likely Washington should review the PP or key sections. Also precycle country guidance related to sectors of interest would permit a sharper articulation of policy questions.

In the end, it is a matter of delegations. If we wish to have a decentralized system then there has to be a greater reliance on the Mission to follow policy prescriptions. Mission assessments, program evaluations and frequent Washington/field travel are then the techniques for monitoring performance.

ACTION PLANS IN CENTRAL BUREAUS

Each of the central bureaus - S&T, FVA, PRE - prepare Action Plans. Discussions with these offices suggest some questioning about their usefulness but overall a belief that the Action Plans help to inform PPC and the Regional Bureaus about their plans and diffuse issues. The Action Plans were helpful in the larger offices in educating other units about program plans and overlapping interests. The review process appeared to be a bit perfunctory with generally low level participation from the other bureaus. The Action Plans were not as a rule the basis for decisions. The preparation of the Action Plans and related portfolio reviews were helpful in focusing attention on priorities and issues, however. For S&T the major new program strategies such as child survival, renewable energy were dealt with outside of the Action Plan process.

Conclusions from these discussions suggest:

1. Keep the Action Plan as an annual requirement to be provided with the ABS;
2. Encourage the regional and other bureaus to participate in the Central Bureaus Action Plan preparation where there is likely to be more interest than at the review stage;

3. Use the Action Plan to bring out the extent and character of Central Bureau participation in Mission and country development programs. Mission Action Plans should also cover this point.

4. Limit the Action Plan document to a summation of performance and progress and issues and avoid detailed presentations project by project. It may be useful to sum up the Central Bureau program by region to inform Regional Bureaus' management about the scope of activity being carried out in their area.

BUREAU INTERACTIONS IN THE PREPARATION AND REVIEW OF ACTION PLANS

Action Plans are essentially a Mission and Regional Bureau process and their use is dictated by their internal requirements. As a consequence, they have less utility in facilitating cross fertilization of ideas and experiences between Missions and between Bureaus. Program Week does provide some opportunity for other offices to learn and participate but from staff reports this has not proved to be significant except in the case of FVA on PL 480 questions. Participation in the early stages of the Action Plan preparation process - Central Bureaus in Mission planning and Regional Bureaus in Central Bureau planning - would be more productive rather than at the end when much of the programming is set. This leads to the next point on the Administrator and Action Plans.

THE ADMINISTRATOR AND ACTION PLANS

Does the Administrator have a role in the Action Plan process? Or is it sufficient that he is aware they are being prepared and reviewed and the system is working?

The Administrator has an important opportunity at the beginning of the cycle to make known his and senior management's views on the main development priorities and cross cutting themes for A.I.D. Also, the programming cycle begins after an intensive period with Congress and the Administrator's interaction with the Congress. The themes, priorities and issues that can be distilled from that experience should be conveyed to the Bureaus and Missions before they start their CDSS/Action Plan preparations. It is an opportunity to accent the substance of A.I.D. development interests over the process. It is the opportunity to have the Missions and Bureaus build into their programs the overall development strategies the Administrator wishes the Agency to pursue.

At the end of the cycle, the Bureaus should report to the Administrator a synthesis of their reviews to present the major points of progress and accomplishment and program and management issues.

MISSION ACTION PLANS SUBMITTED AND REVIEWED DURING FY 1987

AFRICA BUREAU

ACTION PLANS

Malawi
Mali
Senegal
Somalia
Zaire

CDSSs

Cameroon Update
Liberia
Rwanda
Guinea
Zambia
(Burundi Strategy Update)

CONCEPT PAPERS

Uganda
Tanzania

ASIA BUREAU

ACTION PLANS

Afghanistan Humanitarian Assistance
Bangladesh
Burma
Egypt
Fiji
India
Indonesia
Jordan
Morocco
Nepal
Oman
Pakistan
Philippines
South Pacific Regional
Sri Lanka
Thailand
Tunisia
Yemen Arab Republic
Regional Projects

CDSSs

Egypt
Nepal
Pakistan
Philippines (Update)

LAC BUREAU

ACTION PLANS

Belize
Costa Rica
El Salvador
Guatemala
Honduras
Panama
Central American Regional
Dominican Republic
Haiti
Jamaica
Caribbean Regional
Bolivia
Ecuador
Peru
Advance Dev. Countries/"Mexico, Columbia"
LAC Regional Plan

CDSS

Panama

SUGGESTED OUTLINE FOR ACTION PLAN

Section II: Program Goals, Objectives and Performance

A. Goal Statement

This statement places the A.I.D. program in the context of U.S. overall country development trends and aspirations. For some regions Congress has provided relatively specific goals as in Central American and the Caribbean and more recently in Africa. For other areas these goals may be less explicit and more internally derived as, for example, from the Blueprint for Development. The section would include the CDSS's goals, the country trend indicators (tabular) with qualitative analyses that are relevant to the goal and help explain the country's development condition.

B. A.I.D. Program Objectives and Assumptions

This section provides the analysis of the A.I.D. program within the scope of a particular objective which may be macro-economic, sectoral or subsectoral or otherwise defined. The subsets in this section include:

- a quantitative and qualitative statement of the objective.
- presentation of performance indicators both historical and projected (tabular) with a summary of the qualitative features that define performance.
- an identification and analysis of the assumptions associated with the achievement of the objective.

C. Mission Support Activities and Other Donor Assistance

This section provides a summary analysis, not a list of projects, of the principal activities in the Mission program addressing the objective. It includes both project, non-project assistance and policy dialogues and some benchmarks on Mission actions planned and anticipated for program implementation. It also includes a summary of other donor assistance pertinent to the objective.

D. Program Impact Assessment

This section provides the opportunity for the Mission to describe and analyse the impact, potential and actual, of A.I.D. activities. It pulls together the quantitative and qualitative

indicators and relates them to the program goals and objectives and to the overall trends. It is the section where Missions can spell out program accomplishments. The emphasis should be on impact not project outputs.

E. Implications for Future Dialogue and A.I.D. Resource Allocations

This final section gives the Mission the opportunity to outline the issues related to resources - both budgetary and staff - and possible concurrent moves by other donors, etc., required to advance to the A.I.D. program related to the stated objective.