MONITORING, VERIFICATION AND EVALUATION UNIT
AGRICULTURAL POLICY REFORM PROGRAM

VERIFICATION OF POLICY BENCHMARKS: LESSONS LEARNED FROM TRANCHE I OF APRP

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Management Systems International

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I. Background

a) Program Organization

The Agricultural Policy Reform Program (APRP) is a four year $200 million sector grant program directed by the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MALR). Also directly involved in the program are The Ministries of Public Works and Water Resources (MPWWR), Trade and Supply (MoTS) and Public Enterprises (MPE). Following completion of an earlier program, the Agricultural Production Credit Program (APCP), the APRP officially began in 1995 with implementation beginning in late 1996.

Program implementation is overseen by the Program Planning Committee (PPC) which includes representatives of the above mentioned Ministries, USAID, the private sector, and the Ministry of Economy and International Cooperation. The program involves four technical assistance units, each implemented by a separate contractor:

- The Program Management Unit (PMU) coordinates program activities and provides administrative, logistical and financial support to all units. The PMU is implemented by Datex Inc.;

- The Monitoring Verification and Evaluation Unit (MVE) focuses on the monitoring, verification and evaluation of policy reforms. The MVE is implemented by Abt Associates Inc.;

- The Reform Design and Implementation (RDI) Unit provides assistance in designing and implementing reforms. The RDI is implemented by Development Associates Inc. (DAI); and,

- The Food Security Research (FSR) Unit provides medium and long term research on food security. The FSR is implemented by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

b) The MVE

The primary objective of the MVE Unit is to establish and implement a process for monitoring, verifying and reporting on the Government of Egypt's performance in meeting policy benchmarks agreed to in APRP Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). This task is particularly important and sensitive because disbursement of program funds is contingent upon timely achievement of benchmarks. By early July 1997, the MVE had finalized a verification report,[1] focusing on the 62 benchmarks linked to disbursement of tranche I of program funds. A supplemental tranche I report is due on December 31. Tranche II benchmarks will be finalized by

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[1] MVE produced a first draft verification report by early June 1997. The report was reviewed and discussed in great detail within APRP by staff of PMU, RDI and FSR and by selected USAID staff; it went through several revisions before final submission.

August 14 or shortly thereafter and a verification report on these benchmarks will be due on June 30, 1997. The MVE is also responsible for monitoring key policy variables and conducting policy impact evaluations.

The MVE is staffed by four economists, Dr. Gary Ender (Chief of Party), Dr. Morsy Fawzy (Agricultural Policy Analyst), Dr. Adel Moustafa (Agribusiness Specialist) and Dr. John Holtzman (Agribusiness Specialist). Support staff include Daizy Boulos (Administrative Assistant), Yvonne L. Azer (Secretary) and Hisham Amin (Accountant).

II. TASK AND METHODOLOGY

Because the June 30 verification report was produced under considerable time and logistics constraints, very few ongoing verification process systems were put in place. In order to facilitate the process of development of such systems and maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of future verification efforts, the MVE team engaged a consultant to perform an ex post assessment of the verification process leading to production of the June 30 report. Douglas Daniell, from Abt Associates subcontractor Management Systems International (MSI), performed the assessment in Cairo between July 7 and July 23, 1997. This is a report of Mr. Daniell's findings.

To reach his findings, Mr. Daniell employed a methodology involving the following steps:

1. Developing a clear and detailed understand of the assessment task through conversations with MVE Chief of Party Gary Ender and other MVE staff;

2. Creation of an interview protocol to guide interviews and analysis;

3. Interviews with program staff involved in the verification process, key members of the USAID team, and others with significant involvement in the verification process (a list of people interviewed in contained in Annex A);

4. Analysis of interview and document review data resulting in a set of potential recommendations; and,

5. Refinement of these recommendations, based on further discussion with MVE staff and other key informants.

A total of 24 interviews were conducted. Interviewees included the entire MVE staff, professional RDI staff, professional PMU staff, a representative of the German Cooperation (GTZ) and members of the USAID Agriculture and Sector Policy Divisions in the Office of Economic Growth.

Interviewees were asked to describe their role in the verification process, the strengths and weaknesses of the process and how they would like to see the process operating in the future. As potential recommendations emerged from responses to these questions, Mr. Daniell asked additional probing questions to fully understand respondents' views. For the most part, interviewees were frank, honest, thoughtful and accessible.

Analysis of interview results in terms of the number or percentage of respondents expressing a given view, such as "63% of respondents felt that . . . ," would impart a false sense of precision to this report's findings. This is because interviewees had widely variable levels of experience with and understanding of the verification process and because not all interviewees were asked exactly the same questions in the same way. For example, MVE support staff provided valuable insights into the logistics of the verification process but were not in a position to comment on the benchmarks themselves. Other interviewees commented only on the benchmark interpretation process as they had not been involved in verification. Despite these limitations, the interview results represent a nearly comprehensive compilation of the views of the past and future of the verification process from those involved. As such, they provide an essential tool in developing findings and recommendations.

III. MAJOR FINDINGS

1. The June 30 report is comprehensive, clear, accurate and realistic. For each of the 72 individual tranche I benchmark determinations, some involving verification of several different kinds of data, the MVE was able to obtain enough accurate data to effectively judge levels of achievement. This represents a considerable accomplishment by the MVE team.

The quality and comprehensiveness of data varied widely between benchmarks. The nature of the benchmarks themselves also contributed to variations in measurability (see finding number three). These two factors are clearly described for each benchmark, under "Interpretation of benchmark for verification purposes" in the verification report. Most interviewees who were in a position to comment on the verification process as a whole made the point that they felt that the MVE team had done an excellent job under less than ideal circumstances.

2. The report was produced under considerable time and logistics constraints.

Dr. Ender arrived in country in November 1996 and was later joined by Dr. Holtzman, who spent 15 days in Cairo in December 1996 prior to taking up long-term residence in January 1997. They were initially faced with a situation which included two laptop computers, provided by DAI in the U.S., but no network access or printer, limited phone access and the contractual requirement to replace the two Egyptian economists included in the Abt Associates proposal. Bringing the MVE up to speed took some time. A full complement of computers, printer and network linkages was not obtained until March 1997. Phone lines became operational in March and a full complement of support staff was in place by late February. Perhaps the most vexing constraint was the time it took to engage Dr. Moustafa and Dr. Fawzy. Though they were able to provide the MVE with part-time assistance as consultants and worked nearly full-time starting in April, they did not formally become full time MVE staff members until, respectively, June and May.

3. Many of the benchmarks were written in such a way that they were easily subject to varying interpretations. The need to create and negotiate clarity added considerably to the MVE's task.

The tranche one benchmarks were created by the GOE and USAID and finalized in a MOU in September of 1995. There was a very large number of benchmarks of varying degrees of clarity, precision and measurability. Because of this, the MVE's first task was to go through a lengthy process of discussion with USAID and the GOE to create clear and measurable interpretations of benchmarks. Those involved in this process described it as absolutely essential, extremely difficult and very time consuming. These interviewees made a point of strongly recommending development of tranche II benchmarks which are not subject to interpretation. Illustrative comments included "There should not be ambiguity in benchmarks," "We should get definitional consensus beforehand. " and "We should make benchmarks clear, precise and achievable." This is discussed under Issues and Recommendations.

4. Time-staggered start-up, with RDI getting up to speed more quickly than MVE made it difficult for the units, particularly RDI and MVE, to coordinate interview schedules and studies, resulting in “interviewee fatigue.” In addition, the invaluable contributions to the verification process made by the Cotton Sector Promotion Program (CSPP) study conducted by GTZ consultant Ron Krenz were limited by the CSPP’s shorter timeline.

The RDI team began key informant interviews in December of 1996 while the MVE, due to logistics and staffing constraints (see finding number two) and the need to interpret benchmarks (see finding number three), began interviews in mid-March 1997. The result was a situation where some high-level key informants were resistant to being interviewed several times on similar topics by representatives of the APRP and other donors. In one instance, the Chairman of a major textile holding company refused further interviews and forbade the managing directors of his affiliated companies from granting interviews, resulting in significant data gaps in some of the MVE’s cotton sector analyses.

5. The logistics of the verification process were handled quite capably.

The MVE team, together for only a short time, went through a complex process of hiring and supervising local consultants, working with and through local subcontractor Environmental Quality International (EQI), supervising studies and surveys, writing analyses and producing the verification report. Overall, these tasks were carried out well. Experience has led those involved to suggest some ways to make the process more efficient (discussed under Issues and Recommendations).

6. The MVE has a good relationship with the other APRP Units, with USAID and with other donors, particularly GTZ.

Establishment and maintenance of good working relations were key to the production of the June 30 report. The PMU, RDI and Mission technical staff all assisted MVE in important ways. The collaboration with GTZ consultant Ron Krenz, a cotton expert[2] with a wealth of Egypt experience, was particularly fortuitous. MVE staff participated in many of the interviews that Krenz conducted as part of the CSPP cotton market liberalization study and to add questions to the study’s formal questionnaires. The results of this collaboration were essential to verification of many of the cotton sector benchmarks. Some interviewees, particularly in RDI, described their relationship with MVE as “understandably one way” because of time constraints on production of the verification report. This is discussed under Issues and Recommendations.

7. The MVE’s most important initial task was verification. The MVE is also expected to monitor key policy variables and conduct impact analyses and evaluations. To date, the demands of the verification process have precluded monitoring and evaluation activities.

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[2] Ron Krenz worked on monitoring and verification of the agricultural policy reform process under the Agricultural Production and Credit Project (APCP) for six years (1990-96).

As the verification process becomes routinized, with a limited sets of clear and precise benchmarks, the MVE will begin to focus on monitoring and evaluation. Some discussion of these processes is included under Issues and Recommendations

IV. ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This section provides a discussion of six issues identified as key to maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of the MVE verification and monitoring processes. They are:

1. Benchmark development;

2. Verification Tracking;

3. Monitoring of Intermediate Variables;

4. Agricultural Policy Data Collection and Storage;

5. Coordination of Interviews and Studies; and,

6. Logistics of the Verification Process.

All of these issues are related. It is particularly important to understand the relationships between verification tracking, monitoring and data collection/storage. For purposes of organization and clarity, these three issues are discussed separately. However, the verification tracking and monitoring processes will be very similar and both will rely heavily on data collected and stored by the different units of the APRP. Many decisions about what kinds of data to collect will be based on the demands of the monitoring and verification processes. The nature and extent of available data will, in turn, significantly affect the kinds of variables it is decided to track and monitor.

1. Issue: Benchmark Development

The most important determinant of the time and effort required for the verification process is the number and nature of the benchmarks to be verified. As is noted above, those involved in the tranche I benchmark interpretation process strongly recommend that the tranche II benchmarks be clear, precise, measurable and either not subject to interpretation or with interpretation included in the benchmark MOU between the GOE and USAID. To date, these laudable recommendations are not fully reflected in the draft tranche II benchmarks.

1.1 Discussion

The sheer volume of verification that would be required by the draft benchmarks is daunting and perhaps unrealistic. At present, the draft benchmarks include (1) some 77 "verification triggers" (individual criteria to be verified) when compound "triggers" are restated separately.

The verification process is particularly problematic when benchmarks are stated in terms of "Doing what is necessary" for accomplishment. In these instances, because the process of accomplishment is not defined, it is difficult for the MVE to decide what to monitor or even, in some cases, what constitutes accomplishment. For example, suggested tranche II benchmark A-1 (July 16 draft) is “Ministry of Trade and Supply will take whatever measures are necessary to ensure that henceforth private sector traders are allowed to export cotton lint without minimum export price restrictions and without quantity restrictions . . . .” Thus formulated, this benchmark would be almost impossible to verify because achievement would be a function of accomplishment of measures which are not defined, rather than actual policy changes. For effective verification, this benchmark might be restated as two benchmarks, “Minimum export prices for cotton lint abolished by ____ (date)” and “Export quantity restrictions for cotton lint abolished by _____ (date).”

Another important issue is that of linkages between benchmarks and objectives. The logic of APRP benchmarks is that their accomplishment will lead to achievement of specific policy reform objectives. When linkages between benchmarks and objectives are clearly stated, measurement issues inherent in unclear or seemingly unnecessary benchmarks become less problematic because objectives can be used as a reference point. The question of benchmark accomplishment becomes a question of whether or not significant progress has been made towards achievement of an objective. For example, imagine a series of benchmarks documenting steps in the process of abolishing export quotas for cotton. If it is agreed that abolition of quotas is the reference objective and export quotas are abolished but some of the benchmarks are not accomplished, the reference objective allows us to conclude that the benchmarks have been fully met. If, however, there is no reference objective for the process benchmarks, their non-accomplishment becomes grounds for non-disbursement.

Good benchmarks should define achievement in terms of quality (how good achievement needs to be), quantity (how much achievement is expected) and time (by when achievement is anticipated) in a clear and unambiguous manner. The measurability litmus test for a good benchmark is whether its level of achievement, in terms of quality, quantity and time, would be agreed upon by a proponent and a sceptic. By these standards, at least half of the draft benchmark “verification triggers” need revision. All are clear in terms of time (June 30), but many are lacking in terms of the precision of quality and quantity measures. If unrectified, the lack of precision in these “verification triggers” will result in the kind of difficult and never ending interpretation that made the tranche I verification process so onerous. It is important to note here that a few benchmarks are and will continue to be intentionally vague because of the difficulty and sensitivity of the issues which the GOE and USAID are committed to addressing.

1.2 Recommendation

1. The tranche II benchmarks will be finalized by August 14 or shortly thereafter. The MVE has been playing an aggressive and proactive role to assure the clarity, precision and measurability of the tranche II benchmarks. This should continue and imprecise benchmarks, with the exception of those few of extreme political sensitivity, should not become part of the upcoming MOU.

2. Each benchmark contained in the MOU should be identified with a specific objective or set

of objectives from the objectives column in the APRP policy matrix. This will allow for these objectives to serve as reference points in matters of interpretation.

2. Issue: Verification Tracking

A number of interviewees suggested that, in the future, the MVE engage in verification tracking, involving ongoing monitoring of progress towards achievement of benchmark, and potentially provide quarterly or biannual progress updates. Potential advantages cited included the following possibilities:

a) Progress updates could be a management tool. Notably, dissemination of updates might put managers, implementors and policy makers in a position to take informed corrective action in instances where progress was not being made;

b) USAID could potentially use updates for more frequent disbursement of tranche funds, resulting in accelerated accomplishment of policy objectives. USAID interviewees expressed an interest in linking tranche disbursements to achievement of benchmarks at the time of their achievement, rather than doing all disbursement following June 30 reports; and,

c) Verification tracking might make production of the June 30 report a much less onerous and time consuming task. The June 30 report would simply be a more detailed quarterly or biannual report produced with data from ongoing contacts and a few special studies, rather than a massive yearly data collection and analysis effort.

2.1 ***Discussion***

A very important factor to be taken into consideration is the level of effort required to produce biannual or quarterly updates on a formal or informal basis. The time involved might preclude needed attention to monitoring and evaluation activities.

Of the potential advantages cited above, the most significant would probably the use of verification tracking as a management tool for more effective benchmark achievement and, ultimately, better development.

The efficiency gains of verification tracking might be more illusory than real, particularly if quarterly or biannual reports were required. Data is never free. Data collection always has a cost, if only in time. Creation of each separate quarterly or biannual reports would be a major task and the fact that the same task had been undertaken six months or three months earlier, rather than twelve months, would potentially have only marginal impact on the effort required. For benchmarks requiring special studies for verification, frequent repetition of these studies might be entirely unrealistic.

2.2 ***Recommendation***

The MVE should engage in systematic verification tracking for all benchmarks where frequent tracking is made feasible by data availability. Though the MVE should not be required to submit quarterly or biannual verification reports, a system for brief reporting on progress of benchmarks to managers and other key decision makers should be put in place. Benchmarks which require special studies or rely on secondary databases which are updated only annually should be verified on an annual basis. A suggested template for verification tracking, which could be used for updates on progress towards achievement of benchmarks, is provided on page 10.

Identification of data availability for verification tracking should be closely linked to the process of development of integrated data collection and storage. As data needed for tracking are identified, these data should be included in the list of potential data to be to be collected by the APRP. The availability, quality and cost of these data should then be identified.

3. Issue: Monitoring

As part of the integrated processes of verification tracking, data collection and monitoring, the MVE will soon design and begin inplementing its monitoring activities.

3.1 Discussion

The MVE's terms of reference include three kinds of activities: benchmark verification, monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring activities are expected to focus on intermediate variables, such as unemployment and private sector participation, which are indicative of the immediate or short term effects of policy reforms. Evaluation activities are expected to focus on the longer-term impact of reforms or sets of reforms.

Putting in place a monitoring system will involve identification of key intermediate variables, as well as significant data collection, entry, analysis and dissemination. Decisions about which variables to monitor will affect the way data systems are developed and, in some instances, the way the verification process is carried out. Where there is overlap between the verification and monitoring process, it will make sense to integrate data collection and analysis.

There will be level of effort issues associated with development of the monitoring process. Given the evaluation, verification tracking and reporting demands on the MVE, it will be important that the data set to be monitored be manageable and realistic in terms of level of effort. Relevance and data availability will be key criteria in the selection of variables.

3.2 Recommendations

Particularly as there will be significant synergy between the verification, data collection and monitoring processes, it is important that the MVE begin to develop its monitoring system.

In close collaboration with its policy reform partners, particularly RDI, the MVE should identify key intermediate results of the policy reform process. MVE should then identify a small, carefully chosen set of indicators or policy variables which will provide accurate direct or proxy indices of the short-term effects of policy reforms. The next step for MVE should be development of a system for ongoing monitoring of these variables, which may involve extensive RDI participation. The choice of intermediate variables should be closely linked to development of the data collection system. Choosing variables for which data is not available, is of unacceptable quality, or for which the cost of collection is too high will be counterproductive.

Particularly if the benchmark development process is indicative of APRP norms, it can not be overemphasized that the number of policy variables to be monitored should be extremely limited. This will allow for effective and accurate monitoring without overtaxing MVE and RDI staff.

DRAFT BENCHMARK VERIFICATION TRACKING UPDATE MATRIX

Benchmark	Status	Implementation Responsibility	Confidence in Findings	Completed Actions	Actions in Progress	Future Actions	Determination Timing	Comments

Key:
Benchmark = Benchmark identification number and brief description
Status = Data Unavailable/Completed/Partially Completed/No Progress
Implementation Responsibility = Organization(s) responsible for benchmark accomplishment
Confidence in Findings = High/Medium/Low
Completed Actions = What has been done to accomplish benchmark
Actions in Progress = What is being done to accomplish benchmark
Future Actions = What remains to be done to accomplish benchmark
Determination Timing = Approximate dates when future determinations will be made

4. Issue: Agricultural Policy Data Collection and Storage

The APRP has collected and will continue to collect a great deal of information on agriculture and agricultural policy. Many of these data do and will reflect the needs of the monitoring and verification tracking processes. Such data includes or will include numerical sector data, numerical commodity data, numerical data from specific studies, production tables, consumption tables. the texts of laws and decrees, newspaper and journal articles, and hard copies of studies and other documents. To date, collection and storage of these data has been done on a somewhat ad-hoc basis with individual Units and staff members collecting and storing data for their own use. As APRP data collection and storage expands over time, ad-hoc storage and retrieval will become increasingly inefficient. It would seem appropriate to develop program-wide systems for data collection, entry and retrieval.

4.1 Discussion

The issue of information flows is closely linked to that of coordination. A number of interviewees described how information flows to date have been mostly one way with RDI and, to a more limited extent, the PMU providing information to assist in the verification process without being provided easy access to information from the ongoing verification process. Such information was seen as potentially useful for policy formulation and analysis. Almost universally, these interviewees made the point that the one-way information flows were entirely understandable in light of the urgency of the verification process. Their concern was for effective future information exchange.

More effective and comprehensive availability and exchange of data will be essential to the development of efficient monitoring and verification tracking systems. Most APRP staff interviewed expressed enthusiasm for more comprehensive and systematic information exchange. However, there is a danger that, without establishment of agreed upon information systems, the different APRP units will continue to develop and maintain independent, overlapping data bases in instances where central repositories would be more efficient. It is also important to recognize that information in itself has no intrinsic value. It is the use to which information is put that gives it importance. Valuable time should not be spent in entering or exchanging data which has no particular use.

4.2 Recommendations

The APRP should develop a unified system for collection, entry and retrieval of key agricultural policy data. To develop this system, the following process is suggested:

(1) Professional and appropriate support staff of each unit should individually list key agriculture policy data sets which would help them work more efficiently and effectively;

(2) The heads of each unit or their designees should create an integrated document out of these lists;

(3) These documents should serve as the basis for discussion and negotiation between the Units. Consensus should be reached on what data is really important, who should collect and record it, and how and where it should be stored;

(4) This agreement should be formalized in a written document; and,

(5) The tasks in the agreement should be integrated into each Unit's workplan and the workplans of individuals within the units.

Examples of what might come out of this process include:

1. A library in which hard copies of all APRP studies and the texts of laws and decrees are indexed and stored. It might also be appropriate to keep electronic copies of these reports in an easily accessed database;

2. Frequently updated electronic and hardcopy files containing the texts or translations of newspaper and studies dealing with key agricultural policy issues. This might be the responsibility of the PMU; and,

3. Integrated and easily accessible electronic databases containing sectoral and commodity specific (cotton, rice etc.) numerical data on production, marketing exports, etc. Particularly helpful in developing these data sets will be Mohamed Omran's database, which contains supply tables, consumption tables and considerable additional agricultural data. Responsibility for developing and updating databases might be shared between RDI and MVE.

Experience suggests that when such systems are up and running, they receive extensive use and their maintenance becomes a priority as staff recognize the gains in efficiency and effectiveness that come from easy access to key data. Experience also suggests that, particularly with the kinds of complex data sets which are involved in the APRP, it is sometimes unrealistic to expect staff to put the data systems in place themselves. They often do not have the time or the expertise to do a good job of it. It is therefore <u>strongly recommended</u> that, once the data needs have been identified and agreed upon, the APRP either identify competent staff to develop the systems <u>and provide them with the time and support needed</u> or engage a data systems expert to:

1. Design customized systems which respond to the needs identified;

2. In conjunction with APRP staff, collect and enter data into the systems; and,

3. Train support and professional staff to use and update the systems.

The numerical and text data sets should be set up so that searches can be performed using key words or time periods.

To reiterate a point made earlier, information is never free. It will therefore be very important that these systems contain only a carefully chosen and manageable set of key data. Otherwise, the systems will not work because staff will not have the time or the willingness to update them. In general, people tend to make sure that those data bases which are used most frequently are updated. The corollary is also true. When a given data set is used infrequently or not at all, keeping it up to date becomes problematic.

For this process to be effective, it is absolutely essential that all personnel involved possess the Lotus Notes (TAMIS), WordPerfect, E-Mail and Microsoft Excel skills to be able to engage in efficient information exchange. This is not to suggest, for example, that the TAMIS be the locus of most information exchange. This is to suggest that the software competencies of key personnel not artificially limit such exchange.

For the MVE, it is strongly recommended that all professional and office support staff receive detailed training in Lotus Notes. It will probably be advisable that this training be provided by RDI. Because the MVE staff have widely varying levels of competence in WordPerfect and Excel, formal training in these software applications should be provided to those whose skills need improvement.

5. Issue: Coordination of Interviews and Studies

As noted earlier (Findings two and four) coordination between MVE, RDI and the PMU was limited by time and staffing constraints during the tranche I verification process. Improvements in coordination of activities would potentially result in significant gains in efficiency and effectiveness for the MVE and the APRP as a whole.

5.1 Discussion

The issue of coordination was described by interviewees as one of developing process such that representatives of the APRP program present a well informed and united front to the world beyond the 15th floor. It was suggested that, for this to happen, it will be important for each unit to be aware of what other units are planning, not just in general terms but also in terms of the specifics of individuals to be contacted and areas to be covered. It will also seen to be important that all concerned APRP staff have easy access to records of prior contacts with those individuals to be interviewed and the results of those interviews. Finally, it was thought that joint interviews and/or joint studies should be considered whenever appropriate. PMU staff indicated that they expected that much of the burden of coordination would and should fall on the PMU. More systematic coordination was seen as a logical next step in the ongoing program development process.

5.2 Recommendations

The following should become APRP norms:

a) Each interview with an information source should be conducted with full knowledge of the content and results of earlier interviews with that individual;

b) All APRP staff should have easy and timely access to interview schedules such that they can, if they wish, discuss the interview with the interviewer beforehand. In the case of ad hoc interviews, interviewers should make every effort to inform other potentially interested APRP staff beforehand; and,

c) For all planned studies, proposed timing and terms of reference or synopses of objectives and processes should be made easily accessible to APRP staff.

To institutionalize these norms it is suggested that:

a) A detailed list of upcoming interviews and studies be briefly presented by each Unit at the Sunday APRP meetings, and that a recorder from the PMU consolidate these lists, make them available through Lotus Notes and post hard copies on a bulletin board in a central place, perhaps in the fax/server room on the 15th floor or on the large bulletin board in the hallway outside the PMU. An alternative would be for the PMU to develop an integrated calender from information provided by each Unit and make the calender available in hardcopy and electronically;

b) Other units, notably the MVE, adopt the RDI practice of writing up interview notes within two days of interview and entering these notes into Lotus Notes to facilitate program-wide access. If staff schedules make this unrealistic, a brief record of each interview should be entered so that interested parties can, if necessary, contact the interviewer directly;

c) All Units enter terms of reference or synopses of objectives and processes for proposed studies into Lotus Notes; and,

d) A PMU recorder be charged with taking minutes of the Sunday APRP meetings and timely distribution of these minutes to all units.

6. Issue: The Logistics of the Verification Process

Though the logistics of the verification process were handled competently and effectively, there are specific improvements that can be made to increase efficiency.

6.1 Discussion

These improvements are listed as recommendations.

6.2 Recommendations

a) Individual consultant files are being established. These files should contain resumes, biodata forms and other appropriate documents. Evaluation forms describing what the consultant has done for the MVE and her/his strengths and weaknesses should be completed for each consultant and, because of their sensitivity, stored separately. This will allow for quick and easy assessment of the appropriateness of consultants for tasks. The evaluation form developed by Dr. Ender is comprehensive.

b) To the extent possible, the reporting formats for consultants working on specific benchmarks should be standardized such that their reports can be easily integrated into verification reports. In addition to text formats, standardization of table formats and lists of people contacted will result in considerable time savings.

c) As part of the verification process, all decrees and other supporting documentation should be filed by commodity and perhaps cross-referenced by policy area. This would avoid any confusion about linkages between benchmarks and supporting material.

d) The relationship between support and professional staff in the MVE is collegial and respectful. However, in order for the Administrative Assistant and the Secretary to plan their time efficiently, particularly during the verification process, professional staff should inform them, each week, of anticipated administrative support needs for the upcoming week. This will be particularly important in the case of tasks requiring considerable time.

e) As mentioned above, in order to facilitate inter-office communication and document production, both the professional and support staff should receive formal and detailed training in Lotus Notes, and Microsoft Excel. Some additional training in WordPerfect may also be appropriate.

ANNEX A: PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

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MVE - ABT

1. Gary Ender, Chief of Party
2. Morsy Fawzy, Agricultural Policy Analyst
3. John Holtzman, Agribusiness Specialist
4. Adel Moustafa, Agribusiness Specialist
5. Daizy Boulos, Administrative Assistant
6. Yvonne L. Azer, Secretary
7. Hisham Amin, Accountant

RDI - DAI

1. Max Goldensohn, Chief of Party
2. Jane Gleason, Resource Economics Specialist
3. Kamel Nasser, Institutional Analyst
4. Kenneth Swanberg, Agribusiness/Privatization Specialist
5. Edgar Ariza-Nino, Agribusiness/Marketing Specialist
6. Fatma Khattab, Privatization Specialist

PMU - DATEX

1. Mahmoud Nour, Program Coordinator
2. George Kondos, Program Administrator
3. Randall Parks, Project Administrator

CSPP - GTZ

1. Thomas Selzer, Agricultural Economist

USAID

1. Tom Olson, Chief, Agricultural Policy Division
2. Ali Kamel, Agricultural Economist, Agricultural Policy Division
3. Mohammed Omran, Agricultural Economist, Agricultural Policy Division
4. Mahmoud Mabrouk, Water Engineer, Office of Irrigation
5. Craig Anderson, Agricultural Policy Division
6. Paul Mulligan, Program Economist, Sector Policy Division
7. Marie Farid, Economic Specalist, Sector Policy Division

ANNEX B: TERMS OF REFERENCE

ANNEX B: TERMS OF REFERENCE
Monitoring & Verification Specialist

Background.

The MVE Unit has produced a comprehensive draft Verification Report for the first tranche of APRP. This Report will continue to be revised during June, 1997. Approximately one-third of the benchmarks will not have been accomplished. Hence, MVE will produce a second Tranche I verification report (perhaps a supplement) by late December, 1997.

MVE had only three months to do the verification field work and interviews. In the future, verification reports will be produced under less duress, and it will be possible to plan for the implementation of field surveys, interviews, site visits and other verification activities in a more orderly manner. Nevertheless, the MVE Unit thinks that it would be valuable to do an ex post internal assessment of the verification process developed and followed in the first half of CY 1997. To this end, MVE requests assistance from an expatriate monitoring and verification process specialist.

Scope of Work.

The consultant will examine three aspects of the M&V process. The first will be those activities or tasks which are integral to the process of M&V. The second concerns how MVE coordinates or interacts with other APRP units, USAID and the MALR. The third concerns internal MVE management and standard operating procedures. Subtasks under each of these categories are listed below.

M&V Process and Coordination with Other Project Partners:

- creating, maintaining and updating files (hard & soft copies)

- getting interview notes done on a more timely basis: first cuts (outline of key points) vs. detailed summaries, rapid dissemination/review, putting final drafts in Lotus Notes?, systematization of the process.

- keeping score on benchmark accomplishment and giving PMU an earlier heads up (in response to PMU & USAID pressure to do so)?? (dilemma of trying to reach an early determination when all the facts may not be in; how much independence is enough?).

- following the press and flagging/translating/disseminating key articles to staff: who will do this? How should it be best coordinated with PMU and RDI?

- maintaining a "library" and data base, whether real or virtual: does MVE need a separate library? Coordination with RDI, FSR & PMU. How do "new" and important papers, articles, etc. get logged so that MVE staff know that (and where) they are available?

- overall coordination/communication with other units: interview heads of units and selected others (get Egyptian perspective from RDI as well).
- Project coordinators' perceptions of the verification process and future recommendations (interview PMU Coordinator Mahmoud Nour).

- USAID perceptions of the verification process and future recommendations (interview key USAID staff).

- monitoring (tracking of policy developments and intermediate variables) vs. verification: tasks, coordination

- better procedures for making contact with key informants to be interviewed (especially outside of Cairo): Who does this? Do we need to go through PMU or operate independently?

Internal Project Management:

- allocating the verification work: manageable workloads, overlapping responsibilities, coordination, short-term consultant supervision responsibilities. This will involve interviewing each MVE staffer to get a sense of whether they feel their roles are well-defined, manageable, clear.

- roles of MVE Unit staff: are responsibilities allocated along lines of comparative advantage? Or is further optimization (modification/definition of roles) required?

- specific assessment of management/logistics of producer survey implementation.

- report writing format: strengths and weaknesses; how much information should go into Annexes (our write-ups are highly variable in length and detail, partly reflecting the content/complexity of issues, but also reflecting personal writing/analytical styles).

Consultancy Assignment.

MVE requires the services of one expatriate M&V specialist during the month of July 1997. The LOE will be allocated as follows:

- review background material, Verification Plan and Verification Report, and selected samples of interview notes and other material: 3 days in U.S.

- intl. travel: 2 days

- interviews, discussions, write-up of findings at APRP, USAID: two weeks

The deliverable will be a brief written report, disseminated to MVE, other APRP units, and USAID. The consultant will give an informal presentation of key findings to MVE and interested other APRP staff. The consultant will debrief USAID.

No travel outside Cairo is anticipated. The consultant needs to bring a laptop computer. Office space is limited to the "server/fax room" in the PMU. Most interviews can be conducted on the APRP premises.

The consultant is authorized to work a six-day week in Cairo.