

## Chapter 6 Assessment of Governance and Management

### 6.1 The Strategy as a Whole

- 6.1.1 DFID's Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy, 1995 - 2005 represented a major change in the commissioning and management of natural resources research. For the first time, a research agenda was specified which prioritised researchable problems on the basis of a needs assessment and focused on the achievement of research outputs which were likely to have an impact on sustainable natural resource-based production. Logframe methodology was used to make clear linkages between purpose, outputs and activities (Chapter 3). This contrasted sharply with the previous arrangements where the majority of DFID-funded natural resources research was based on long-term relationships with a limited number of institutions and funding was effectively institutional core funding or allocated to support what has been described as 'curiosity-driven' research. Several stakeholders characterised the RNRRS today as the 'best structured' and 'most accessible' of DFID's major research programmes.
- 6.1.2 The decision to contract out programme management to 11 (now 10) separate PMs also represented an important innovation, as did the requirement that they should award research contracts on a competitive basis. This mirrored changes which had been taking place throughout the public services in the UK and many other countries, and was intended both to reduce administrative costs to DFID, and to demonstrably obtain good value for money through competition.
- 6.1.3 Although the framework therefore represented a major step forward, it was not perfect. With hindsight it is possible to be critical. Although priorities were determined as a result of a consultative process, the strategy was still heavily 'supply led' with little scope for consultation with potential beneficiaries in the target countries<sup>24</sup>.
- 6.1.4 The strategy consisted of a very large number of distinct research areas, subdivided into 11 (now 10) programmes oriented towards commodities or farming systems. Although this provided a much more coherent framework than before, and represented best practice at the time, it is clear that, along with the competitive process and the 'level playing field' policy, it created potential for fragmentation in implementation, encouraging research managers and researchers towards a somewhat piecemeal 'shopping list', containing many small projects. The consequences of this, in terms of diseconomies of scale, and a lack of thematic continuity, momentum and synergy, became apparent in the early years of implementation and much of the subsequent evolution of the strategy has been aimed at overcoming these shortcomings.
- 6.1.5 The competitive funding mechanism has also demonstrated some drawbacks over time. Project-by-project contracting does little to facilitate the continuity or sustainability of research activities, and the field studies carried out as part of this evaluation demonstrated how rapidly institutional memory decays if there are no follow-on activities when projects are completed. Similarly, project-by-project funding tends to establish pragmatic 'contractor' relationships rather than broad-based collaborations, and this militates against the establishment of longer-term linkages between researchers and research institutions.
- 6.1.6 Future competitive models must learn from programme managers' experiences and efforts to correct the potential for fragmentation, by using a variety of methods such as the use of restricted calls for continuation projects as described in 6.5 below. The award of larger and longer duration projects, or even the award of 'sub-programmes' consisting of a number of linked projects should also be considered. At the strategic level, careful definition of the shortlist of research priorities drawn from the Research Funding Framework, and determined through transparent processes (as described elsewhere in this report) should allow greater harmony and synergy between projects and programmes.

---

<sup>24</sup> Note that this comment applies to priority setting for the **strategy** as a whole. It is accepted that programme managers were directed to demonstrate evidence of demand led prioritisation within each individual programme.

- 6.1.7 The RNRRS was not conceived in a vacuum. DFID was already an important funder and implementer of many natural resources research activities in a number of UK institutions. Large programmes for integrated pest management, crop post harvest and forestry had been supported for quite some time, as had fisheries and plant science research. Strong relationships existed with some UK institutions, notably the Natural Resources Institute (NRI) and a few universities with a track record in natural science in developing countries. It was never intended that all of this work should be brought to an abrupt halt, and therefore some of it featured as a legacy in the RNRRS framework.
- 6.1.8 One of the consequences of this is that the relative size of the individual programmes was distorted at the outset. This pattern has been maintained and it is not immediately apparent how this correlates with modern perceptions of overall priority research needs. The Core Team has been unable to identify the formal procedures that led to the decision to have the original 11 research programmes, and e.g. the logic of having (at the time of RNRRS inception) 4 fisheries programmes, 1 forestry and 6 agriculture-related programmes. Nor has the Core Team been able to find the formal documentation on the original rationale for the relative size of each programme (Table 1).
- 6.1.9 At the extremes, the CPP accounts for approximately 25% of the total RNRRS budget, while the three fisheries programmes together account for only 7.5%. CPHP, NRSP, and FRP each account for approximately 15% of the total. LPP, AHP and PSP have been allocated less than 10% each. This variation is an important causal factor for the differences which have emerged as the programmes have evolved. Funds made available clearly have strong influence on the type of projects undertaken, their duration and scope.
- 6.1.10 On the one hand, large programmes may benefit from economies of scale, which permit them to establish more effective programme management arrangements, and they also have more programme development funds available to them than smaller programmes. On the other hand, smaller programmes are more ‘manageable’, and this may manifest itself in closer supportive relationships between PMs and project teams, and in increased responsiveness and flexibility. For the future, strategic allocation of resources between thematic or other categories of research must clearly follow from and be based on needs assessment and not on a historical basis.
- 6.1.11 Different starting points, particularly in relation to possible developing-country influence on the design of the strategy and relative size of programmes, could well have yielded different outcomes, including the balance between single and multiple discipline research activities in the programmes and projects, and between natural sciences and social sciences.
- 6.1.12 As described in Chapter 1, the Strategy was reviewed and adjusted in 1998 to align it more closely with the International Development Targets and with DFID’s approach to poverty reduction. It has also evolved in more subtle ways. An increasing focus on dissemination and uptake promotion activities; emphasis on demonstration of demand and participatory processes, and the acknowledgement that capacity building is an important part of the research management process, all reflect DFID’s response to new notions of good practice for impact on poverty and sustainability of outcomes.
- 6.1.13 Policy and structural changes in DFID, particularly the evolution from natural resources to livelihoods and budgets support approaches, and replacing the natural resources specialist cadres with the livelihoods cadre, have also impacted on the programme strategy. This has manifested as pressure for increasingly integrated and multidisciplinary research activities in which the technical, social, institutional and economic dimensions of researchable problems are addressed simultaneously. PMs have responded well to this challenge, and recent generations of projects display these characteristics.
- 6.1.14 DFID’s wider engagement with the strategy has also evolved over time. The initial research priorities identified in the RNRRS derived from consultations with DFID’s country advisers, indicating the expectation, at least at the outset, that they would be important stakeholders in the strategy and its outputs. PMs’ original terms of reference also required them to ‘take into consideration the views of “... relevant DFID country programme managers, natural resources and livelihoods advisers; and to ‘establish and maintain liaison with DFID natural resources and livelihoods advisers and with field managers...’.’

6.1.15 DFID would no longer describe itself as a primary client for the outputs of the research programmes, and this has been so for some time as DFID has reoriented itself in various ways. Working relationships with the development programmes on the ground are now extremely limited, which is a source of considerable frustration to PMs, who perceive this as a lost opportunity to build momentum for uptake – particularly when they are exhorted to emphasise this. Equally, some stakeholders suggested that the reduced general engagement of the central departments was a contributing factor to reducing some dimensions of oversight, as discussed below.

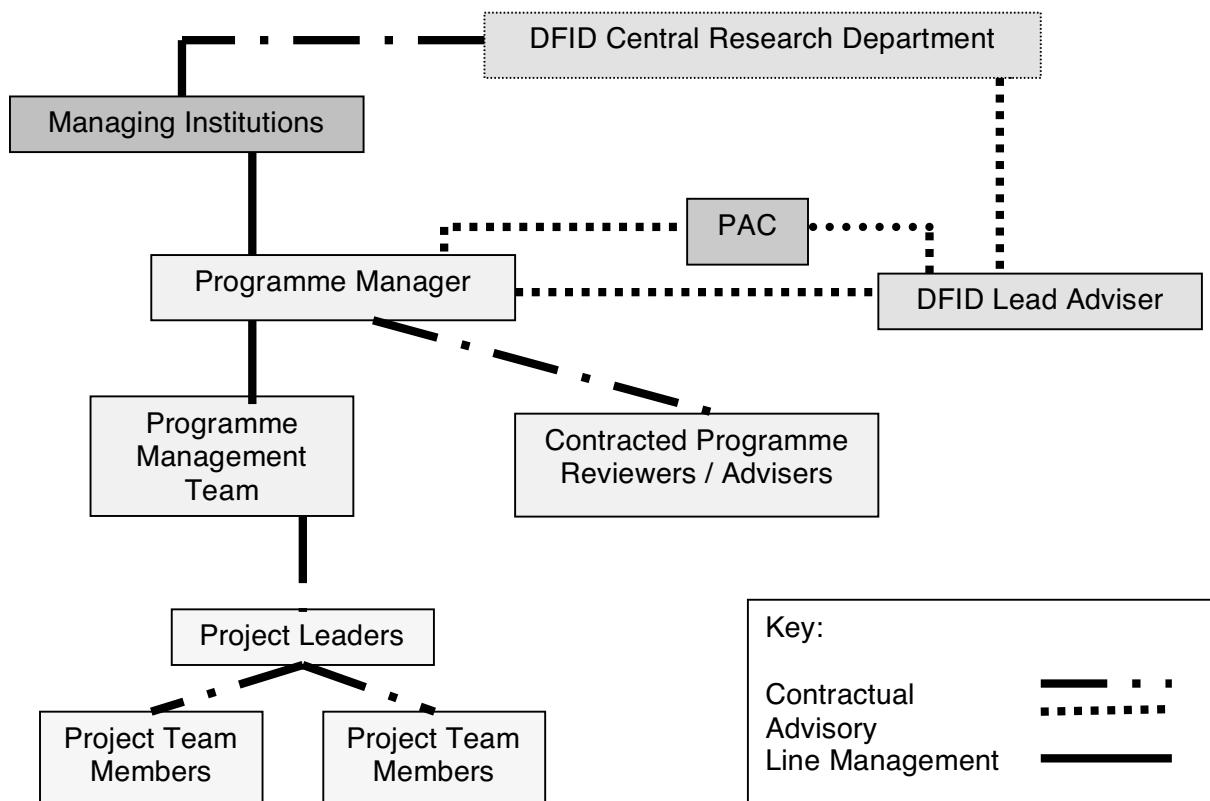
## 6.2 Strategy and Programme Management

### Structure, Roles and Relationships

6.2.1 The management framework for the RNRSS comprised a number of contracted PMs, each responsible for delivering a specific element. At the outset, one of the strategy’s programmes, dealing with natural resources systems, was retained for in-house management. A Systems Management Office was established to oversee this, and was also envisaged as providing oversight of and linkage between the contracted-out elements. The NRSP was subsequently contracted out and the Systems Management Office was wound up, leaving a small DFID team (including a dedicated post of Dissemination Coordinator) to retain oversight and maintain communications across the strategy.

6.2.2 Figure 4 below summarises the main elements of the programme management structure and the nature of the relationships between these.

**Figure 4 Programme Management Structure**



<sup>25</sup> Towards livelihoods rather than technical natural resources disciplines, towards autonomous country programmes, towards programmatic and budget support rather than project approaches etc.

- 6.2.3 The role of the PM is laid out explicitly in contractual terms of reference, and further detail is implied in the programme management performance indicators, which are used to assess their performance. PMs are responsible for delivery of the outputs of their programme Logframe, including programme development, project cycle management, dissemination and promotion, monitoring and reporting on performance, and administrative and financial management. The terms of reference make it clear that the PM is contractually accountable to DFID through his/her managing institution for the achievement of these tasks. S/he is advised by a Programme Advisory Committee, the terms of reference for which include providing advice on the strategic direction of the programme, programme structure, project selection, project monitoring and independent programme reviews. The DFID Lead Adviser has a dual role: providing advice to the PM directly and through membership of the PAC; and advising DFID's Central Research Department on the PM's performance through evaluation of the Annual Report (see below).
- 6.2.4 Despite the apparent plethora of checks and balances through these various relationships, the PM has considerable autonomy within the contract. PMs interpret their roles in a variety of ways. Some PMs see themselves as essentially providing strategic leadership and operational management (particularly of generic activities such as capacity building, dissemination and promotion): their role is to formulate and obtain approval of programme strategy, and manage the outcomes of a series of research contracts to deliver this. This view is more typical of PMs who are not themselves active researchers, or employed in an active research institution. By contrast, active researchers within active research institutions are more likely to see their role as including 'intellectual prospecting', professional scientific leadership, and direct scientific advice and support to project teams, including direct involvement in undertaking research projects in some cases.
- 6.2.5 While the PAC is an important support mechanism, its advisory role means that its effectiveness is heavily dependent on the PM's willingness to make use of it and agreement as to the role it should play – from a relatively narrow technical focus on approval of proposals and review of outputs, to a much broader strategic perspective. The quality of the PAC performance is also an important determinant of its impact (and unfortunately, some PACs have been problematic on occasion). As a result, some PACs have been more effective in advising and influencing PMs than others. The positional authority of the Lead Adviser as DFID's representative can play a vital role in these interactions. However, advisers have very limited time available for oversight of programmes, and turnover of personnel in recent years has often disrupted advisers' engagement.
- 6.2.6 PAC structures and processes are extremely variable. Two PACs advise more than one programme (livestock and fisheries). PACs vary considerably in size and membership mix, ranging from the very small generalist PAC responsible for LPP and AHP, to the much larger CPP PAC. NRSP has established a steering group to expand its technical expertise in support of its PM and its PAC, and CPHP has used regional advisory committees to contribute to the PAC's deliberations. Although the intention was to rotate membership on a three or four year cycle, some PACs have retained substantially the same members since inception, while others have insisted on changes.

---

<sup>26</sup> For example, not in sympathy with the research model which has evolved in recent years, or with some members misunderstanding their roles□ programme manager.

<sup>27</sup> Some□ in fact no adviser contact at all for lengthy periods.

---

- 6.2.7 Apart from the joint PACs, there are no formal linkages between programmes. PMs have identified opportunities for additional linkages, for example, between crop and fisheries post-harvest, and between livestock production and the post-harvest programmes, but these have not formally been established. Several programmes have made successful efforts to establish joint projects, but these are few in number when considered across the strategy as a whole, and there are neither mechanisms nor incentives to encourage this type of activity under the current structure. One or two RNRRS-wide initiatives have been attempted, for example to revise project proposal and reporting pro-formas, but these have not been completed, and PMs cite lack of clarity as to who has a mandate for coordination across the strategy as part of the cause<sup>28</sup>.
- 6.2.8 Two important informal factors impact on the operations of the RNRRS management structure in practice. Firstly, many of the managing institutions, and the PMs themselves, have a long history of interaction with DFID research programmes prior to the RNRRS. They are familiar with DFID's and each other's ways of working, and generally have strong and open lines of personal communication. These undoubtedly facilitate management processes and compensate for any structural limitations. Secondly, the fact that Natural Resources International Ltd (NRIL) holds the management contracts for five of the programmes, and that the programme management teams are co-located means that these PMs have additional opportunities for sharing and synergy: actively sharing administrative and support staff, and tapping into shared expertise for, for example, information management and communications.
- 6.2.9 An unusual feature of the structure is the absence of a general governance body, such as an RNRRS-level Steering Committee. While this is not strictly required since each of the PMs' contracts are managed separately, it means that there is no dedicated structure responsible for providing guidance and maintaining oversight of strategy-wide performance of the strategy, and no forum for strategy-wide representation of stakeholders<sup>29</sup>. Given the scope and scale of investment represented by the RNRRS, and DFID's preference for stakeholder participation in transparent governance mechanisms in its development programme, this omission is surprising. In the early years of the strategy, DFID's Research Strategy Monitoring Panel provided an oversight mechanism (albeit comprised of DFID personnel) but the role of this panel had become attenuated (for example, it no longer managed programme reviews, or interacted directly with PMs) and it was disbanded at the end of 2002. Since then, each Lead Adviser effectively works in isolation with his/her programme. Only the small core Central Research Department team is able to have any meaningful overview across programmes.

### **RNRRS-wide Systems and Processes**

- 6.2.10 As is to be expected with a series of independent contractual relationships, there are few RNRRS-wide management systems and processes. Effectively the control of the programmes relies on contractual compliance with the PMs' terms of reference and agreed Logframes<sup>30</sup>. The initial retention of the natural resources systems programme in-house and creation of the Systems Management Office and the DFID Research Strategy Monitoring Panel suggests that DFID initially intended that there would be fairly active coordination across the strategy. However these arrangements changed with contracting out of the NRSP, closure of the Systems Management Office, and disbandment of the Panel. It is possible to view this from two different perspectives: on the one hand, this can be considered as a logical decision taken when early experience demonstrated the PMs did not require close oversight<sup>31</sup>; on the other hand, some of those consulted expressed the view that this was essentially a pragmatic response to changing internal priorities and resource constraints.

---

<sup>28</sup> The evaluation team found that some confusion exists on this point, with some stakeholders asserting that NRSP still has a role to play in this respect, but this was by no means a common view.

<sup>29</sup> The PACs are also not designed to provide stakeholder representation, and in fact, with the notable exception of CPHP, PAC members are almost entirely drawn from UK institutions.

<sup>30</sup> Targets and milestones are agreed annually in addition to these and are incorporated and reported upon in annual reports.

<sup>31</sup> Some of those consulted also expressed the view that the Systems Management Office was an 'experiment' which had not yielded the benefits expected and so was terminated.

- 6.2.11 At various times, significant efforts have gone into data and knowledge management, activities, including the development of an RNRRS-wide project database (NARSIS) (although this refers only to projects which have a designated 'R' number, and therefore does not track the numerous other activities undertaken by programmes); the production of a newsletter (now ceased), the website, and the 'Handy Guides' which summarise programme activities in printed form (and which were updated by DFID's Dissemination Coordinator to facilitate sample selection by the evaluation team). Knowledge management has proved problematic, partly due to the sheer scale of materials produced, and partly due to the variety of media used (for example, early reports are incompatible with modern information and communications technologies). At the programme level, a number of programmes have made considerable advances with cataloguing and the development of web-enabled searchable databases to supplement the central system.
- 6.2.12 Today there are no formal RNRRS-wide internal communication channels<sup>32</sup>. At one time PMs attended the annual Natural Resources (later Rural Livelihoods) Advisers Conference, but this practice was ceased<sup>33</sup>. A joint meeting of PAC chairpersons arranged for the purpose of this evaluation was the first occasion on which they had met. Nevertheless, partly as a result of the familiar relationships described above, but also due to strenuous efforts on the part of the small RNRRS core team in DFID's Central Research Department (CRD), PMs are in regular contact with each other, with CRD, with their PAC chairpersons, and (in some cases) with their Lead Advisers. External communications rely heavily on the individual programme websites. Although initiatives were started in the past with the support of Natural Resources Policy and Advisory Department (NRPAD), including the development of an RNRRS-wide communications strategy and plans to improve website linkages, these have not been carried forward since the policy division restructuring.
- 6.2.13 The evaluation terms of reference allude to a 'quality assurance strategy'. Although no formal strategy has been published, various versions of the Guidance Notes for PMs include reference to the mechanisms which DFID uses to manage and monitor the RNRRS and individual programmes. Effectively, formal management is document-based: quarterly reports are primarily used for financial planning and monitoring; the annual report of each programme is the central document for measuring programme performance against the logframe outputs and other agreed targets and milestones<sup>34</sup>, and the content of the latter is tightly specified. DFID also requires the submission of final project technical reports and project completion reports for inclusion in the RNRRS database.
- 6.2.14 In the first few years, PMs were subject to more extensive oversight than now. The Research Strategy Monitoring Panel maintained an overview of progress across the RNRRS as a whole, and conducted a rigorous examination of PMs' annual reports. After it was disbanded, Lead Advisers were expected to lead an annual interdisciplinary review of performance, but this appears to have fallen into abeyance fairly quickly (partly because of the difficulty in committing cross-cutting advisers' time)<sup>35</sup>. In the third phase, general programme oversight has primarily been exercised through informal personal contact between the CRD, some Lead Advisers, and PMs. Performance review is carried out on an individual programme basis, and is essentially a brief desk review<sup>36</sup> of the annual report by the Lead Adviser. There is no apparent corporate action on the outputs of the RNRRS as captured in the annual reports or otherwise. Opportunities for, for example, sharing learning across programmes, feeding learning into internal DFID policy and strategy processes, or engaging other parts of DFID, do not appear to be sought or acted upon in a systematic manner.

---

<sup>32</sup> Note that in place for this, including the extensive use of web sites and circulation of reports. This point relates to active liaison, sharing and decision-making between RNRRS management stakeholders.

<sup>33</sup> Par# migrating from a natural resources to a livelihoods focus.

<sup>34</sup> PMs also report their self-assessment of progress on the A-H scale as described in Chapter 3.

<sup>35</sup> Note that the terms of reference for Lead Advisers, included in the 2000 version of the Guidance Notes for PMs includes requirements to... 'lead an annual interdisciplinary assessment of programme management, assembling and guiding the work of an assessment panel.□ in by monthly meetings of the lead advisers group....in reviewing policy, procedures and practices'. Past and present Lead Advisers consulted did not indicate that they recalled these processes in operation.

<sup>36</sup> Lead Advisers indicated that they were able to allocate one to three days to this task.

---

6.2.15 Although the 1996 ‘Guidance Notes for PMs’ referred to independent quinquennial output to purpose evaluations, these were not commissioned and the reference was dropped in the revised version of the guidance notes which was issued in 2000. While a variety of special reviews and studies have been commissioned for aspects of the strategy, for individual programmes, and for groups of programmes, no formal evaluation of the RNRRS as a whole has taken place until now. Without this, the Core RNRRS team in CRD, and DFID in general, have been obliged to rely primarily on the lead advisers’ reviews of annual reports to assess programme performance, and have had no independent mechanism through which they could assess performance of the strategy as a whole.

### **Overall Strategy and Programme Management Issues**

6.2.16 It is apparent from the analysis above that DFID’s management of the RNRRS has been characterised by a ‘light touch’, which has nevertheless been responsive and supportive. PMs and PAC members hold a broadly positive view of the CRD RNRRS core team’s operational management of the strategy. The majority consider that this team has been able, with some key lead advisers, to provide strategic guidance as the policy context has changed; that light monitoring has been sufficient, and that DFID managers have responded positively and flexibly in support of PMs when necessary. Nevertheless, the management process has suffered from four important constraints:

- The absence of a high-level group with stakeholder representation to maintain oversight of the RNRRS and advise DFID managers.
- Limited mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of programme performance, which have further diminished over time.
- Very limited allocation of advisory or programme management resources to coordinate the strategy.
- Inevitable lack of continuity, as Lead Advisers are posted into different roles.

6.2.17 While these constraints have not necessarily had a negative impact on the performance of individual programmes, there is wide acknowledgement (among PMs, DFID internal stakeholders and many project leaders) that they have resulted in a lack of synergy and coordination across the strategy as a whole. This manifests itself in a number of ways:

- A low and unclear profile for the RNRRS – stakeholders, including research policymakers and managers (as well as potential contractors) are unfamiliar with it, and there appears to be little knowledge of its successes. Although information is posted on the DFID and programme websites, and there are a variety of publications as described above, stakeholders other than PMs appear to be poorly informed about the ‘big picture’. It may be argued that some of the recent critical commentary from the science establishment could have been avoided if the strategy’s achievements had been better collated and publicised.
- An absence of synthesis during the strategy’s lifetime (until the recent PARC efforts and some recently-commissioned cross-programme synthesis studies (chapter 5)), which means that no synopsis of performance as a whole is available. As a result, it is almost impossible to say concisely what has been achieved by the RNRRS overall. Recent efforts to collate information about programme performance revealed enormous quantities of data in the form of project and programme reports, which are so voluminous as to almost defy synthesis at this stage.
- Opportunities to link activities in different programmes to achieve greater impact on a multidisciplinary problem have not been pursued as extensively as they might have been.
- While strategic evolution has taken place across the RNRRS, this has been less coherent and focused than it might have been, with some programmes responding rapidly and others responding more slowly, and a variety of directions being pursued. (see the discussion on programme strategies above and in Annex 7).

6.2.18 In the course of this evaluation, the argument has been put forward that, since PMs are governed by individual contracts which specify their performance, there is no need for an overarching governance structure, or for overly-onerous monitoring, especially in the later stages of programmes which have already demonstrated efficiency and effectiveness. However this argument does not outweigh the requirement for oversight and synthesis to facilitate accountability and transparency, and the need to promote synergy and coherence through cross-programme mechanisms.

### **6.3 Individual Programmes**

#### **Programmes' Management Structures**

6.3.1 Basic programme management structures are similar across all of the RNRRS programmes, including a PM and in some cases a deputy PM and programme officers (depending on programme size) who take responsibility for professional liaison with projects. All programme management teams include some dedicated administrative support, although this varies from one or two part-time posts to a substantial full-time staff including specialists in, for example, dissemination, communications and information management. There are some other significant variations: for example, CPHP has established a very effective formalised regional structure (and some other programmes use its regional coordinators as channels for their own operations); PSP has made use of its own coordinators in Nepal and in ICRISAT; FRP has deployed contracted thematic leaders, and CPP has established a group of ten contracted programme advisers to support the programme management team on technical aspects of project development and monitoring, and NRSP has developed a similar structure with a 'steering group' composed of specialist advisers with contracted inputs.

6.3.2 Despite these variations, all of the programmes operate within the agreed management costs provided by their contracts. As each programme was awarded through competition, and proposals were evaluated, inter alia, on the basis of their proposed programme management arrangements and costs, this indicates that programme management arrangements have been economical and cost-efficient. Beyond this, since we would not be comparing 'like with like' (and since, as described below, it is not possible to make a direct correlation between programme management arrangements and programme performance as assessed in chapters 4 and 5), it is not possible to make any objective assessment of the relative cost-effectiveness of programmes' management arrangements.

#### **Programmes' Strategies**

6.3.3 Few RNRRS programme strategies<sup>37</sup> are formalised and documented per se<sup>38</sup>. Notable exceptions are NRSP, CPHP, FRP and LPP, all of which have gone to considerable lengths to define and articulate their strategies (See Annex 7 for individual programme descriptions). Nevertheless all PMs were able to describe the coherent strategies which they have adopted. In some cases strategy development was taken forward by (or in close cooperation with) the PAC. In other cases, it was developed as an internal managerial tool by the PM and his/her team. The strategies vary considerably: some are complex and radical (such as CPHP, which has adopted an innovation systems approach); some are pragmatic (such as PHFP which has shifted from research to dissemination and uptake activities to optimise impacts), and others are relatively conservative (such as CPP and PSP which have focused on incrementally improving the effectiveness of project commissioning and implementation by using livelihoods and other concepts).

---

<sup>37</sup> Note that the term 'strategy' is used throughout this analysis to denote a formal multi-year statement of concepts, approaches, priorities, methods etc, and not to describe annual operating plans. Each programme presents an annual operating plan which defines programme activities and the project portfolio. This does not constitute a 'strategy' for the purpose of this discussion..

<sup>38</sup> Although they are generally discernible in the commentary provided in annual reports.

6.3.4 Apart from identification of technical needs and demands (discussed in more detail in chapters 4 and 5 ), three factors appear to have influenced programme strategy formulation:

- Programme characteristics, in terms of the demands of the discipline (e.g. technical forestry research requires very long timescales)
- PMs' (for example, PHFP, AHP and AFGRP programmes), Lead Advisers' (for example, LPP) or PACs' interests and preferences play a significant role in shaping programme strategy.
- Legacy factors, for example PMs' own research interests, the continuation of research themes from earlier DFID-funded projects, or continuing relationships with institutions or countries.

6.3.5 The effect of all of these pressures is that programme strategies exhibit the considerable diversity described above. This diversity can be seen as a strength of the RNRRS, as uniformity is neither necessary nor particularly helpful where innovation is the goal. However, one consequence of strategies evolving separately is that, while each programme may have a very coherent rationale in itself, coherence across the RNRRS as a whole is reduced. It is therefore necessary to question whether this divergent evolution, unmitigated by strong cross-RNRRS coordination, further reduced the potential for meaningful synergy and linkages.

6.3.6 Despite the variability in specific programme strategies, general trends are detectable in the evolution of programme strategies over time, particularly in the last few years<sup>39</sup>. The most significant are:

- A shift from organising around commodities or systems to organising around beneficiary groups.
- Prioritising impact on livelihoods over the generation of knowledge for its own sake.
- More emphasis on participatory processes to establish demand and prioritise research needs.
- Fewer, more tightly focused calls for concept notes.
- More 'follow-on' and clustering of projects to allow for continuity of research themes.
- More emphasis on dissemination and uptake promotion.
- Increasing 'southernisation', with more southern partners acting as project leaders, and more expenditure in southern countries (up to 60 to 70% of project budgets in one or two programmes in recent years).
- Explicit capacity building activities (which extend beyond facilitating individual higher qualifications - see below)
- Links with the private sector stakeholders as partners and research users.

6.3.7 Overall, these trends point in two interesting directions. Firstly, they clearly indicate a move towards a strong livelihoods and poverty impact focus. This is in line with DFID's policy direction, so it is apparent that, even without strong direction from the centre, the RNRRS has successfully adapted to the changing policy environment<sup>40</sup>. However, a note of caution has been sounded in respect of these shifts, and some observers have made the point that the programmes may effectively be reinventing development paradigms, focusing on demand-led, participatory activities, and engaging with policies, institutions and processes at the expense of research. This is borne out to some extent, as discussed elsewhere in this report (Chapter 7 and Annex 7), by the evaluation team's difficulties in identifying the research components of some projects examined.

---

<sup>39</sup> These are not universal. For example, CPP and CPHP have not altered their approaches to issuing calls for concept notes. Similarly, some programmes have placed more emphasis than others on transferring research project management to southern partners.

<sup>40</sup> AI development community at large as much as to DFID direction. The change was supported by dialogue between DFID and Programmes and through the revision of contractual arrangements.

6.3.8 Secondly, the trends indicate a shift in the modality of programme and project management, away from the original project-focused concept towards something which places more emphasis on relationships between researchers and institutions, on building research and research management capacity, and on building coalitions of stakeholders in target countries. Essentially, by shifting to overcome some of the perceived shortcomings in the 'pure' project contract model, the RNRRS programmes are beginning to display some of the characteristics of the consortium model which is discussed further in Section 7.6.

### **Programme Planning and Prioritisation**

6.3.9 The original RNRRS laid out detailed priorities for each of the programmes, and most programmes followed these in the first contracting cycle. However, almost all programmes have subsequently revisited and revised these priorities, using a variety of processes at the programme and regional levels. New programme-level needs identification and priority-setting exercises were triggered by DFID policy changes, and by the 1997 White Paper in particular. However, other events triggered revisions to programme priorities, including changes to the programme management contract (for example, when NRSP was contracted out, and when the fish genetics and aquaculture programmes were merged); when new PMs were appointed (for example, AHP and PHFP), or when the PM, PAC or DFID Lead Adviser initiated strategic reviews (for example, LPP, FMSP, CPP and CPHP). In the last few years, as described in chapters 4 and 5, many programmes (notably CPHP, LPP, CPP, FRP, NRSP and AHP) have adopted a variety of participatory processes to feed into prioritisation and planning. Others (for example, PSP) also continue to utilise the original RNRRS priorities to some extent, gradually refining these in consultation with research partners, alongside participatory prioritisation and planning processes.

## **6.4 Project Cycle Management**

### **In General**

6.4.1 In general, all programmes follow the guidelines set out in the various versions of the DFID 'Guidance Notes for PMs'. The prescribed project management cycle is largely followed: logframes are used as the core planning and guidance document; calls for concept notes are published (albeit to varying degrees); concept notes are subject to screening (although the protocol varies between programmes); successful concept notes are converted to full proposals; all projects are required to report formally at regular intervals during implementation (although intervals and formats vary); and monitoring arrangements vary from limited informal review processes to formal regular review missions.

6.4.2 This project management cycle model is clear, transparent and effective. Nevertheless, there are some drawbacks: operated strictly in accordance with the letter of the guidelines, it can encourage fragmentation, with too many small, short projects and consequent diseconomies of scale (also with too many partners, according to some informants). As a result it may hamper continuity of research themes (although the majority of PMs have addressed this by awarding follow-on contracts by one means or another). Finally, it often results in only short-term linkages with isolated elements of partner institutions - which means that efforts are not sustained after project funding ends, and impact may therefore be lost<sup>41</sup>.

6.4.3 While some of the variation in individual programme management arrangements may be attributed to the preferences of individual PMs and (to a lesser extent) PACs, much of it arises from the very different scale and scope of programmes. For example, the fisheries programmes are all small enough to adopt focused but flexible strategies, while large programmes such as CPP have, of necessity, a much broader project portfolio, and more extensive formalised programme and project management arrangements.

---

<sup>41</sup> Some programme managers expressed the view that the shifting geographic focus (described elsewhere in this report) was also an important factor militating against the establishment of sustainable linkages between partner institutions.

6.4.4 An examination of programme and project management arrangements suggests some aspects of good research management practice which improve the efficiency and effectiveness of interaction with project partners and may contribute to the achievement of sustainable outcomes. On the other hand, consultations with programme and project managers in the UK, Asia and Africa have highlighted a number of areas where further improvements could be achieved. Lessons deriving from both aspects are discussed for each stage of the project management cycle in more detail below and in Annex 7. In summary, some of the strengths and weaknesses are:

#### **Strength/good practice**

- Adopting a flexible approach to contracting, allowing for follow-on projects, restricted competition etc, where appropriate.
- Providing support for project development, including needs identification, budget development and identifying potential partners and mentors.
- Ensuring that tendering processes are not unduly protracted, and that implementation begins promptly.
- Maintaining regular contact with researchers throughout the project cycle, with as much face-to-face contact as is operationally and financially feasible.
- Using education and training mechanisms (for example PhD and MSc studentships) to strengthen links between research institutions.
- Supporting partners (both research and promotion) with in-country or in-region coordination, including communications, harmonisation, advice and mentoring.
- Appropriate monitoring and evaluation arrangements including a mixture of standardised reporting, internal monitoring, and external review as appropriate.

#### **Weakness/poor practice**

- Adopting an inflexible approach either relying entirely on full open competition or on award of contracts to a small select group of researchers.
- Relying on northern research partners with experience to lead bidding teams and engage and support southern partners.
- Long delays at various stages of the tendering process, and especially between approval and implementation.
- More intense contact during project planning and design, followed by only intermittent reporting linkages, and over-reliance on electronic and paper-based communication.
- Ignoring (or discouraging) opportunities to link education and training processes to research activities.
- Relying exclusively on UK-based mentors and processes.
- Either over-fastidious monitoring (for example excessive use of external review) or inadequate monitoring (for example, relying only on review of implementation reports).

6.4.5 While it is possible to identify these lessons, no strong correlation is apparent between what might be described as ‘managerial good practice’ and programme performance, either in quality of science or potential impact on poverty. This is due to a variety of reasons, including:

- Because every programme follows the basic contract of research model laid out in the guidelines, and carries out the core management processes (planning, contracting, operational management, reporting etc), there are more commonalities in the management approaches adopted by programmes than there are differences.
- Management processes adopted are only one of a number of factors which will have impacted upon programme success. The nature of the research, the technical issues addressed, the quality of partners selected, and the level of risk associated with particular projects are just a few of the factors which will have been important. It would be inappropriate to draw correlations taking account of only one of these factors.
- As described in Chapter 4, the variety of criteria for assessing programme performance means that it is not possible to definitively identify some programmes as more ‘successful’ than others. Relative success depends on the relative weight which is given to the various measures of science quality and impact or potential impact on poverty.
- Further, the conclusions from the assessment of science quality and impact on poverty do not indicate a wide distribution of programme performance: broadly speaking, all of the programmes appear to have performed well. It is not therefore possible to objectively associate any specific management processes adopted with ‘more successful’ or ‘less successful’ programmes.

- 6.4.6 No single ‘best practice’ research management model or style can be identified and management arrangements for the successor to the RNRRS should therefore incorporate managerial flexibility within broad guidelines to devise appropriate management arrangements for specific circumstances.

### **Competition, Selection and Contracting**

- 6.4.7 All programmes have followed the arrangements set out in the RNRRS guidelines to some extent, publicising calls for concept notes, shortlisting on the basis of these, and requiring full proposals from shortlisted project teams. However, there has been considerable variation in practice, both between programmes and over time within individual programmes. The degree of competition is a particularly important aspect: a widely publicised ‘open call’ is the most competitive model, yet almost all of the programmes have moved away from this to some extent, either circulating narrow calls for concept notes, or circulating calls to a limited audience. These less-competitive calls are specifically intended either to ensure continuity between one project and the next within a research theme, or to ensure that concept notes are received from the limited number of researchers with the specialist competence to carry out the work, and not to waste the time of the others.
- 6.4.8 Some patterns can be detected. The larger programmes (for example, CPP, CPHP and NRSP) are more likely to have continued to use the full competitive process than some of the smaller programmes (for example, AFGRP). Whether an open call or a focused call is used, all programmes ensure that formal concept notes are produced and reviewed, and full proposals are prepared and reviewed before contracts are awarded. It is not possible to say whether the different practices actually resulted in a less competitive environment for some research areas. An analysis of projects awarded shows that some UK research institutions have been very successful in winning contracts from particular programmes (for example NRI has been very successful with the crop protection and crop post-harvest programmes, as has University of Wales, Bangor with plant sciences, and CTVM with animal health) but this is at least partly a reflection of their legacy of involvement in pre-RNRRS research and their expertise in these disciplines, and it also must be said that the proportion of contracts awarded to these institutions has reduced in later years. If the effectiveness of competition is an issue for the successor to the RNRRS, this can be addressed by establishing quantified performance indicators to ensure that research contracts are awarded in line with overall objectives<sup>42</sup>.
- 6.4.9 While all programmes use a screening process to select concept notes to go forward to development of full proposals, the precise procedure varies: some programmes use only the programme management team for initial screening, others use PAC members, others use contracted specialists, or a combination of all of these. The process appears to be transparent in the majority of cases<sup>43</sup>, with PAC members well-informed, and formal written feedback provided to unsuccessful proposers. All of those consulted in the UK and through the country visits in Africa and Asia who had submitted concept notes reported that the process was effective and efficient, and noted that the inclusion of the concept note stage before the development of a full proposal reduced the risk that they would invest significant time in ideas which had no prospect of approval.

---

<sup>42</sup> For example, no more than X% of research contracts or expenditure is awarded to programme managers’ own institutions, or that a minimum of Y% is awarded to southern institutions, or that a minimum of Z% is awarded through formal open competitive processes.

<sup>43</sup> In □ are not shown to the PAC.

- 6.4.10 Beyond the concept note stage, programmes differ considerably in their approach to supporting proposal development. Some (for example, LPP NRSP, FRP and CPHP) are highly interventionist, with PMs, other members of the programme management team, or contracted specialists becoming directly involved in advising the proposers. Supportive activities at this stage include visiting proposed locations, funding design workshops, identifying and linking suitable partners, and even linking separate proposers together to submit a single joint proposal<sup>44</sup>. In all cases, all full proposals are subject to PAC consideration<sup>45</sup>. Across the RNRRS as a whole, it is rare for a full proposal to be rejected, although some proposals may go through an iterative revision process before final approval.
- 6.4.11 During interviews in Britain and in developing countries the Core Team attempted to ascertain the degree of satisfaction with the review process to which competitive project proposals are subjected. There is widespread agreement that PACs and PMs have usually done a very good job in this process. Proposers of rejected bids have commented that they had fair hearings of their proposals, and rapid and adequate feedback on why proposals failed. Comments received by successful proposers have equally been helpful for adjustments and creating wider networks for cooperation. Several programmes have been specifically mentioned as providing unusually good feedback. Among them are forestry, aquaculture and natural resources systems. The follow-ups once projects get underway have generally been good for all programmes.
- 6.4.12 Proposers consulted were broadly happy with the process as described above, but highlighted some aspects where change is necessary:
- Despite the considerable efforts made by some programmes (especially in the last two years), many southern partners (and some northern researchers consulted) either were unaware of the opportunities represented by the RNRRS (suggesting that calls were insufficiently publicised), or were reluctant to submit concept notes because of the presumption that they would be unsuccessful<sup>46</sup>. In almost all cases sampled, partners were introduced to the RNRRS through other agencies (almost invariably a northern partner). The few examples where this was not the case were particularly well-capacitated institutions (for example, national offices of international NGOs such as ITDG in Bangladesh or Appropriate Technologies in Uganda), or international or regional research institutions (for example, PRAPACE in Uganda, CIFPR or ICRISAT). The situation has been improving, and the CPHP regional concept note calls have been a very successful method of facilitating southern engagement.
  - In some cases, proposers experienced a prolonged proposal preparation and review process. Although they value the two-stage process and appreciated the support they were offered, a long wait for approval, spanning one or even two years in some cases, disrupted their personal and their parent institutions' research programmes. Of equal concern, participatory processes of concept note and/or proposal preparation raised the expectations of potential beneficiaries, and in a number of cases informants (in both Africa and Asia) asserted that motivations and relationships were diminished where there were long delays before implementation could begin.
  - In some cases, post-proposal budget negotiations appeared to result in considerable pressure to reduce costs without reducing activities. This was more important for less-experienced southern proposers, some of whom also experienced difficulties with estimating the management time and costs involved in acting as project leaders. (Some also felt that they had insufficient information about the management and reporting requirements to enable them to make realistic estimates.) This suggests that support needs to be extended to planning and budgeting as well as technical aspects of proposal preparation (as is already provided, for example, by FRP).

---

<sup>44</sup> Which indicates that programme managers are looking for synergy across their programmes.

<sup>45</sup> NRSP's PAC does not consider all proposals directly, but the PM includes a PAC member in each proposal review team.

<sup>46</sup> However, some programmes cite the submission of unsolicited concept note proposals as evidence that southern partners were sufficiently aware of the RNRRS in some countries (for example, Tanzania and Bolivia).

## Implementation Generally

- 6.4.13 During implementation, programme management team contact with projects is variable, ranging from very frequent informal contact which almost amounts to a 'managerial' relationship (for example FRP and AFGRP); to less frequent contact through occasional monitoring visits by the PM or another nominated team member (for example, CPP). CPHP's and CPP's regional and country coordinators have also provided considerable hands-on local support to project teams. For those programmes which devote considerable resources to the support of project teams, capacity building is an implicit objective, often in the form of supported<sup>47</sup> PhD and MSc studies but also through short specific training events. However, overall capacity building remains very limited. (Capacity building is discussed in more detail elsewhere in this report.)
- 6.4.14 A few PMs have explicitly attempted to build relationships and linkages across their projects. They have used a variety of approaches, and some of the best examples of these are the LPP, CPP and FRP approach to clustering projects, the role played by the CPHP regional coordinators, and AHP's efforts to build longer term partnerships with southern institutions across projects.
- 6.4.15 More generally, programmes have made very impressive efforts to communicate, both internally and externally at the programme level (for example newsletters, posters, conferences and workshops resourced through programme development and dissemination funds); and at the project level as part of dissemination activities (5.6). Innovation in project level communications to stakeholders is particularly impressive, including local language leaflets and posters, toolkits, conferences, workshops and demonstration activities, and innovative use of mass media including information and communications technology, and web and radio-based. A number of programme managers have provided significant support to project teams to develop these ideas.
- 6.4.16 Generally speaking, contract and financial administration has operated smoothly throughout project implementation. The evaluation team found very few examples where contractual difficulties or disputes had arisen between programme management and project leaders, and (with one exception) these were all speedily resolved. Financial disbursements were made efficiently, although the requirement to finance project activities in arrears has caused problems. A number of southern partners alluded to difficulties and delays in beginning implementation of approved projects due to their inability to begin work without funding. This was usually resolved with programme managers' support, often by northern partner institutions providing initial resources, but this was more problematic where the project was awarded to an all-southern team.

## Reporting, Monitoring and Evaluation

- 6.4.17 All programmes operate the basic reporting framework set out in the DFID guidelines. Project leaders are required to produce brief financial and activity reports quarterly. A more comprehensive annual report is also required. At the end of the project, a final technical report and project completion report must be produced.
- 6.4.18 Although the majority of programmes operate the reporting cycle precisely as required by the DFID guidelines, there is some variation. One or two have tried to simplify and reduce the reporting requirements in agreement with DFID (notably CPP). These efforts are appreciated since some project leaders (particularly from southern institutions) have found the reporting cycle demanding. However the majority of project leaders consulted regarded the reporting requirements as fairly consistent with those demanded by all funders today.

---

<sup>47</sup> This support is generally not financial.

- 6.4.19 While all PMs maintain good communications and are aware of progress with their projects, not all programmes carry out formal evaluations, either internal or independent. At one extreme, NRSP carries out formal mid-term on-site evaluations of all projects. Although not formal evaluations, CPHP also conducts what project leaders have described as rigorous and demanding review missions, including country visits and stakeholder consultations. LPP conducts occasional independent mid-term reviews, but provides independent evaluation of all project final technical reports, as does FMSP. Some other programmes conduct no regular formal evaluations (for example, PSP and CPP<sup>48</sup>), but rely on other mechanisms to keep track of project performance.
- 6.4.20 There is no compelling argument for standardisation of monitoring and evaluation processes in terms of ensuring quality at the individual programme level. All PMs have made arrangements which they believe to be appropriate, and there is no evidence to indicate that these are insufficient. However, yet again, the lack of standardisation means that independent oversight of project and programme progress (i.e. not directly dependent on PMs' accounts) and oversight of the performance of the RNRRS as a whole has not been possible.
- 6.4.21 For the future, consideration should be given to the development of a clearer policy and operational guidance for monitoring and evaluation. This would lay down minimum standards for monitoring, review and evaluations, graduated to reflect relative materiality and risk. In this way programme managers would be assisted to devise monitoring and evaluation procedures which are appropriately rigorous, and also cost-effective.

### Relationships at the Programme and Project Levels

- 6.4.22 The evaluation has consistently found that the important working relationships fostered by the RNRRS are between individual researchers<sup>49</sup> rather than institutions, and it is these individual relationships which persist outside the project context, and after projects are completed. PMs' personal scientific networks are important for a number of programmes (this is particularly notable for those programmes whose managers are within active research institutions, such as AFGRP and PSP). There is also some evidence that projects have succeeded in creating new and strengthening existing alliances between researchers within developing countries. It can be concluded that these relationships constitute an important informal mechanism for strengthening researchers' capacity.
- 6.4.23 Although many programmes have undertaken activities which have an institutional strengthening aspect, these are usually aimed at researcher capacity building. There is no compelling evidence to date that the RNRRS has been instrumental in forging sustainable institutional (as opposed to individual or sub-institutional) relationships. Unless there are follow-on projects or other activities in an institution (whether funded by RNRRS or not), the institutional memory of projects appears to be lost very rapidly, and relationships between the partner institutions do not persist. Shifting geographic targets, as described above, may be an important factor. This was very striking in Indonesia where the de-prioritisation of the country resulted in a complete cessation of activities: four years later it was almost impossible to find anyone who knew anything about the RNRRS or about particular projects<sup>50</sup>. On the other hand, experience under the INNOVA initiative in Bolivia may show a different picture, as described in section 7.3. However, the rarity of this type of example would suggest that the RNRRS contract research model is not particularly suitable for making a sustainable impact on the capacity of southern research institutions in terms of establishing long-term linkages to local and international research networks, or building deep institutional competence (beyond that of individual researchers in specific research themes or discipline areas).

---

<sup>48</sup> CPP conducts evaluations of final technical reports where a follow-on project is being considered.

<sup>49</sup> Note that t  
and intermediate/uptake agencies.

<sup>50</sup> Note that this conclusion was based on the experience of the evaluation team's short field visit in Indonesia. CPP has indicated that there is a strong legacy of research outputs in this country, but these were not detected by the team.

## 6.5 Capacity Building

### Capacity Building in the RNRRS

- 6.5.1 UK scientists have increasingly involved developing country scientists in projects, and have fairly shared research tasks and research credits (e.g. co-authorship of publications) to maintain scientific standards and relevance. It is apparent that during the decade of RNRRS activities there has been a clear shift of science responsibilities, giving much more emphasis to developing country science and/or development groups during latter years.
- 6.5.2 Many examples have been quoted to the Core Team from projects in crop protection, forest science, aquaculture and natural resources management indicating that co-authorship is strongly encouraged by PLs and PMs (4.4), that the order of authors fairly reflects on scientific contribution, and that the frequently superior science writing skills of British partners ensure that international journals accept good science where developing country scientists have played major roles.
- 6.5.3 RNRRS research funding has increasingly flowed to the Southern partners, so that some programmes now have a 50/50 split, in strong contrast to the early years.
- 6.5.4 This, however, is not unique in research sponsored by development cooperation agencies: similar tendencies are present in e.g. USAID's CRSP programmes and in Australian AIARC, and by major research efforts in France. In other countries, a larger proportion of resources has traditionally been earmarked for developing countries (Canada, the Netherlands, and Scandinavian countries). In some fields of science, conducting research in a developing country using developing country scientists is a highly cost-effective mode, but it can be more expensive when infrastructure is lacking.
- 6.5.5 RNRRS has contributed funding to increase the efficiency of developing country research establishments, although human capacity building was excluded until recently (although nevertheless achieved by some programmes, e.g. Plant Sciences).
- 6.5.6 There have been major efforts from programme managers and from individual project leaders to involve a broader group of research institutions in developing countries in the RNRRS projects. The Core Team applauds such efforts, which have led new combinations of government research institutions, universities, farmers associations, NGOs and private national and multinational commercial interests. In general, achievements have been significant, although the exclusion of capacity building incentives in the first 8 years of RNRRS may have failed to create long-term sustainable partnerships with weaker partners, especially civil society organisations.
- 6.5.7 A new emphasis on capacity building has been apparent throughout the last few years of the RNRRS. Several programmes have supported various forms of capacity building for individual researchers, in the form of facilitating higher qualifications for individual young scientists, providing on the job learning opportunities alongside experienced researchers. Some programmes (for example, CPHP, CPP, FMSP and FRP) have also provided short specific training events for a large number of project team members. CPHP's 'Partnerships for Innovation' approach also emphasises strengthening of systems. However, overall capacity building remains very limited.
- 6.5.8 Although capacity building activities are now seen as a legitimate part of programme management, no specific capacity building policies or strategies have been devised, either for the RNRRS as a whole, or for individual programmes. Because capacity building was expressly excluded from the programme management remit until recently, these activities represent a very small portion of the overall RNRRS effort.
- 6.5.9 It is clear that capacity building will need to be an important element of the successor research management mechanism. Virtually every group of stakeholders interviewed in Africa stressed the need to have capacity building, particularly at the MSc and PhD levels as an integral part of any future natural resource management research programme. There appears to be growing shortage of professional manpower in the region. This viewpoint was also expressed, although perhaps not so strongly, by Asian stakeholders consulted.

## Defining Capacity Building

6.5.10 There are many different potential audiences and mechanisms for capacity building in the context of natural resources research. The most important are:

1. Individual researchers: for example, by providing research facilities and supervision for PhDs and MScs. Providing on the job learning through involving inexperienced researchers in experimental design, drafting and editing alongside more experienced researchers, or providing off the job training in particular techniques and concepts through tailor-made training courses. It is likely that any future capacity building policy would want to draw a distinction between UK-based researchers gaining experience of research in developing countries and developing country researchers, and give a higher priority to the latter.
2. Research managers: for example, to improve their ability to use participatory methodologies to establish demand, prepare proposals, assemble project teams, and manage project implementation.
3. Policy- and decision-makers: for example, through supporting evidence-based policy processes, awareness-raising, and demonstration activities.
4. Public, non-government and private sector extensionists: through, for example training of trainers, or preparation of guidance manuals.
5. Poor natural resources-dependent people: through, for example demonstration, mass media, manuals and leaflets, and direct empowerment of grass roots farmers and community institutions.
6. Research institutions: for example providing assistance to senior managers with strategic planning, internal reorganisation, bidding for resources, quality assurance, public relations.

6.5.11 The first two categories are directly concerned with developing scientists. The third, fourth and fifth relate to dissemination and uptake. The sixth relates to building sustainable research capacity in-country.

6.5.12 To date it would appear that only the last of these (building institutional capacity in national research systems) lies beyond the boundaries of capacity building as it has been interpreted by RNRRS PMs to date. All of the other activities are being undertaken by at least some of the programmes. It is generally accepted that it is beyond the scope of researchers to work directly to build the capacity of poor people, but several programmes argue that they are involved in this. The situation with respect to institutional capacity building is by no means so clear-cut. The majority of stakeholders consulted felt that building capacity in southern research institutions is important to secure and sustain demand-led adaptive research efforts. However the majority of internal DFID stakeholders felt that this was not an appropriate role for centrally-funded research.

## Future Capacity Building Priorities

6.5.13 The successor to the RNRRS should consider prioritising three major areas of capacity building activity, although these should be handled in different ways.

---

<sup>51</sup> The ev□  
level instit□  
activities as such.

6.5.14 There is no doubt that the highest priority and bulk of capacity building resources should be applied to the professional development of researchers and research managers. This is likely to be facilitated by PMs rather than necessarily as an integral part of project design. Capacity building activities could take a number of forms:

- PhDs and MScs
- Secondments and exchanges between institutions
- Technical training courses
- Workshops and seminars
- Support for project design and management
- Joint projects
- Contact with other projects and researchers in the programme

6.5.15 If capacity building for researchers and research managers is to have a higher priority in the successor programme, then an explicit capacity development policy, which identifies priorities, methods and appropriate budgets, and which allocates specific responsibilities will be necessary. Capacity building is a long-term and expensive process, and if a heavy emphasis is to be placed on this aspect, then the successor programmes' Logframe outputs and funding structures will need to reflect this clearly.

6.5.16 Assuming that the focus on dissemination and poverty is maintained, it is inevitable that the successor programme should also concern itself with the 'capacity building' (although perhaps in the narrower sense of delivering knowledge in useful formats) of policymakers, decision-makers and extensionists. It would be more appropriate for these activities to be an integral part of project design rather than a separate stream of activity.

6.5.17 The situation in respect of institutional strengthening for research institutions is much less clear cut. Envisaging a situation where most future development aid is in the form of budget support or programmatic aid rather than project support, it is apparent that strengthening the capacity of southern research institutions is likely to be a very important channel for sustainability, and very strong demand for this form of support was expressed by almost all of those southern researchers and institutions consulted during the country visits. Whether strengthening this capacity is the responsibility of a research programme is a moot point: generally it would be argued that this should lie within the remit of country assistance programmes – but in a budget support environment no mechanism would exist to do so.

6.5.18 DFID's Development Research Centre model intended capacity development to be an explicit and formal activity, tailored to specific needs in research partner institutions. However the practical experience of capacity development has proved rather different from its original concept. Partner institutions see themselves as equally competent and the question of institutional capacity building, with its implication of inferiority, is in abeyance. Almost all capacity development to date has been through informal mentoring and tutoring of individual researchers as normal academic good practice. This experience tends to support the case that researchers should not be given direct responsibility for institutional capacity strengthening, although this could be carried out through engagement of institutional strengthening specialists as part of programme or project teams.

## **6.6 Key Findings Concerning Governance and Management**

### **6.6.1 The Strategy as a Whole**

- The Strategy represented a major advance by prioritising researchable problems on the basis of a needs assessment, and with clear linkages between purpose, outputs and activities.
- The evolution of the strategy reflects DFID's response to new notions of good practice for impact on poverty and sustainability of outcomes.

## 6.6.2 Structure, Roles and Relationships

### Strategic governance

- The absence of a general governance body means that there is no dedicated structure responsible for providing guidance and maintaining oversight or for strategy-wide representation of stakeholders.

### Role of Programme Advisory Committee

- The advisory nature means that effectiveness of the PAC is dependent on the willingness of PM to use it.
- PAC roles vary from a narrow technical focus on approval of proposals and review of outputs to broader strategic perspective.
- Some PACs have been problematic due to lack of clear roles.

### Role of DFID Lead Advisers

- Lead Advisers are central in determining the quality of the PAC contribution, but limited time and high turnover of personnel have reduced their impact.
- Since the demise of DFID's Research Strategy Monitoring Panel in 2002, each Lead Adviser works in isolation with his/her programme. Interaction is dependent on individual adviser's time and commitment.

## 6.6.3 Programme Management

### Generally

- There are few RNRRS-wide management systems and processes.
- DFID's central research department RNRRS core team (and its predecessors in DFID, the RLD and NRRD) has been able to monitor contractual performance, provide knowledge management and offer strategic guidance.
- Where managing institutions and PMs have a long track record working with DFID, management processes are facilitated.
- Overall, programme management suffered from 4 constraints
- Absence of high level group with stakeholder representation to maintain oversight of RNRRS.
- Limited mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating programme performance which have further diminished over time.
- Very limited allocation of advisory or programme management resources to coordinate the strategy.
- Inevitable lack of continuity as lead advisers are posted into different roles.
- As a result, there has been less coherent and focused strategic evolution than might have been with strong central management.

### Good practice in communication

- Programmes have made impressive efforts to communicate both internally and externally. Innovation in project level communication to stakeholders is particularly impressive.
- Today there are no formal RNRRS-wide internal communication (as opposed to information dissemination) channels.

### Knowledge database

- At various times, significant efforts have gone into data and knowledge management activities, including NARSIS, the newsletter (now ceased), the website, and the Handy Guides.
- Knowledge management has been problematic due to the scale and due to the inevitable variety of media used over a 10-year period.
- There have been considerable advances at programme level with cataloguing and development of web-enabled searchable databases to supplement the central system.

## Quality assurance

- No formal 'quality assurance strategy' has been developed or published.
- Effectively, quality assurance is document-based.

## Reporting, monitoring and review

- In the first few years, PMs were subject to more extensive oversight than now. Now, performance review is essentially a brief desk review of the annual report by the Lead Adviser.
- There is no independent mechanism by which the DFID central research core team can assess performance of the strategy as a whole.
- There are no apparent mechanisms for, nor evidence of, corporate action on outputs from the RNRRS.
- There appear to be no structured opportunities for sharing learning across programmes, feeding learning into internal DFID policy and strategy processes or engaging other parts of DFID.
- Lack of standardised monitoring and evaluation processes makes independent oversight of project and programme progress impossible

### 6.6.4 Programme Structures and Strategies

#### Generally

- Programme structures and strategies exhibit considerable diversity. This is a strength of the RNRRS, but may have reduced the potential for meaningful synergy and linkages.
- Programme strategies have evolved towards:
  - a strong livelihoods and poverty impact focus
  - an 'institutional' focus on relationships between researchers and institutions, on building research and research management capacity, and on building coalitions of stakeholders.
  - Contract and financial administration has been smooth.

#### Multidisciplinary Approach

- Multidisciplinary approach increased in all programmes with increasing utilisation of participatory approaches.
- Opportunities to link activities in different programmes have not been pursued to achieve greater impact on multidisciplinary approach.

### 6.6.5 Project Cycle Management

#### Generally

- The project management cycle model is clear, transparent and effective.

#### Competitive Bids

- The degree of competition is variable but it is not possible to say whether the different practices have resulted in a less competitive environment for some research areas.
- Screening processes for concept notes and proposals were variable but transparent in all cases. All who submitted concept notes reported that the process was effective and efficient.

#### Strengths, Weaknesses and Lessons

- No single 'best practice' research management model or style can be identified and management arrangements for the successor to the RNRRS should therefore incorporate managerial flexibility.
- Lessons from the variety of project cycle management approaches observed include:
  - A flexible approach to contracting (e.g. follow on contracts, restricted calls as well as open competition) allows space for synergy and harmonisation.
  - Research effectiveness is improved by providing support for project development, including needs identification and partner identification.

- As much regular and face-to-face contact as is technically and financially feasible improves performance.
- In-country and in-region support confers additional research and promotion benefits to UK-based support.
- There is some indication that efforts to create linkages between projects within programmes can confer additional synergy and momentum.
- Synergy is also achieved by linking education and training for researchers to research projects.
- Appropriate monitoring and evaluation arrangements will include a mix of internal and external review, tailored to the materiality and risk associated with each project or group of projects.

### **Relationships, networking and partnerships**

- RNRRS tends to foster important working relationships between individual researchers rather than institutions. It is these individual relationships which persist outside the project context, and after projects are completed.
- Project by project funding leads to pragmatic contractor relationships and does not facilitate continuity or sustainability of research activities.
- Institutional memory decays rapidly when projects are completed without any follow-on activities.

### **Capacity Building and Skills Transfer**

- There has been a clear shift of research project management responsibilities to developing country science and/or development groups during latter years.
- Strong working relationships established between individuals are an important informal mechanism for strengthening researchers' capacity.
- However, there is no compelling evidence that the contract research model is particularly suitable for making a sustainable impact on the capacity of southern research institutions, or building deep institutional competence.
- Although a new emphasis on capacity building has been apparent throughout the last few years of the RNRRS, no specific capacity building policies or strategies have been devised.
- The successor to the RNRRS should prioritise three major areas of capacity building activity:
- Professional development of researchers and research managers through an explicit capacity development policy.
- 'Capacity building' of policymakers, decision-makers and extensionists as an integral part of project design.
- Whether institutional strengthening for research institutions is to be the responsibility of a research programme is yet to be determined.