

## **External Evaluation of IFS 2010**

### **IFS Response to the External Evaluation of 2010**

The IFS Board of Trustees and the IFS Donors Group decided to commission a forward-looking external evaluation in 2009 with the purpose of assessing IFS achievements and challenges and outlining a proposal for the future course of the IFS programme.

The Evaluation Report was presented in February, 2010. The Evaluation Report and the IFS response are presented here.



Final report

February, 2010

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EXTERNAL EVALUATION  
OF  
THE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR SCIENCE (IFS)

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

AOs	Affiliated Organizations
BOT	IFS Board of Trustees
CES	Capacity Enhancing Support
CGIAR	The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
DG	IFS Donors Group
EC	Executive Committee
IFS	International Foundation for Science
GAAS	Grant Application and Administration System
KFPE	Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries
LIC	Low-Income Countries
LMIC	Lower Middle Income Countries
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MESIA	IFS Monitoring and Evaluation System for Impact Assessment
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RUFORUM	The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture
SAC	Scientific Advisory Committee
SCNAT	Swiss Academy of Sciences
SGC	Scientific and Grants Committee
SPC	Scientific Programme Coordinators
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SSEA	South and South East Asia and the Pacific
ToR	Terms of Reference
UMIC	Upper Middle Income Countries
XL	Latin America and the Caribbean

# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Background

Since the 1970s the International Foundation for Science (IFS) supports young scientists in developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Support includes research grants and capacity enhancing activities such as feedback on research proposals, scientific counselling, hands-on training in thematic workshops, research skills courses, mentorship, training visits to advanced laboratories, training courses in service and maintenance of equipment as well as assistance in purchasing scientific equipment and supplies.

In 2008 the IFS Board of Trustees (BOT) and the IFS Donors Group (DG) decided that it be timely to initiate an external evaluation in 2009 which would take stock of achievement since 2001 and also be forward-looking, analyzing challenges ahead.

## 1.2 Observations and Analysis

The IFS has an impressive track record. There are few (international) organizations that are focused on support to this category of young scientists in the same way. The IFS has developed well-established structures and systems, among others a comprehensive Grant Application and Administration System (IFS-GAAS) with well defined key IFS Concepts and Glossary.

Grants are honoured according to a rigorous selection process based on high standards of scientific quality. The weight attributed in the evaluation process to scientific quality is certainly higher than the one for developmental relevance.

The IFS “*Monitoring and Evaluation System for Impact Assessment*” (MESIA) studies show that most past grantees have had a successful science career, that they have published widely and that they have continued to stay in their home countries in universities and other scientific institutions after the grant.

The current structure of funding is a major concern for IFS itself, its Board and the Director. Most of IFS support comes from aid agencies with a minor contribution from research councils and foundations. However, IFS might need to be more focused and not spread the limited resources too thinly and address all issues.

The Evaluation Team has analysed the strengths and weaknesses. The analysis results in the following perceived comparative advantages:

- IFS has an unparalleled global network of researchers, technical advisers and partnerships in developing countries.
- Most grantees think that the IFS grant although ‘very rigorous’ takes shorter time to process compared to others. It is said to be flexible, un-bureaucratic, and fund transfers are easy. The rigorous process, in the words of one grantee, “brings out the best” in the researcher as well and seems an appreciated feature of the grant.
- The direct contact and feedback from mentor/coach specialist reviewers and advisers is perceived as a very high value input even when one does not end up with a grant.
- Its model of ‘incubating’ and focusing on individual young scientists in developing countries who most granting schemes overlook is perceived as a most unique and

attractive feature of the IFS model. Qualifying for an international grant has a huge impact of building the confidence of young scientists.

### 1.3 Overall Conclusions

#### *Mission statement still highly relevant*

IFS mission statement of strengthening capacity of developing countries to conduct relevant and high quality research on the sustainable management of biological and water resources; and its focus on young scientists is still relevant. Most other sources of funding favour established scientists, and in some instances donor agencies interested to support individual young scientists lack the infrastructure to implement such funding programme, and IFS fills that gap. The IFS is able to attract and support a lot of interesting proposals in different fields and from a wide number of countries. Its funds are especially suitable for supporting good research ideas to be carried out in small projects.

#### *IFS grants are widely recognised*

IFS grants enjoy a high reputation among young scientists who seek grants since the awarding selection process is competitive and rigorous and widely recognised as transparent and fair. It draws on the expertise of highly qualified scientists who are deeply committed Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) members, and a big pool of external experts. Unlike many other grant makers, IFS provides detailed feedback on the weak points of the application giving the chance to improve and reapply; even those who do not receive a grant get important advice concerning their proposals and research.

#### *IFS structure is not efficient and the prevailing culture is not productive*

The IFS administrative efficiency has many times been put in question by donors. Programme work breakdown structures at the Secretariat are 'standalones' and not efficient or complimentary. This has created a competitive climate that seems to have created an erosion of trust among staff that waste staff's time. IFS' culture is defined by its practices; and its present culture seems to impact staff's behaviour. Ideally, policies and procedures are put in place to govern organizational behaviour, thus providing a means for establishing values, norms and standards. Management systems are also put into place to save time on supervision and giving directions allowing individuals to be more proactive on critical matters. However, while there might be clear distinction between the tasks and responsibilities of the Scientific Programme Coordinators (SPC) and their Programme Administrators; and between the Programme Administrators and the Finance Administrators, in practice, governing regulations are poorly adhered to. Further, the governance structure in relation to the size of the organization is expensive, in addition to costly physical meetings of the Scientific Advisory Committees (eight committees meet twice per year) and of the Board of Trustees (once a year). Other questionable costs include those of physical location of the IFS office. The offices are also space-wise quite luxurious and it might be possible to find cheaper location in Stockholm.

#### *IFS should have a stronger development focus in its grant-making*

So far, in the grant awarding process more emphasis has been given to the scientific quality and less to the development relevance or 'development results'. However, due to the mere fact that IFS deals with biological and water resources issues, potentially all projects have relevance to development. Research agencies are mostly interested in strengthening capacities for high quality research and development agencies are mostly interested in the development relevance of the research. Little consideration is given to the fact that researchers are more and more required to

work in interdisciplinary groups and trans-disciplinary projects. All this could have contributed to IFS' difficulties in broadening its funding base. Despite its apparent success, it has not been able to mobilize more long term financial commitments by development agencies.

Although IFS seems to have long recognized the synergies that can be realized through formation of strategic partnerships it has not fully exploited and utilized the opportunity.

Global scientific issues that IFS grants address are inherently complex, straddling a wide range of disciplines, communities and institutions, with challenges that transcend the IFS' capacity. But while IFS has done well with individual partners (SAC members), it has not fully explored other leveraging/ strategic partnerships on the basis of shared interests, complementarities and task divisions.

## 1.4 Recommendations

The recommendations of the Evaluation Team can be summarized as follows:

1. The Evaluation Team came to the conclusion that there is no need to change the basic mission statement as it is formulated in the statutes of IFS since it is still relevant. It is, however, strongly recommended that a common institutional strategic vision for IFS 2020 be developed through an inclusive, consultative and participatory process that includes the board, secretariat, key donors and select members of SAC. The Visioning process should be an important starting exercise which the Board and the new IFS Director should jointly lead.
2. IFS should further develop strategies on how to achieve a better gender balance in the granting programme and how to collaborate with public and private sector institutions to leverage IFS efforts.
3. With regard to the target groups of the IFS activities, the main focus should be on supporting young individual researchers in Low-Income Countries (LIC) with weak and volatile scientific funding infrastructure through IFS grants programme and CES. In a second priority, the engagement of IFS in Lower Middle-Income Countries which were earlier eligible for the IFS grants but now have a stronger scientific funding infrastructure, should in the future be based on specific collaboration packages. These collaboration packages would have to be adapted to the specific situation/needs of each country.
4. Considering the fact that (a) the costs for equipment increased significantly in the last 30 years and (b) the costs for laboratory equipment is usually considerably higher than the costs for equipment in social science studies, the upper limit of each grant should be increased to USD 15,000 and there should be two levels of grants: USD 8,000 and USD 15,000. Furthermore, if several grants (up to three) are given to the same individual, only the first grant should be given to conduct purely disciplinary research (strengthening the basic research capacity); second and third grants should be given to support inter- and/or trans-disciplinary projects.
5. A distinction should be made between support activities which are tailored to an individual researcher (e.g. visiting other laboratories, attending international meetings and conferences), and general support for proposal writing and writing scientific papers. For each grant, at least 2,500 USD should be reserved for CES activities like visiting,

attending and presenting results at international meetings and conferences (to be approved based on performance). On the other hand, organising and conducting workshops and courses on proposal development and scientific writing should be mainly the task and responsibility of research organizations and IFS partners in the countries.

6. A thematic focus is necessary. The thematic focus on sustainable management of biological and water resources is still justified. Within this general thematic focus a few (2-3) research programmes should be defined.
7. Each Research Programme should have its own budget based on performance previous year(s).
8. To improve effectiveness, the upper age limit for male and female applicants should be reduced to 35 years. The 40 years upper age limit was considered too high for the grantee to give any premium leverage to the grantees in their scientific careers. All candidates both men and women should be able to compete ably for the grants since the grant does not require them to leave the country.
9. To manage more strategically, efficiently, effectively and in keeping with current development management practices, IFS has to adopt Results-Based-Management in all its operations, especially programming. IFS has to urgently develop an M&E system that effectively tracks progress on implementation as well as progress on the realization of planned results on outcome and impact level and facilitates learning. It must also be able to show value for money.
10. To manage better, and as part of creating a leaner, flatter, more flexible, efficient and effective organization, IFS has to reorganize the Secretariat: The Management Team should comprise the Director, the Head of Programme and the Head of Administration; The Programme Department should comprise one Scientific Programme Manager responsible for each research programme and 1-2 scientific Programme Officers (in relation to the size of the programme). All administration tasks should be done within the Administration department (Finance, HR, IT, administrative support). Working together as one team might help re-culture IFS from a negatively competitive organization to a synergetic efficient and effective one.
11. The IFS Governance structure should be maintained, however, the Board of Trustees should consider the following adjustments in the way of work. First, the Board and the Committees should use distance spanning techniques as often as possible. The Board should meet at least twice a year using distance spanning techniques. One meeting should be held at the end of the year to approve the work plan and budget for the next year; the other meeting should be held in the beginning of the year for adoption of the annual report and giving directions for the next budget- and planning process. The number of SACs should also be reduced having one SAC per Programme. The SACs should also meet physically only once a year and the Board should meet physically only every second year. Specific ToRs for Board members should be developed and broadened to allow for pro-activity, especially in financial and programmatic issues.
12. If IFS is going to develop a distributed organization, it should comprise of HQ in Stockholm and at least 3 regional IFS offices (at least one each in Africa, Asia and Latin America). Having only one small office in Africa does not give IFS a global image. The

HQ and the regional offices should have the same brand name and should preferably be parts of the same legal entity.

13. To do better, IFS has to start giving greater attention to capacity building for staff especially in managing for results. A strategy should be developed for continuous education and linkages with current scientific intelligence from academic institutions.
14. IFS should actively look for more cost-effective location.
15. For greater stability, IFS should broaden its funding base especially its range of long term funders/donors. Although it has considerable number of funders, the present dependency of one main donor creates financial uncertainty and instability which in turn constrains long term strategic planning.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background

The International Foundation for Science (IFS) was founded by scientists for scientists as one of the first organizations to explicitly address the needs of young scientists in developing countries. The IFS mandate is to contribute to the strengthening of scientific capacity in developing countries to conduct relevant and high quality research on the management, use, and conservation of biological and water resources. The IFS Programme was conceived in the 1970s as a response to the brain drain: unfavourable conditions in scientific institutions in these countries resulted in the migration of many of the most promising young researchers. IFS created an alternative by offering competitive research grants with some supporting services and occasional workshops. Since then the IFS programme has grown in size and content.

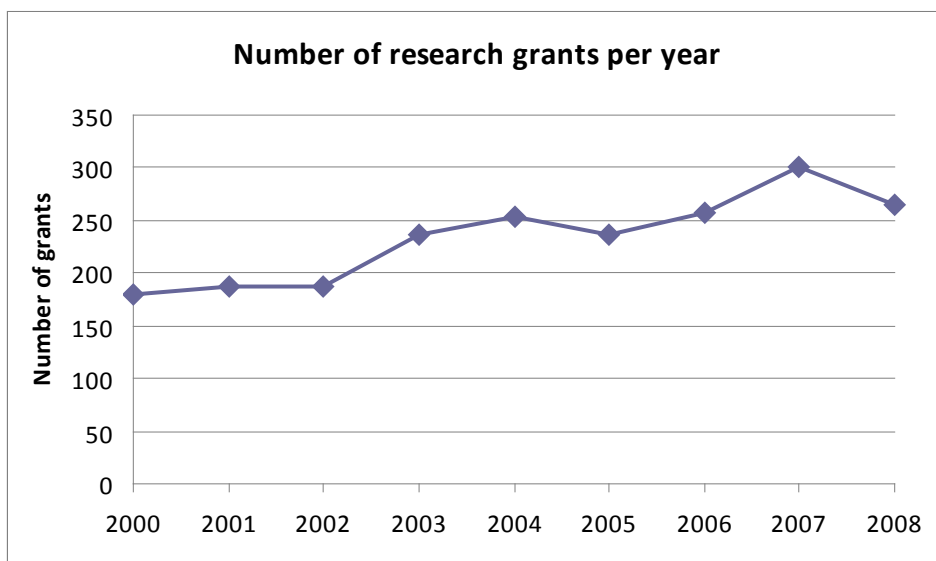
The latest evaluation of IFS was conducted in 2001, basically confirming the continued necessity of IFS' unique role as a direct/individual supporter of young scientists in developing countries. While the development of IFS since then has been testimony to its successful adaptation to changing needs and priorities of the receiver community, new challenges and necessities have developed over the last decade. Questions therefore arise as to a number of IFS' current missions and visions: Are there new necessities and priorities in the fields of global change research? If yes: What are they? Is IFS prepared to tackle these challenges? Is IFS' organizational structure and financial basis appropriate to cope with changing needs and priorities?

In 2008 the IFS Board of Trustees (BOT) and the IFS Donors Group (DG) therefore decided that it be timely to initiate a new external evaluation in 2009 with the purpose of improving both in the understanding and analysis of reality and issues and in future actions. The evaluation is therefore viewed as a systematic way of learning from experience, whereby involved stakeholders draw lessons from their interaction and take corrective actions to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their ongoing future activities. A revised evaluation process is also appropriate in view of the fact the present Director of IFS will retire during 2010.

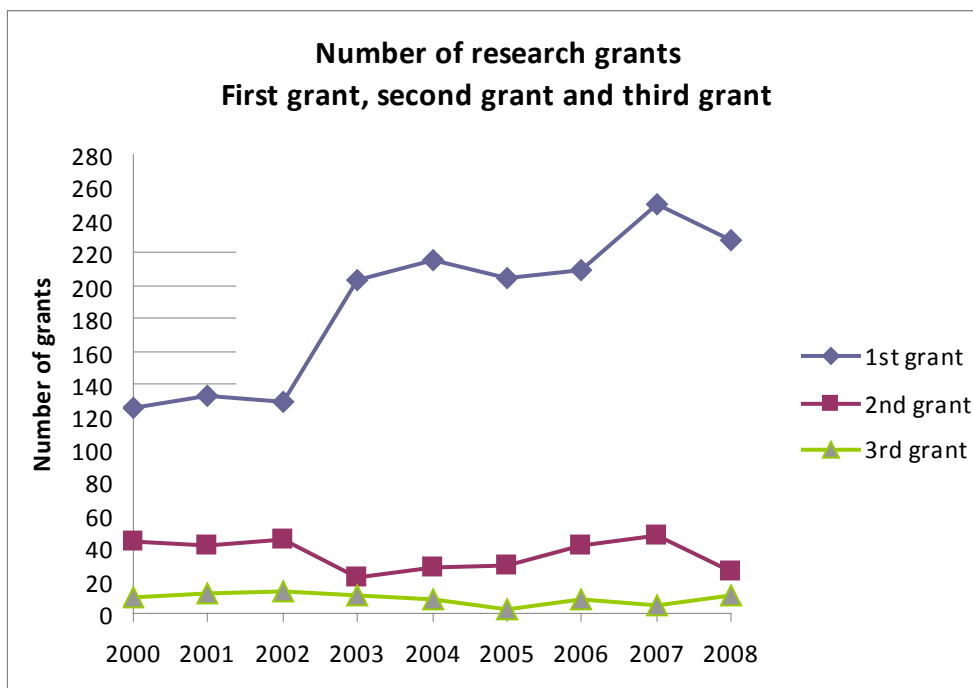
### 2.2 Brief information on IFS

The IFS supports young scientists in developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Support includes research grants and capacity enhancing

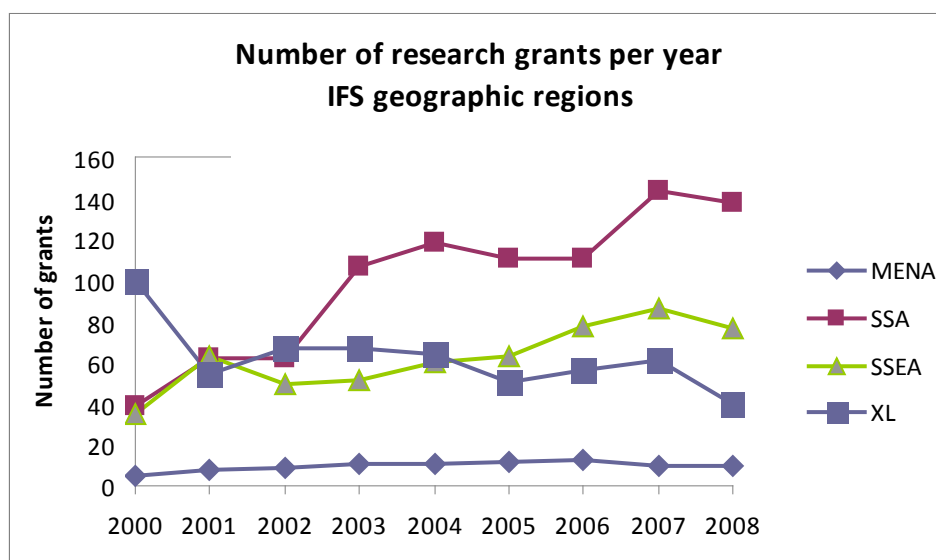
activities such as feedback on research proposals, scientific counselling, hands-on training in thematic workshops, research skills courses, mentorship, training visits to advanced laboratories, training courses in service and maintenance of equipment as well as assistance in purchasing scientific equipment and supplies.



The table above shows all the research grants approved within the period 2000 to 2008. The peak was reached 2007, when the number of grants was more than 50 % higher than the year 2000. A grantee may have up to three grants, meaning that a grantee with three grants will appear three times in the table above. The table below shows that the number of grantees that have been honoured with three grants is limited and has not changed much the last decade. The major part of the grantees receives one grant only as illustrated in the table below. There was a major shift 2003. The years 2000, 2001 and 2002 the number of grantees receiving the second grant was one third of the number receiving the first one. However, in 2003 the relation was instead 1:10.



The table below shows the geographical distribution of the grants. The following four geographical regions are used in the table: MENA=Middle East and North Africa, SSA= Sub-Saharan Africa, SSEA=South and South East Asia and the Pacific; and XL= Latin America and the Caribbean.



There has been a major shift in the distribution of grants over the last decade. In the year 2000 more than 50 % of the grantees came from Latin America and the Caribbean. The number of grantees coming from this region is now less than half the number in 2000. Instead, the number of grantees coming from Sub-Saharan Africa has increased significantly. The number of grantees from Sub-Saharan Africa is now more than three times as many as those in 2000. In the last few years approximately 50 % of the new grantees are based in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## 2.3 Purpose and Scope of this Evaluation

The purpose and scope of the evaluation was twofold. On the one hand, it was a stocktaking exercise with an evaluation of the implementation and the results of the IFS programme during the period 2001-2008. The review was to determine efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, impacts and outputs of the programme and – equally important – lessons to be learnt for the future.

On the other hand – and even more than the stocktaking exercise – the evaluation was a forward looking exercise. It was supposed to give directions and recommendations regarding how to develop IFS in the future and how to make it fit to tackle, in a flexible way, new demands and challenges of IFS' target group. IFS' support strategy of young and promising researchers in countries with scientifically vulnerable infrastructure was no longer unparalleled. New support strategies have come into existence. Further, needs of developing countries had been subject to rapid changes, and hence a need to redefine priorities. IFS' own organizational and financial structures as well needed to be reconsidered. In short: an overall forward looking evaluation was requested, based on lessons learned, both positive and negative, and making specific recommendations on how to improve IFS' internal structure and its international commitments in a meaningful way and complementary to other support organizations in the fields of enhancing scientific capacity building in developing countries.

In line with the aforementioned remarks the evaluation consisted of two parts:

- The first was to critically assess achievements and performance of IFS in the period since the 2001 evaluation, and to point to the developed strengths, niches and lacunae of its performance in the period under review, and to formulate lessons (to be) learned as a basis for future improvements of the programme.
- The second part was to look forward, i.e. to assess IFS' present structure and functions in view of new necessities and priorities as a result of rapidly changing needs of the developing countries, but also in view of changing framework conditions of IFS due to new partners and competitors in funding and supporting similar activities.

The Terms of Reference (ToR) in full are attached as **Annex 1**.

## 2.4 The Evaluation Team

The Evaluation Team consisted of three senior consultants – Dr. Rosa Muraguri-Mwololo, Mr. Roland Schertenleib and Mr. Arne Svensson, Professional Management AB (team leader).

## 2.5 Methodology

### 2.5.1 General Approach

The assignment included studying documentation, making a mapping and survey, making analyses and providing recommendations in accordance with the description given in the ToR. The ToR provided a comprehensive set of areas to be studied and evaluation questions to be answered. The Evaluation Team applied a three pronged approach in order to collect data for meeting the objectives: i) defining methods and sources of data/information; ii) data/information analysis in respect of the objectives; and iii) developing a validation method (or matrix to be more specific) in respect to the specific requirements in the ToR. The validation matrix is attached at **Annex 2**. This methodology had two main objectives: (1) to establish the validity of the findings and ensure the reliability of the information on which the findings are based and (2) to evaluate the impact of one or more values, strategies and activities on improving the overall performance of the organization under review.

### 2.5.2 Methodology

The Evaluation was carried out during the period of September 2009 to January 2010. The Evaluation Team:

1. Analyzed relevant documentation available at IFS;
2. Conducted interviews with a sample of members of IFS Board and the Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs);
3. Conducted interviews with the IFS staff;
4. Conducted interviews with staff at Sida;
5. Prepared and analysed the response to questionnaires which were sent to all members of IFS Board and SACs, IFS External Experts, IFS Partner Institutions and Grantees;
6. Carried out visit to the IFS hub and Makerere University in Uganda. The visit included interviews with relevant stakeholders. The visit also included participation in an IFS workshop Developing Africa through Science and Technology Innovations in Agriculture: "Women as the Key Drivers" 28-29 Sept 2009; Carried out a visit to Kenya to interview relevant stakeholders;
8. Conducted additional interviews with stakeholders over the phone;

9. Participated in the workshop which was organised jointly by the International Foundation for Science (IFS) and the Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE) of the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT) to analyze the emerging international “architecture” of research funding for young scientists in developing countries;
10. Assessed the evaluation questions per ToR;
11. Provided recommendations on how to improve IFS; and
12. Presented and discussed preliminary findings at the IFS Board Executive Committee meeting on 21 November 2009.

### **2.5.3 Reviewed Documents and Persons Interviewed**

A list of persons interviewed is attached (**Annex 3**). The list contains approximately 60 persons. We met with some of the key informants several times. These interviews offered an invaluable insight on the contributions made towards the fulfilment of IFS’ mission.

The interviews were semi-structured. Based on the verification matrix a number of pre-defined questions for each target group were formulated. Departing from these rather broad questions follow-up questions were formulated individually dependent on the respondents’ answers.

Questionnaires with key questions were sent to the members of the IFS Board and the SACs and a sample of IFS External Advisers, IFS Partner Institutions and present and former Grantees.

IFS Evaluation response rate to e-mail survey

	Numbers contacted by e-mail	Number of Responses	Approximate %
IFS Board members	11	7	64 %
SAC Members and IFS External Advisers	52	37	71 %
Grantees	297	208	70 %
IFS partner organizations	10	4	40 %

As indicated in the table above the response rates were: Board Members: 64 %; SAC Members and External Advisers: 71 %; Partner Organizations: 40 %; Grantees: 70 %.

Copies of the different questionnaires are attached (Annex 5).

A list of documents reviewed is attached (Annex 4).

### **2.5.4 Workshop**

Before finalising the first draft report a workshop was organised 8-10 November 2009 by IFS and the Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE) of the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT) to analyze the emerging international “architecture” of research

funding for young scientists in developing countries and to discuss potential relationships and collaborative arrangements between organizations which promote scientific capacity strengthening in less developed countries and other selected evaluation questions.

## 2.6 This Report and How to Read it

Preliminary findings and conclusions were presented to the IFS Executive Committee on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2009.

The findings were presented in a Draft Report that was submitted to IFS Director on the 4th of December 2009 for further distribution to a group of Trustees and Donors. After the receipt of comments from them, a Final Report was submitted to IFS on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 2010. Minor editions were made after the IFS Board meeting in February.

This Report is divided into five sections as follows:

- The Executive Summary in section ONE contains the overall conclusions and the recommendations.
- Section TWO is introductory.
- Section THREE is concerned with the first part of the Evaluation, namely an assessment of the results achieved so far.
- Section FOUR is looking forward on IFS' future
- Section FIVE contains the overall conclusions and provides concrete recommendations.

The various sections of the report answer questions pertinent to the overall purpose of the evaluation and the elements stipulated therein.

## 3. Achievements 2002-2008

This section outlines the evaluation questions:

- What are the achievements 2002-2008 and how do they comply with the present Five Year Programme?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current IFS programme?
- Are there implementation problems both internally and/or externally, and how can they be eliminated?
- How and to what extent does the programme reflect the needs, necessities and priorities of the recipient countries?
- Does the development of grants to individual applicants and the regional distribution of applications and grantees reflect the needs of the developing world or should a regional/focussed concentration be considered?
- A multiple of disciplines and topics related to the biological resource base are supported by IFS. Does this support reflect the priority needs of the developing countries? Should IFS reconsider these topics?
- Over the last decade IFS has included Capacity Enhancing Support (CES) in the programme in the form of workshops – courses – laboratory research – conference participation etc. Should they be continued/increased/abandoned?
- Are age structure and gender distribution of applicants appropriate or should changes be considered?

The Evaluation Team 2009 considered the above mentioned items and formulated consequences to be taken into consideration for the future improvement of IFS activities. Please note that one of the questions in this section of the ToR, namely “*How should IFS change in order to be well prepared to meet the post 2010 period?*” is not discussed here but in the final chapter.

### **3.1 Achievements 2002-2008 and compliance with the Five-Year-Plan**

IFS prepared a “Mid Term Strategic Plan 2002–2004”. In 2005 IFS was devoting its efforts to prepare the “Five Year Programme 2006–2010”. At the beginning of the planning process for this Five Year Programme, three regional consultations were carried out with stakeholders in Africa, Asia and Latin America, respectively. The meetings are documented. The outcome was unanimous and was fed into the Five Year Programme. A summary of how IFS has followed up the recommendations from the external evaluation 2000/01 was discussed at a Board meeting in 2006.

This section of the report is largely based on quantitative evidence collected from internal documents and looks at IFS objective, which is to enhance scientific capacity in developing countries through support (grants and capacity building activities) to promising young researchers in biological and water resource management, so that they can contribute to development in their own countries. And while the IFS Strategic Plan 2006-2010 was not modelled using a Results-Based-Management logic model with planned activities, expected outputs and expected outcomes, this section of the report will attempt to look at ‘achievements’ through the internationally accepted definition of results; as observable and measurable changes caused by projects or effects that are consequences of the actions of a project.

IFS in its Plan commits to two output level objectives:

- a competitive research grant scheme; and
- capacity enhancing support adding value to the grant scheme

According to the Plan, the target for the Five Year Programme period was an increase to between 250 and 300 grants annually. So far internal reports indicate that in 2006, IFS awarded 263 grants, in 2007: 302 grants, 2008: 265 grants, and in 2009: 250 grants. In all the five years, IFS met and in 2007 exceeded planned targets.

In regards to Capacity Enhancing Support activities (CES), IFS internal reports indicate that it was able to support grantees to participate in a single or a package of activities in the duration of his/her research project. Specifically, the following number of young scientists including grantees, applicants and potential applicants have benefited from capacity enhancing events through either participation in workshops or through individual visits to advanced research institutions or laboratories through travel grants. In 2006: 535, in 2007: 642, in 2008: 1080, and in 2009: 600. These young scientists have had access to functioning scientific equipment for their science, access to literature, and most have benefited from attending workshops and courses offered by IFS, visiting other laboratories, and attending and presenting results at international meetings and conferences. The decline in 2009 compared with 2008 is a result of the difficult and insecure funding situation. Since IFS has put first priority in keeping up the number of grants, CES activities had to be reduced proportionally.

The IFS “*Monitoring and Evaluation System for Impact Assessment*” (MESIA) studies show that most past grantees have had a successful science career; they have published widely, have continued to stay in their home countries in universities and other scientific institutions after the grant, but what is not clear is how their research is contributing to policy discussions and solutions to development problems in their countries. The lack of an “*outcome/results focus*” is a current concern for several of IFS’ key donors. One respondent summarized the concern of many donors when he said: “*science is being challenged by development at local and global levels- there are more problems than there are solutions - IFS has to be responsive*”. However, how realistic is it to expect, that with a relatively small grant of USD 12,000 research can be conducted which will contribute significantly to policy discussions and practical solutions to development challenges?

The capacity building engagements of the IFS grants before or after the grant are perceived as ‘catalytic’ and a high value and a first important input for young scientists. Few other grants are able to give substantial support to both grantees and potential grantees. The transfer of knowledge and technology is perceived as unique. In the words of one grantee: “*Ensuring one can write a good proposal opens doors for researchers in a way no other grant does.*”

## 3.2 Strengths and weaknesses

### 3.2.1 Strengths

- IFS encourages every year hundreds of young scientists from developing countries, especially from countries with weak and vulnerable scientific infrastructure, to perform relevant research in their own countries. This encouragement includes financial support, but it also facilitates very useful contacts with well established scientists elsewhere. Even those who do not receive a grant get important advice concerning their proposals and research. This support to talented young scientists to kick-start careers, attend and present results at international meetings and develop collaborative links is crucial to the advancement of science and technology in developing countries.
- There are few (international) organizations that are focused on support to this category of young scientists in the same way. Most other sources of funding favour established scientists. Therefore, IFS is rather unique in its niche. Its support allows most scientists to bridge some difficult years at the start of their career which allows them to learn how to compete for other grants and to obtain later more substantial finances from other donors.
- The IFS has an impressive track record.

The most important specific strengths of the current IFS are:

- The IFS has developed well-established structures and systems, among others a comprehensive Grant Application and Administration System (IFS-GAAS) with well defined key IFS Concepts and Glossary.
- Granting of funds according to a rigorous selection process based on high standards of scientific quality. This selection process of projects to be supported is fair and transparent; it is based on the review of external experts and the recommendations of Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs) composed by researchers from various disciplines and nationalities. Applicants are judged on the basis of excellence or scientific potential, away from their environment, and thus, away from potential influences deriving from personal knowledge or influence. Originality and innovativeness should be stimulated and valued.

Therefore, it is very prestigious for a young scientist to receive an IFS grant and boosts his/her career prospects;

- High scientific quality and strong commitment of SAC members and of a big pool of external advisers. Grantees get feedback from and are able to interact with world experts in their field; this also opens doors and other opportunities for them;
- IFS provides detailed feedback on the weak points of the application, and, if possible, a chance to resubmit a revised application;
- IFS is able to attract and support a lot of interesting proposals in different fields and from a wide number of countries; IFS funds are also suitable for supporting good research ideas of young researchers to be carried out in small projects and for giving a young researcher the means to bring his own scientific project to a successful conclusion;
- IFS provides a response to the research applications in a relatively short time (decisions on grants are taken in June and December each year) and, therefore, giving the chance for the research work to start immediately or for the candidate to search for alternative sources of support;
- The Capacity Enhancing Support (CES) activities have been included since the last external evaluation in 2001 and especially the strengthening of the capacity of young researchers in developing countries to conceptualize and prepare research proposals through courses and workshops;
- Stimulating the dissemination of scientific information from developing countries;
- Regular publication of MESIA impact studies with in-depth assessments of grantees, their scientific fields, the conditions in which they work and the general scientific landscape within their countries;
- Committed members of the Board; and
- Good donor relations although they perceive a problem of 'high overhead costs'.

### **3.2.2 Weaknesses**

The most important weakness of the current IFS as a whole is related to the institutional environment in which IFS operates and especially the rules and policies of some of the donor organizations. Due to the fact that the contribution by some of the donors is granted only on a year-to-year basis without longer term commitment, short- and mid-term planning becomes very difficult for IFS. This creates a lot of frustration within IFS as well as with potential partners in CES activities and with grantees. CES activities, which have been included in the IFS programme based on the strong recommendations of the last external evaluation, are affected most. Although it was possible to broaden somewhat the funding base and to include new types of donors such as government authorities in some advanced developing countries (e.g. Argentina, Thailand), private foundations (e.g. McArthur, Bill and Melinda Gates, Syngenta) and commercial companies, the financial commitments of the donors on a long term basis which would allow IFS better financial planning has not increased significantly over the last years.

Weaknesses which have been identified by the Evaluation Team and/or mentioned by the respondents and which are related to the actual implementation of the IFS programme are:

- Different philosophy and working mode among the different research areas and especially different views on the role and main tasks of the Scientific Programme Coordinators (SPC); there is even quite a strong sense of competition between the different groups leading to a considerable amount of tension within the secretariat;

- An inconsistent standard among different SAC groups – a proposal not passing the scientific rigor of one group does get approved by another;
- Uncertain place of Social Sciences among the different research areas;
- The allowed response time to review the proposals is considered by some of the external experts to be short (in some cases 4 weeks), especially when they receive several proposals and when they have to do the work in their spare time; and
- Relatively little emphasis is given to the development relevance in the grant awarding process.

Other issues which are considered by some of the respondents as weaknesses of the current IFS programme are: (a) that little consideration is given to the fact that researchers are more and more required to work in interdisciplinary groups and transdisciplinary projects, and (b) that little attention is given to capacity strengthening of research institutes/universities. However, this is directly related to the conscious decision to focus on individual researchers in the early phase of their career.

### 3.3 Lessons learned

1. It seems that IFS has slowly learnt that the assumption that grants for scientific equipment alone be enough for grantees to develop the necessary skills required to identify, conduct and disseminate meaningful research was wrong. IFS introduced the CES activities to strengthen the research capacity especially for grantees in countries with poor scientific infrastructure.
2. In light of shrinking resources and rising competition for the grants, IFS has learnt that relatively little value is added when investing in young scientists from more developed countries; therefore, IFS has phased out some countries like Chile, Mexico, Uruguay and Argentina. The reason is that these countries have invested in post-graduate research training and in the establishment of national granting schemes. Scientific grants and CES activities have a higher added value in countries where the scientific infrastructure is very weak.
3. IFS feels it could be slowly losing its reputation as a prestigious grant maker. It has also learnt that it is no longer the “only game in town” and that there are more and more organizations supporting science in developing countries. To keep its relevance and to play a leading role in developing countries, IFS has realized that it has to be closer to the field and reinvent itself in alignment with the emerging scientific landscape. Creating a local office (hub) for Eastern Africa in Uganda in September 2009 was part of the new futuristic strategy.
4. For quite some time, the Scientific Programme Coordinators in the different research areas at IFS have tended to work in “silos” and competitively and not in concert and synergistically to leverage programme results. The IFS is learning that to be effective, “stand alone” approach will not deliver valuable results. All Coordinators must pull in the same direction for efficiency and cohesion and to harmonize programme activities as well. The recruitment of the Head of Programme two years ago was specifically to address the situation.

5. One of the other implementation lessons IFS has learned is that it does not have to do the purchase of equipment for its grantees. Developing countries are changing and equipment is now more available locally and grantees can purchase for themselves.
6. IFS has learnt that a strong base of scientific Advisers is a special niche and a critical factor in IFS' success, and hence has continued to increase and nurture this free resource.

### 3.4 Relevance

In this sub-section the Team assesses how and to what extent the programme reflects the needs, necessities and priorities of the recipient countries.

#### 3.4.1 Mission statement

IFS Mission Statement is defined in the Statutes and comprises three parts: the need, the mission and the strategy<sup>1</sup>.

- *The need*

Scientific research provides an important input for sustainable management of biological and water resources. Scientific knowledge is central for rural, urban, industrial, and policy development, which will lead to improvement of people's livelihoods.

- *The mission*

IFS shall contribute towards strengthening the capacity of developing countries to conduct relevant and high quality research on the sustainable management of biological and water resources. This will involve the study of physical, chemical, and biological processes, as well as relevant social and economic aspects, important in the conservation, production, and renewable utilisation of the natural resource base.

- *The strategy*

IFS shall identify, through a careful selection process, promising young scientists from developing countries with potential to become future lead scientists and science leaders. They will receive support in their early careers to pursue high quality research in developing countries on problems relevant to the mission, which will help them to become established and recognised nationally and internationally. Additional supporting services will be provided to researchers in scientifically weaker institutions and countries.

IFS shall act in collaboration with Affiliated Organizations and other national, regional, and international institutions utilising the complementary strengths of such partnerships.

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<sup>1</sup> Statutes for the International Foundation for Science, Insamlingsstiftelse, adopted by the constituent meeting of the Board of Trustees 22 October 2002

### **3.4.2 Needs, necessities and priorities of recipient countries**

In the past, IFS has allocated at least 70% of the research grants to scientists in Low Income Countries (LIC) and Lower Middle Income Countries (LMIC). This included most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, some countries in Central America and Asia.

Since most LICs and many LMICs still have a very weak and vulnerable research infrastructure, the need of these countries to build up research capacity and especially to support young researchers in embarking on a scientific career in their home country is still very high. In addition to the support of young scientist at the beginning of their scientific career, it is becoming also in these countries more and more important to encourage researchers to stay in academic and research institutions.

Since IFS gives individual grants, it has been seen as contradictory to demand that the research proposals should be multi-disciplinary, especially when the researcher is in her/his early career. Nevertheless, many grantees team up with colleagues, investigating other aspects of the same problematic. In the future programme IFS should discuss how to modify its approach so that interdisciplinary work becomes more positively appreciated.

According to the present IFS policy, up to 30% of grants can be allocated to researchers from Upper Middle Income Countries (UMICs). Since the researchers based in these countries in general have much better access to national research funding and infrastructure (higher scientific baseline), the need for IFS in these countries to support young researchers to kick-start their scientific careers, attend and present results at international meetings and develop collaborative links with other scientists is less urgent. The main challenge in these countries is to create and sustain an environment which encourages and supports researchers to stay in the academic field.

Many of the research projects supported by IFS are addressing MDG issues poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability. There are several examples of such research projects in the Annual Report 2008.

## **3.5 Distribution of grants**

This sub-section deals with the question if grants to individual applicants and the regional distribution of applications and grants reflects the needs of the developing world or if a regional/focused concentration should be considered.

The strategy of IFS has been to support as many individual researchers as possible to kick-start their scientific careers without focusing on a specific region or on specific research topics. This strategy is justified as long as strengthening the basic research capacity of individual young scientists is the main objective of IFS. However, with the limited funds available, a strong regional/focussed concentration would be necessary if, for some reasons, more importance has to be given to the impact of the research results/outputs. In this case, the relatively small grants would have to be streamlined in order to be able to have a significant impact on policy discussions and solving complex development problems. On the other hand, streamlining small research grants and managing the resulting research programme would be extremely challenging.

### 3.6 The choice of disciplines for support

A multiple of disciplines and topics related to the biological resource base are supported by IFS. Does this support reflect the priority needs of the developing countries? Should IFS reconsider these topics?

Research projects related to the sustainable utilisation of the biological and/or water resource base are supported by the current IFS granting programme in the following research areas:

- Aquatic Resources
- Animal Production
- Crop Science
- Forestry/Agroforestry
- Food Science
- Natural Products
- Social Sciences
- Water Resources

The last two research areas were added to the list after the last external evaluation in 2001.

In view of the global challenges related to climate change, increasing water scarcity, decreasing biodiversity, rapid urbanisation etc., the need for science based and locally adapted solutions to the sustainable utilisation of biological and water resources is growing at an unprecedented rate. The Low and the Lower Middle Income Countries are the most vulnerable towards these global changes and will be affected the most. Since these countries have generally also a very weak and vulnerable scientific infrastructure, their needs to build up and strengthen local research capacities in the research areas presently supported by IFS are even more urgent than before. However, the research should be heavily geared to the demands of the society and to find locally adapted solutions.

### 3.7 Capacity Enhancing Support

The seventh Evaluation question was: Over the last decade IFS has included a Capacity Enhancing Support (CES) to the Grant in form of workshops, courses, laboratory research, conference participation etc. Should they be continued/increased/abandoned?

Based on the recommendations of the last external evaluation in 2001, IFS has added to the granting programme Capacity Enhancing Support (CES) activities in the form of workshops, courses, visiting other laboratories, attending and presenting results at international meetings and conferences, etc.

A major part of the IFS capacity enhancing support programme in 2008 focused on the arranging of thematic and research skills workshops for scientists in the priority countries. The events, arranged by IFS and its collaborating partners were attended by more than 1,000 young scientists, including IFS grantees, applicants and potential applicants.

These activities have undoubtedly added to the strengths of the overall programme and many of the grantees have benefited a lot from them. However, how and by whom some of these activities have been organized and conducted might not have been the most cost effective way. For instance, proposal writing courses and workshops can be organized at a local level with local

people at much lower cost than sending IFS staff everywhere. It should be anyway the task of local universities to organize such kind of courses and workshops for all researchers and not just for IFS grantees. Also thematic workshops organized by IFS are not the best way for grantees to share/confront their work. It is preferable to send grantees to international meetings/conferences on their topic, where they can really get a feeling what is done in their research area and establish contact with other scientists working in the specific field.

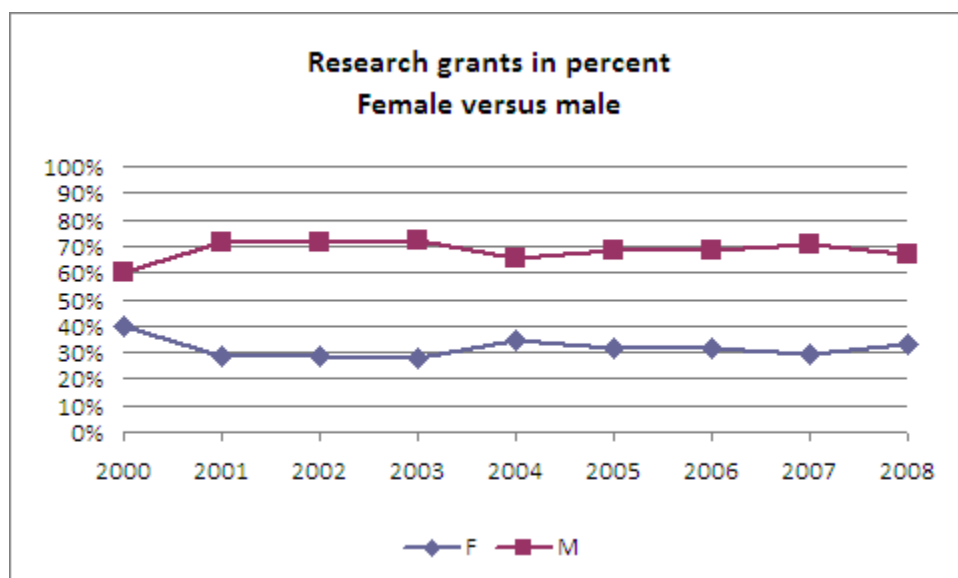
On the other hand, using IFS funds for sending grantees for short training periods to specific labs and for supporting international conference attendance is a justified investment. This makes it more attractive for young researchers to stay in the academic field. Some 80 IFS grantees travelled to and participated in events during 2008 as part of the IFS Capacity Enhancing Support Programme. Grantees came from the following countries: Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chile, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Peru, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, Tunisia, Uganda, Vietnam, Zimbabwe.

CES for grantees such as supporting visits to specific labs and attendance at international conferences is not included in their original research grants but requires additional funding which is granted based on performance. This is basically a good policy but it can also create a lot of frustration if the grantees do a good job but the additionally required funds are not available. In order to omit this problem, 15-20 % of the total sum committed to research grants should be centrally budgeted and reserved for such direct Capacity Enhancing Support to the grantees beyond their original research grant.

### 3.8 Age structure and gender distribution

One evaluation question is: Are the age structure and gender distribution of applicants appropriate or should changes be considered?

The maximum age of 40 years is the eligible age for applicants except concerning applicants based in China where the age limit has been pegged at 30 and applicants from Sub-Saharan Africa at age 45 (provided they have completed their highest degree, MSc, MA, PhD or equivalent, in the last five years.). IFS has however been flexible with age of female applicants who it assumes have had to take a break in their scientific careers to raise a family, however it has had no formal strategy or quota for women. The percentage of women grantees has been around 30 % for several years as indicated in the table below and that corresponds roughly to the percentage of women in post-graduate programmes.



A review of documents revealed that recommendations from past external evaluations, specifically the one undertaken 2000-2001, advised that *“IFS should attempt to increase the number of women grantees by targeting information and training to potential women applicants.... The availability of special donor funding targeting qualified women scientists should be explored.”* It also recommended that -“Attempts be made to increase the number and use of women scientific advisers”. Following this, IFS recently entered into collaboration with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Gender and Diversity unit to implement an Africa-wide project promoting women scientists. This five year project is going to see over 500 women scientists trained in capacity building components from proposal writing to scientific writing and to policy briefs.

The IFS hub in Eastern Africa gives special emphasis to promote women scientists in the region.

Due to lack of statistical information, it is still not possible to estimate the increase or decrease in numbers of women advisers over the years.

It is evident from a review of literature that the age limit has been an issue in many past IFS discussions and different positions have been proposed. One past external evaluation suggested that *“IFS introduces an age limit... limiting the eligibility for first grant to 5 years after the final research degree has been awarded”*.

## 4. Looking forward

The rapidly increasing impacts of economic and social globalization and the negative effects of the economic crisis 2008/2009 pose new challenges also to IFS. The development of appropriate responses is vital to the future work of IFS and its meaningful and forward-oriented performance among both the recipients of IFS grants and within the international donor community as partners and/or competitors.

This chapter is structured in seven sections addressing the following areas in turn:

- IFS in the emerging research landscape and the international funding architecture for scientific capacity strengthening
- Programme content
- Eligibility for IFS support
- Governance structure
- The Secretariat
- Regional presence
- The Scientific Advisory Committees

## **4.1 IFS in the emerging research landscape and the international funding architecture for scientific capacity strengthening**

This section will deal with a number of pertinent questions for IFS in the emerging research landscape and the international funding architecture for scientific capacity strengthening.

### **4.1.1 The emerging research landscape**

The emerging research landscape in developing countries is characterized by

- a generally more positive attitude towards science;
- an expansion of universities with post graduate programmes;
- an increasing requirement to link research with development relevant issues/problems;
- an increasing emphasis on research which is related to global change issues such as climate change, biodiversity, urbanisation, etc.;
- an increasing demand for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research; and
- the fact that the enabling environment and the quality of scientific infrastructure for supporting young scientists varies not only between Low and Middle Income Countries but it also varies between different Low Income Countries; GNP alone is no more a suitable criteria for identifying if a country has a weak and vulnerable scientific infrastructure.

The main characteristics of the emerging international architecture for funding research in developing countries can be summarized as follows:

- There is an increasing interest among research as well as development agencies to strengthen research capacities and to support individual researchers in developing countries;
- Research agencies are mostly interested in strengthening capacities for high quality research; development agencies put more emphasis on the development relevance of the research by addressing development related issues and problems;
- In most funding programmes the main emphasis is given to strengthening institutions and supporting established scientists;
- Some of the donor agencies are also interested in supporting individual young scientists but don't have the infrastructure to implement their own funding programme; and
- There are more and more private companies with philanthropic ambitions which can choose either to pay tax or support an organization such as IFS.

### **4.1.2 Adaptation of the founding concept to the future needs**

The main characteristics of the founding concept and principles of IFS have been: (a) focus on strengthening research capacity of young individual scientists in developing countries, (b) supporting many researchers with relatively small grants instead of supporting few researchers with large grants, (c) grants shall not be used for paying salaries; in 2001 after the last external evaluation, the founding concept was adapted by (d) adding Capacity Enhancing Support activities to the grant programme and by (e) defining that the grants should mainly go to

applicants from Low Income Countries and Lower Middle Income Countries. These founding concepts and principles of IFS are still largely valid for the future needs. However, there should be in future a clear distinction between target countries which are eligible for the funding programme and countries where specific collaboration packages will be developed and implemented.

IFS has to navigate among

- Post-graduate training programmes
- Research networks
- Other granting schemes

IFS has already formal and informal linkages and collaboration with like-minded organizations such as START, TWAS, IRD, UNU etc. The collaboration includes organizing joint courses and workshops for proposal development and scientific writing. IFS is also offering services with a good reputation and a good brand name to those organizations which are interested to support individual young scientists in developing countries but don't have the infrastructure to implement their own funding programme. However this collaboration can and should be strengthened and expanded.

## 4.2 Programme content

This sub-section is concerned with the programme structure and programme content. To what extent is the present structure of IFS and its different programme components relevant in the future? In dealing with these questions, the Team was requested to consider also IFS' role vis-à-vis other similar organizations and consider potential synergies with them.

### 4.2.1 Research grants

The ToR raise the following evaluation questions: Should IFS keep the scheme on the "traditional" research grants? Should IFS stick to the current amount of USD 12,000 per grant?

Most of the respondents (grantees, the members of the board and advisers) explicitly said the research grants should be revised. Since the late 1970's the grant has remained at USD 12,000, although it is renewable twice for similar amounts if deemed necessary. In the words of one respondent: "At the age of 40, USD 12,000 is not a motivating grant or financial incentive for research". Most perceive the grant as a good start-off funding, but for good research nearly all respondents agreed that 30 years ago it was a significant amount, but in today's global economy, with many fluctuating currencies, its significance has greatly reduced. Costs have increased, science projects vary greatly and many projects require a budget higher than the USD 12,000. *"Some scientific experiments require equipment that is beyond the IFS grant, this in the end means your results are questionable and not accepted in international journals"*. This is unless you can send your samples abroad to be analyzed.

Several respondents, however, thought that keeping the grant small was appropriate because it kept the experienced researchers away from the competition. If the grant became large and more attractive, it would lose its target group of young researchers as more established researchers would be competing for it.

Considering that the costs for equipment have increased significantly in the last 30 years and that the costs for lab equipments are usually considerably higher than the costs for equipment in social

science studies, the Evaluation Team came to the following conclusions: the upper limit of each grant should be increased to USD 15,000 but there should be two levels of grants: USD 8,000 (mainly for social science research) and USD 15,000 (mainly for research with expensive lab equipment). Furthermore, if several grants (up to three) are given to the same individual, only the first grant should be given to conduct purely disciplinary research (strengthening the basic research capacity); second and third grants should be given to support inter- and/or trans-disciplinary projects.

#### **4.2.2 The Capacity Enhancing Support**

The Capacity Enhancing Support (CES) as well as funds for specific/special projects (support to women, scientific equipment etc) constitutes the second major part of IFS activities. The following questions related to capacity enhancing support were to be answered: How important is it that IFS takes on special projects outside the granting scheme? Which CES types should be prioritized? What magnitude should the budget for CES have in relation to the budget for research grants?

The capacity enhancing support which covers a wide range of activities, including feedback on research proposals, scientific counselling, hands-on work with thematic workshops, visits to advanced scientific institutions, training in research skills etc, has been received very well by both grantees and advisers. However there is a feeling that they lack clear standard criteria for who qualifies for what and different grantees have different expectations. While some grantees have attended up to three capacity development events, others have had no exposure at all. Grantees seem to have varied experiences of IFS. Most of them had very positive experiences but in some cases the expectations were not met:

- *“After the grant I was expecting to know other young fellow researchers from other countries but this did not happen”.*
- *“Since receiving the grant, one has no other interaction with IFS”.*

Many of the evaluation respondents suggested that IFS should create more opportunities for researchers to network (south/south and north/south collaborations), sector alumni, creation of regional networks, lab collaborations, team/joint proposal funding, attending scientific workshops and conferences, to *“break the isolation of the young researcher”*.

Which CES types should be prioritized is a question of management, but budget for CES in relation to the budget for research grants should be complementary but significantly lower, given that grants are considered the core business for IFS.

#### **4.2.3 Research areas**

Are the eight different research areas still functional? Can they be amalgamated? Should some of them be discontinued? Should IFS take on new research areas? Might coordinated/integrated new funding structures be more appropriate in view of increasingly cross-cutting research themes and problems? Would an open IFS funding scheme (open agenda) be timelier than a targeted research report? Should IFS identify (a) very important field(s) of research and proactively push them?

The Evaluation Team has studied the pros and cons with the present selection of research areas and the division of grantees between them. In summary the Team’s analysis is as follows:

- Thematic focus is necessary;
- Thematic focus on sustainable management of biological and water resources is still justified;

- Within this general thematic focus a few (2-3) research programmes should be defined; important criteria for deciding on the programmes should be: relevance to the MDGs and existing expertise within the IFS network;
- Each Research Programme should have its own budget based on performance during previous year(s).

The research programmes should be based on the present resource base of IFS and, thus, take advantage of IFS major strengths. A crucial question is when and how the 2-3 programme areas which will replace the current eight research areas should be identified. The choice of content for those programmes will be a defining decision for IFS future. All research projects (= approved research grants) in the same programme should have something in common and create added value. At the Secretariat this would encourage collaboration and play down competition. This would strengthen “family-building” at IFS.

It is also crucial to have a common understanding of what a research programme means. Often, one would understand a programme with a pre-defined well-elaborated thematic orientation and whose projects create a substantially added value due to the fact that they are coordinated within this programme, i.e. the programme is more than the sum of its projects. It is doubtful, whether the IFS approach (young scientists spread around the developing world, limited financial resources etc) can provide for such an approach. Thus, one may rather speak of 2-3 programme **areas**, where IFS still reacts in a responsive way (no elaborated/detailed scientific agenda of the whole programme), but where IFS will cluster projects once it is known what kind of projects were submitted.

There are of course different ways to amalgamate the current eight research areas into 2-3 new programme areas. One option would be to define the new programme areas according to the level being addressed by the research:

1. Research at the molecular level (natural science orientation)
2. Research to understand the processes at the system level (natural and technical systems)
3. Research related to the sustainable management of land and water resources (interactions between natural/technical systems and the society)

This and other suitable options for the new programme areas should be discussed during the earlier mentioned visioning process.

### **4.3 Eligibility for IFS support**

A specific strength of IFS has always been its focus on young promising scientists within less developed countries and weak scientific infrastructures. In this context some parameters have played a major role in the selection process of candidates. They refer to items like the age of the applicants, their educational backgrounds and institutional affiliation. Special consideration have been given to the gender issue as well as to the country eligibility. IFS requested the Team to assess if these criteria are still timely and appropriate.

#### **4.3.1 Criteria on age and gender**

The maximum age at the time of application is 40. IFS has been flexible with the age of female applicants from Sub-Saharan Africa who have taken a break in their academic career in order to raise a family. The minimum educational background is M.Sc. or the equivalent. IFS accepts

applications from formal academic and science institutions as well as from research oriented NGOs. IFS has no formal quota for women applicants.

#### **4.3.2 Country eligibility criteria**

Although the emphasis is on “*low income countries with vulnerable scientific infrastructure*” middle income countries up to a certain GNP/Capita are also eligible and maximum 30% of grant resources can be allocated to researchers based in such countries, including Brazil, India and China. Should IFS consider modifying the country eligibility criteria?

With regard to the target groups of the IFS activities, the main focus should be on supporting young individual researchers in Low-Income Countries (LIC) with weak and volatile scientific funding infrastructure through the IFS grant programme and CES. Only these should be eligible for grants.

Collaboration packages between IFS and some selected Low- and Middle-Income countries would have to be adapted to the specific situation/needs of each country and could include:

- Identification of good laboratories which can host IFS grantees (especially from neighbouring countries);
- Participating in a pro-active dialogue with government agencies to create/secure the required enabling environment in the country to foster scientific research and especially to omit any brain drain;
- Supporting the governments in developing competitive funding programmes to strengthen local research capacities by partnering with organizations that conduct such activities; and
- Strengthening the position of local research institutions.

Collaboration packages should be identified on a selective basis and only when there is a pro-active interest from the partner organizations or governments. The Affiliated Organizations should be approached for such purposes.

## **4.4 Governance structure**

### **4.4.1 The Board of Trustees and its Standing Committees**

IFS is registered in Sweden as a non-governmental, non-profit foundation. The aims, governance and construction of IFS are given in the statutes of the organization<sup>2</sup>.

The Board of Trustees (BOT) is the governing body of IFS and it determines the policies and fulfils the corporate responsibilities of the Organization. Trustees are nominated by Affiliated Organizations and Donors and are appointed by the Board.

The BOT has three standing committees (1) the Executive Committee (EC), (2) the Scientific and Grants Committee (SGC) and (3) the Nominations and Membership Committee (NMC). The EC has the power to exercise and perform all of the powers and functions of the Board between meetings of the Board, except the power to alter any fundamental policy of the Board. The SGC

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<sup>2</sup> Statutes for the International Foundation for Science, Insamlingsstiftelse, adopted by the constituent meeting of the Board of Trustees 22 October 2002

advises the Board on scientific and granting policy matters. The Committees' functions and composition are described in the IFS Statutes.

IFS has abolished holding General Assemblies due to the high costs involved. The IFS statutes have been changed and the term "Member Organization" was replaced by "Affiliated Organization". Swedish law defines "members" very narrowly and the IFS Member Organizations do not fall in to this definition.

In the 2001 evaluation it was recommended that IFS revises the role of the Scientific and Grants Committee (SGC) as an independent body, and replaces the annual SGC meeting by a meeting between the SAC representatives and the full BOT. After consultations it was agreed that the SGC should continue to function as a separate committee to the Board. Its main task is to give advice to the Board of Trustees and the Director about science policy issues related to the IFS grant programme and capacity enhancing support activities. The SGC meets annually in connection with the meeting of the Board of Trustees and joint sessions between the BOT and SGC are usually held.

However, it is still unclear which decisions shall be made by the BOT. BOT has in reality little influence on the budget. For example the division of resources between the research areas is not decided by the BOT.

The link between the science issues handled by the SGC and the policy/strategic decisions of the BOT is also unclear.

The Executive Committee meets between Board meetings and then exercises the powers of the full Board. With new electronic devices there is a real possibility for virtual meetings. However, there is a risk that if the Board would meet physically only once every second year, then the cohesion would disappear and the Board may lose ownership of IFS. Thus the Board has to discuss this risk and make sure that it is carefully weighed against the issue of cost-effectiveness.

#### **4.4.2 The Secretariat**

The Director with a Secretariat and assisted by a number of independent Scientific Advisers is implementing the policy and strategy given by the BOT. The Scientific Advisers are organized in Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs). The Director is responsible for the management of the organization's scientific, administrative and financial affairs and for the records of the organization. The IFS Secretariat implements the programme which the BOT has decided. The SACs assess the scientific merit of eligible applicants and research projects and give recommendations to the Director.

The Secretariat is discussed in section 4.5 and the Scientific Advisory Committees in section 4.7.

#### **4.4.3 The Donors Group**

The IFS receives funding from governmental and non-governmental sources, as well as national and international organizations. The IFS annual budget is approximately EUR 5 million. Current donors (2009) are

- Department for International Development (DFID) (United Kingdom)
- Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) (Germany)

- Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGDC), Belgium
- Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) (Belgium)
- Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research (MISTRA) (Sweden)
- French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) (France)
- Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD) (France)
- Inter-Islamic Network on Water Resources Development and Management (INWRDAM)
- Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) (Norway)
- Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)
- Organisation of the Islamic Conference Standing Committee on Scientific and Technical Cooperation (COMSTECH)
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (Sweden)
- Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) (Switzerland)
- Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture (Switzerland)
- World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) (Kenya)
- United Nations University (UNU)
- National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT)
- National Research Council of Mexico (CONACYT)
- National Research Council of Argentina (CONICET)

Donors to IFS may according to the Statutes organize themselves into a group that can interact collectively with IFS. IFS is supported financially by the Donors Group (DG), which is an informal group of institutions dedicated to promote science in developing countries and coordinate interaction of the Donors with IFS. They contribute to the discussion about major IFS issues such as strategy, portfolio of activities, use of funds etc. and elaborate corresponding recommendations to the attention of the IFS Board of Trustees.

#### **4.4.4 IFS Affiliated Organizations**

IFS Affiliated Organizations (known formerly as IFS Member Organizations) are national, regional, and international organizations and institutions, such as academies of science and research councils, with a mandate related to IFS work or otherwise supporting or dedicated to the advancement of science in developing countries.

Today, the 135 Affiliated Organizations (AOs) of IFS in 86 countries constitute a unique contact network for IFS, providing very important links to the scientific and donor communities in both donor and recipient countries. Of these about three-quarters are in developing countries and one-quarter in industrial countries.

Information to Affiliated Organizations is mainly disseminated through periodic electronic newsletters. A strategy for communication with and involvement of Affiliated Organizations has been prepared. During 2005 IFS held a regional stakeholder meeting in Africa in June and a Regional Assembly for Asia in August. The purpose was to discuss and get inputs from Affiliated Organizations and other partners into the preparation of the Five Year Programme. A Regional Assembly for Latin America was held in May 2006.

#### **4.4.5 Networks and collaborating organizations**

Developing long-term partnerships and effective collaboration with other organizations has always been high on the IFS agenda. IFS defines 16 organisations and institutions as collaborating organizations that share IFS conviction that building on common interests and complementary strength creates new opportunities.

IFS acts as both enabler of existing and emerging networks and convener of new ones. Seed money, co-operative and administrative assistance and funding to workshops, training courses, exchange visits and mentoring are a few examples of IFS participation in this context. Many of the issues and problems that IFS grantees are dealing with transcend their normal working environment and even national boundaries. Such common challenges can bring people and stakeholders from very diverse backgrounds together. Drawing on the diversity, networks can break isolation, facilitate interchange of experiences and information, ignite productive discussions and mobilize joint resources.

## **4.5 The Secretariat**

The Team was requested to look closely at organizational structure and management issues of IFS specifically organizational aspects of the IFS Secretariat in Stockholm, its size, functions, management and responsibilities of the staff members. Questions to be answered included:

- Are there potentials and necessities for restructuring, including savings in personnel and/or finances?
- What about the role and function of the eight different research areas and their administration: Are they reasonable or should there be a re-organization into fewer, but stronger integrated research fields with appropriate re-organization of the staff?

### **4.5.1 The present organizational structure**

Most staff at IFS reports to the Head of Programme: (i) the eight Research areas (13 staff members), (ii) the Manager for Database and Statistics and (iii) the Manager of Network and Information.

Two staff, the Personnel and Accounting Administrator and the Administrative Assistant, report to the Head of Finance and Administration.

The Head of Finance and Administration, the Head of Programme and the Office Manager report to the Director.

IFS has tried to establish a Management Group that over the years has had many different compositions. Before summer 2009 the Management Group comprised the Director, the Head of Finance and Administration and the Head of Programme.

### **4.5.2 The ongoing reorganization**

In 2009 the Director decided to refurbish IFS finance and administrative functions by establishing a new post as Head of Administration. The Head of Administration will be in charge of strategic planning related to organizational aspects of the Secretariat, overall budget coordination and financial control as well as personnel management. IT and information will also fall under the Head of Administration. The Personnel and Accounting Administrator will retire from her post as of 1 February 2010. The Head of Administration will start working in 1 February and will be member of the Management Group. IFS used a professional recruitment agency for the recruitment process.

### 4.5.3 Potential for savings

The Scientific Programme Coordinators and the Programme Administrators have duties in two main areas:

- The Grant Process
- CES

The division of responsibilities between the Scientific Programme Coordinators and the Programme Administrators varies from one Research Area to another. Also the way of work varies between different Research Areas. The number of applications is unevenly distributed among the Research Areas.

However, there is no information available on how much time staff is spending on the tasks respectively based on time sheets or similar sources. The Evaluation Team has been provided with a rough calculation on the time needed for managing the research grant scheme and capacity enhancing activities. According to this calculation around 60 % of the Scientific Programme Coordinators and the Programme Administrators' time is required for managing the research grant scheme and capacity enhancing activities. However, the time devoted to managing CES varies from year to year depending on the number of workshops organized etc. The calculation seems to be based on relevant data and informed estimates. However, the calculation should be validated before decisions on savings are made based on it.

The following information is essential in order to validate the potential for savings:

1. Estimates on how much time that presently in practice is used for each task
2. The management's view on ceilings/limits/benchmarks

Thus, the Evaluation Team recommends the Management Group to introduce reporting on time. In order to get necessary information on the potential for savings and also in order to make informed decisions on the dimension of staff in a new organisational structure the staff should provide the Management Group with the following essential information:

Activity	Number	Average minutes or hours/each	Total
<b>The Grant Process</b>			
Filing an application			
Registration of applications			
Prescreening of applications			
Selection of Adviser for comments			
SAC meetings			
Edit SAC comments to the application and send them to the applicant			
Insert data on the new grantee in the database			

Prepare contract with a new grantee			
<b>CES</b>			
Workshops			
Individual CES			

## 4.6 Regional presence

IFS is in the middle of a process of establishing an organized regional presence (a “hub”) in Eastern Africa. Although the operations of the hub in Uganda will only just have started when the evaluation takes place, the Team was asked to comment on the concept of decentralization of IFS through hubs:

- Is this concept feasible, desirable and worthwhile? And what about synergies with already existing other international programmes in this field?

### 4.6.1 The Hub in Uganda

The IFS has organized a hub in Uganda in cooperation with The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM)<sup>3</sup>. The agreement is valid one year until June 2010. IFS and RUFORUM have agreed that, in the event that this Agreement will be extended or renewed, such extension or renewal shall preferably be for a multi-year period.

RUFORUM is a consortium of 25 universities in Eastern and Southern Africa established in 2004. RUFORUM is registered in Uganda as a Not-for-Profit limited company and is currently in the process of registering as an International NGO. It has a mandate to oversee graduate training and networks of specialization in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) countries. Specifically, RUFORUM recognizes the important and largely unfulfilled role that universities play in contributing to the well-being of small-scale farmers and economic development of countries throughout the Sub-Saharan Africa region.

IFS and RUFORUM shall meet on a semi-annual basis to review work plans and budgets and follow up the progress of the programme activities. If circumstances so require, either organization may request that an intermediate meeting be held.

IFS and RUFORUM will have the following roles and functions in the co-operation under the agreement.

IFS shall

- be responsible for obtaining funds for the operations of the IFS activities in the region and for the relations with the funding agencies to IFS;
- in consultation with RUFORUM, prepare annual work plans and budgets for the activities of the IFS programme in the region;
- oversee the activities of RUFORUM (pertaining to IFS), which shall ensure that the IFS contribution is used exclusively for the purposes agreed with IFS;

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<sup>3</sup> Agreement between IFS and RUFORUM dated 30 March 2009

- provide instructions and guidance on financial reporting to meet IFS and donor standards and requirements;
- support the IFS programme implementation by providing support and guidance on technical matters on a demand basis; and
- make regular disbursements to RUFORUM as agreed in the annual budget.

#### RUFORUM shall

- be responsible for the implementation of IFS activities in the Eastern African region in accordance with Work Plans and Budgets prepared by IFS. For the purposes of the agreement, the Eastern African region consists of the following countries: Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. IFS activities shall be understood as meaning the IFS Capacity Enhancing Support;
- provide financial management and administer funds for the IFS activities in the region;
- be accountable for funds management, as more specifically set out in the agreement;
- without delay make funds available to the activities, provided such funds have been disbursed by IFS to RUFORUM. RUFORUM shall not be required or requested to provide funds on an advance basis;
- provide administrative management including putting contractual arrangements as requested by IFS in place, recruiting and employing personnel, undertaking procurement of goods and services related to the IFS activities or as otherwise requested by IFS and providing office space and services as well as administrative support as more specifically set out in the agreement;
- adhere to the guidelines or administrative manuals of IFS in carrying out its functions under the agreement, as stated in the agreement or the General Conditions as specified in the agreement;
- recruit and employ personnel for implementation of the IFS activities as agreed with IFS and within the annual budgets approved by IFS;
- prepare and submit periodic progress reports and quarterly financial reports as set forth in the agreement; and
- perform such other tasks in support of the programme activities as are defined in the agreement.

RUFORUM is compensated for the costs incurred in performing the services. The costs are specified in the budget.

The general job description attached to the agreement between IFS and RUFORUM is intended for the IFS staff to be posted at the hub once IFS has secured long term financing. It is therefore more general than the job description and work plan for the IFS Programme Manager who is employed during the period July 2009–June 2010. That work plan focuses on gender related activities. The Programme Manager is under direct supervision of the Head of Programme at IFS Stockholm. Further guidance is also provided by the RUFORUM team of experts on a daily basis in close interaction with the Head of Programme at IFS.

During July 2009–June 2010 the following tasks shall be accomplished by the IFS Programme Manager

1. Organize one major workshop on how to promote young women in science
2. Address gender-related topics in the field of scientific capacity strengthening relevant to the region
3. Identify capacity strengthening training modules for this purpose
4. Link up with projects and initiatives supporting young women in science in the region

5. As a follow-up of the workshop, prepare a work plan for long term funding based on the conclusions from the workshop.

In implementing these activities the Programme Manager is guided by the general job description for the IFS hub when it comes to approaching IFS grantees and scientific institutions in the region.

The duties, responsibilities and output expectations for the Programme Manager in the long run is defined in the following way: *“IFS has a commitment to a demand driven approach to the design and the implementation of capacity enhancing activities aiming at improving the likelihood of research success for young scientists. The IFS Capacity Enhancing Support (CES) gives high priority in responding to the needs of young scientists. It is driven from the region and addresses issues of regional concern. It develops long-term collaborative relationships between the different actors in the region.”*

The Programme manager should according to the agreement have both scientific and managerial competence. The tasks will be as follows:

1. Assess the scientific capacity needs of young scientists in the region with special focus on women scientists
2. Based on the above, develop and implement capacity enhancing activities for the above target group
3. Assess the affordability and availability in response to a particular need that a grantee may have.
4. Allocate CES activities in time, compare the benefits of one activity relative to the costs and expected benefits of other activities in a package.
5. Aggregate the different needs of a similar nature among different grantees in time and in space, for example when the means to satisfy such needs is for IFS to arrange workshops or courses.
6. Specify the needs between those that require research field specific scientific competence, and those that require some general scientific competence, but not research field specific competence e.g. training courses on sampling techniques, good lab practice, statistical methods and experimental design, access to scientific literature, conceptualizing and preparing research proposals and preparing scientific presentations, confidence building, leadership etc..
7. Visit a sample of IFS grantees in the region (to be identified together with IFS staff in Stockholm) in order to understand the challenges and needs of the grantees and (i) verify the equipment and other support which IFS has provided to the institution, (ii) note the research progress, (iii) be informed of the relations grantee – institution, (iv) any other issue. Women grantees shall be adequately represented among the visits to grantees and the staff person shall provide a special analysis of their situation.
8. Visit IFS Affiliated Organizations in the region with the aim to activate them and involve them in the IFS activities in the region.
9. Make promotional visits to universities and research institutions to inform about IFS. Hold presentations for young scientists and discussions with senior staff (as part of visits to grantee institutions).
10. Establish contacts with the IFS Alumni Association in Uganda and in the region and hold a meeting with them.
11. Identify events arranged by other organizations in the region. Explore how IFS grantees can take part in them. Explore how IFS work can be enriched.
12. Identify funding opportunities in the region for IFS grantees.
13. Follow up earlier IFS activities in the region
14. Write reports from all these activities. The reports shall be the basis of RUFORUM’s periodic progress reports to IFS. They will indicate the real situation of IFS grantees in the region, their achievements and the challenges they face.

#### **4.6.2 Regional presence in the future**

The strategic reason for regional offices has been discussed by the Board at several occasions. Thus, the reasons are well known. It has also been discussed internally with the staff at the Secretariat. However, according to the interviews there is still some resistance among staff on the idea of regional offices. It is stated that the arguments for regional offices are vague and that a negative effect is that limited resources will be spread thinly.

Thus it can be motivated to summarise the arguments for regional presence briefly. The Evaluation Team's understanding was that the Board's motivation for regional offices is (not necessarily in order of importance) the following:

- common image; IFS is not only a Swedish interest, but a global organization;
- increased opportunities for fund-raising in the region;
- development and implementation of capacity enhancing packages requiring closeness to the local academic/scientific institutional realities; and
- closer policy dialogue with public research authorities and academic institutions.

The Evaluation Team agrees with the Board that there are several reasons why IFS should develop a distributed organization. In order to be a global organisation IFS should develop a distributed organization comprising at least three regional IFS offices (at least one each in Africa, Asia, Latin America). The regional offices must report to IFS Director and be fully part of the IFS programme and philosophy.

An internationally operating non-profit organization can choose several alternatives to establish a presence in target countries. The main alternatives are:

- a) to set up a legally independent "subsidiary" in the target country;
- b) to establish a local office of the organization;
- c) to locate staff from the main organisation to the target country within another organisation (a host institution); and
- d) to contract out the implementation and/or administration of the operations to a host organization in the target country (in commercial relations this is an agency relationship).

An assessment of these four alternatives was presented to the Board in 2008<sup>4</sup>. As far as IFS is concerned, alternatives a) and b) are hardly relevant according to this assessment. The remaining two alternatives were analysed in detail. Three issues were stated to be of particular importance: employment matters, legal capability and accountability, and management and guidance of the operations. The conclusion of the assessment is that it is important to enter into a well defined agreement with the host institution which should regulate the assignment both in terms of the operational functions to be managed by the host institution's personnel as well as the administrative and financial undertakings by the host institution. The Board found alternative d) to be the best one under the circumstances and decided to establish the hub in Uganda as described above.

The Evaluation Team was of the same opinion as is stated in the assessment when it comes to pros and cons with the assessed alternatives. However, the Team proposes that the Board once again discusses the alternative where the HQ and the regional offices belong to the same legal entity. According to the Team's assessment both alternative b) and alternative d) have their certain advantages. However, when creating a new distributed organizational structure as recommended in this report alternative b) in most cases is more sustainable and has more clear lines of authority.

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<sup>4</sup> Some legal comments regarding to the initiative to establish IFS regional presence in Africa, By Björn Mothander, Memorandum, DRAFT 2008-04-04

The argument for choosing the current option in the Ugandan case is slightly different since it is a question of having only one regional hub with one person working there. The pros and cons with “having one legal entity” should, thus, be discussed more in detail. It will require that IFS negotiates country agreements with the governments and it will create employment issues. Maybe more than one IFS scientific programme officer is needed as staff in one regional office. Perhaps a “contact person” should be appointed in each country in the region. That person should be attached to a university or research institute and her/his director would agree that she/he works a specified number of days per month for the IFS regional office. These aspects should be discussed further.

## 4.7 The Scientific Advisory Committees

The Scientific Advisers provide an invaluable free service to IFS. The question, however, is whether they are used as effectively as possible or if there are ways in which their role in the programme can be strengthened? This question is already dealt with in Chapter 3.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

The evaluation question per ToR is: “*How should IFS change in order to be well prepared to meet the post 2010 period?*” The Team was requested to pay special attention and give recommendations to the following aspects of IFS’ future development:

- Vision/mission statement IFS 2010-2020
- Programme structure and its implications for IFS administration
- Support to individuals versus support to institutions
- Thematic focus (which and how many research areas) and target groups (geographical distribution, age and gender)
- Governance and organizational structure of IFS
- Funding of IFS and donor participation
- Role of IFS in the international landscape (vis-à-vis similar organizations )

Answers to these questions shall not only enable IFS to improve its effectiveness and to position itself appropriately within the existing similar organizations, but also to create synergies with them.

### 5.1 Role of IFS in the international landscape

The analysis of the future role of IFS has to take into consideration IFS relations with other partners and competitors. Here a discussion of IFS’ own position vis-à-vis potential cooperation with other partners may be necessary, not only in regard to IFS’ internal activities but also in regard to the improvement of IFS’ funding structure and a better allocation of the limited financial resources. This could include the development of joint funding programmes, project-oriented coordination with other funding agencies and the like.

#### 5.1.1 Role of IFS

IFS grants enjoy a high reputation among young scientists who apply for research grants since the awarding selection process is competitive and rigorous and widely recognised as transparent and fair. It draws on the expertise group of highly qualified scientists who are deeply committed SAC

members, and a big pool of external experts. Unlike many other grant makers, IFS provides detailed feedback on the weak points of the application giving the chance to applicants to improve and reapply; even those who do not receive a grant get important advice concerning their proposals and research.

The emerging research landscape in developing countries is characterized by the following:

- More positive attitude towards science
- Expansion of universities with post graduate programmes
- Increasing requirement to link research with development relevant issues/problems
- Increasing emphasis on research which is related to global change issues such as climate change, biodiversity, urbanisation, etc.
- Increasing demand for interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary research
- The enabling environment and the quality of scientific infrastructure for supporting young scientists varies also between Low Income and Lower Middle Income Countries; GNP alone is not a suitable criteria for determining if a country has a weak and vulnerable scientific infrastructure;

Emerging architecture of research funding:

- an increasing number of research as well as development agencies who are interested to support research in developing countries. Research agencies are mostly interested in strengthening capacities for high quality research and development agencies are mostly interested in the development relevance of the research;
- Emphasis is mostly in strengthening institutions and supporting established scientists;
- Some of the donor agencies are also interested to support individual young scientists but don't have the infrastructure to implement their own funding programme.

### **5.1.2 Vision/mission statement IFS 2010-2020**

IFS Mission Statement is defined in the Statutes and comprises three parts: the need, the mission and the strategy. The mission is broad and it is a difficult process to change the statutes of a Foundation. Thus, the Evaluation Team is of the opinion that IFS should develop an institutional vision within the scope given by the present mission as stated in the Statutes.

It is of significant importance that the BOT initiates an institutional visioning process involving the major stakeholders in order to establish an institutional vision for IFS in the post-2010 period. Based on this institutional vision and the strategy defined in the Statutes IFS should decide on a Strategic Plan.

IFS mission statement of strengthening capacity of developing countries to conduct relevant and high quality research on the sustainable management of biological and water resources; and its focus on young scientists is still relevant. Most other sources of funding favour established scientists, and in some instances donor agencies interested to support individual young scientists lack the infrastructure to implement such funding programme. IFS fills that gap. IFS is able to attract and support a lot of interesting proposals in different fields and from a wide number of countries. Its funds are especially suitable for supporting good research ideas to be carried out in small projects.

## 5.2 Programme structure and its implications for IFS administration

The IFS administrative efficiency has many times been put in question by donors. Programme work breakdown structures at the Secretariat are ‘standalones’ and not efficient or complimentary. This has created a competitive climate that seems to have created an erosion of trust among staff that waste staff’s time. IFS’ culture is defined by its practices; and its present culture seems to impact staff’s behaviour. Ideally, policies and procedures are put in place to govern organizational behaviour, thus providing a means for establishing values, norms and standards. Management systems are also put into place to save time on supervision and giving directions allowing individuals to be more proactive on critical matters. However, while there might be clear distinction between the tasks and responsibilities of the Scientific Programme Coordinators (SPC) and their Programme Administrators; and between the Programme Administrators and the Finance Administrators. In practice, the governing regulations are poorly adhered to. Further, the governance structure in relation to the size of the organization is expensive, in addition to costly physical meetings of the Scientific Advisory Committees (eight committees meet twice per year) and of the Board of Trustees (once a year). Other questionable costs include those of physical location of the IFS office. The offices are also space-wise quite luxurious and it might be possible to find a cheaper location in Stockholm.

## 5.3 Support to individuals versus support to institutions

Although IFS seems to have long recognized the synergies that can be realized through formation of strategic partnerships it has not fully exploited and utilized the opportunity. Global scientific issues that IFS grants address are inherently complex, straddling a wide range of disciplines, communities and institutions, with challenges that transcend the IFS’ capacity. But while IFS has done well with individual partners (SAC members), it has not fully explored other leveraging strategic partnerships on the basis of shared interests, complementarity and task divisions.

## 5.4 Thematic focus and target groups

So far, little emphasis has been given to the development relevance or ‘development results’ focus in the grant awarding process. Research agencies are mostly interested in strengthening capacities for high quality research and development agencies are mostly interested in the development relevance of the research. Little consideration is given to the fact that researchers are more and more required to work in interdisciplinary groups and trans-disciplinary projects. All this could have contributed to IFS’ narrow funding base. Despite its apparent success, it has not been able to increase its income significantly.

## 5.5 Governance and organizational structure of IFS

The governance structure should be streamlined and effectively deal with policy and strategic issues. It should be clearly stated which decisions should be made by the Board. The Board should more frequently use distance-spanning techniques instead of traditional face-to-face meetings.

When it comes to the function of the SGC (Scientific and Grants Committee) it has been stated in the interviews that it has not been clear enough when it comes to which questions the Board should seek advice from SGC and in what form this should be done. The role of the SGC should be revisited as part of the reorganization of IFS and in line with the new Research Programmes.

The process of involving the SGC in certain issues should then be discussed. This should be further clarified as part of the vision building exercise in 2010.

It is important that science policy issues are regularly discussed and necessary adaptation implemented. For this purpose the chairpersons of the new SACs and other selected experts should be invited when the Board is discussing these issues on a regular basis.

It is stated above that the thematic focus on sustainable management of biological and water resources is still justified. However, the Evaluation Team suggests that within this general thematic focus a few (2-3) research programmes should be defined.

In the reorganization of the secretariat it is suggested that the Management Group should comprise the Director, Head of Programme and Head of Administration. The Programme Department should comprise one Scientific Programme Manager responsible for each research programme and a number of Scientific Programme Officers (in relation to the size of the programme). The Scientific Programme Managers are mainly responsible for the scientific aspects of the granting programme: pre-screening and external evaluation process of the proposals; secretary of the SACs (one for each research programme). The Scientific Programme Managers and the Scientific Programme Officers should have time-bound contracts (3-5 years) and then go back to their university or for example to a development cooperation agency. The employment at IFS should be a valuable part of their career development, which is not necessarily in research but in research management or in development cooperation.

Thus, the Evaluation Team also proposes that all administration is organized in the Administration Department (Finance, HR, IT, administrative support to the Programme Department etc).

The organizational location of Programme Administrators (in Programme Department or in Administrative Department) has been discussed in detail. There are pros and cons with both solutions and we are aware of the arguments in both directions. With the Programme Administrators as part of the Administrative Department they can work as a pool and concentrate their tasks where the workload at any particular time is high.

## **5.6 Funding of IFS and donor participation**

The current structure of funding is a major concern for IFS itself, its Board and the Director. Most of IFS support comes from aid agencies with a minor contribution from research councils. However, financial needs are increasing not only to upkeep IFS' present level of activities but also to expand its services to science and scientists in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

## **5.7 Recommendations**

From the findings and conclusions of this evaluation, the Evaluation Team was requested to submit some recommendations. However, it is difficult to offer a general prescription to the Board for several reasons. Firstly, decisions on changes are often a function of the specific context and the actual situation at hand, for example when it comes to funding. Secondly, changes are always inter-related. If for example a recommendation on a new organizational structure is rejected, then other recommendations may not be valid any longer. All in all, the in-depth understanding that has been gained from the evaluation can, with care, be used to offer a number of insights for future action. The following are the Evaluation Team's specific recommendations:

- The Evaluation Team came to the conclusion that there is no need to change the basic mission statement as it is formulated in the statutes of IFS since it is still relevant. It is however strongly recommended that a common institutional strategic vision for IFS 2020 be developed through an inclusive, consultative and participatory process that includes the Board, Secretariat, key donors and select members of SAC. The objective of participation is to improve the quality of the decided vision and to ensure that the decisions have the support needed to succeed. Focus should remain on the individual scientists, however IFS also works to influence the environment in which they work. Relevance to development should be factored in. The visioning process should be an important starting exercise which the Board and the new IFS Director should jointly lead.
- IFS should develop strategies on how to further increase the proportion of women scientists in the granting programme and how to collaborate with public and private sector institutions to leverage IFS efforts.
- With regard to the target groups of the IFS activities, the main focus should be on supporting young individual researchers in Low-Income Countries (LIC) with weak and vulnerable scientific infrastructure through the IFS grants scheme and CES. In a second priority, the engagement of IFS in Low Middle-Income Countries (which were earlier eligible for the IFS grant programme but have now a stronger scientific funding infrastructure) should be based on specific collaboration packages. These collaboration packages would have to be adapted to the specific situation/needs of each country and could include: identification of good laboratories which can host IFS grantees (especially from neighbouring countries), supporting partners in a pro-active dialogue with government agencies to create/secure the required enabling environment in the country to foster scientific research and especially to omit any brain drain (competitive salaries), supporting the governments in developing competitive funding programmes to strengthen local research capacities, and strengthening the position of local research institutions.
- Considering the fact that (a) the costs for equipment increased significantly in the last 30 years and (b) the costs for lab equipment are usually considerably higher than the costs for equipment in social science studies, the upper limit of each grant should be increased to USD 15,000 and there should be two levels of grants: USD 8,000 and USD 15,000. Furthermore, if several grants (up to three) are given to the same individual, only the first grant should be given to conduct purely disciplinary research (strengthening the basic research capacity); the second and third grants should be given to support inter- and/or trans-disciplinary projects. A distinction should be made between support activities which are tailored to an individual researcher (e.g. visiting other laboratories, attending international meetings and conferences), and general support for proposal writing and writing scientific papers. For each grant, at least USD 2,500 should be reserved for CES activities like visiting, attending and presenting results at international meetings and conferences (to be approved based on performance). On the other hand, organizing and conducting workshops and courses on proposal development and scientific writing should be mainly the task and responsibility of research organizations and IFS partners in the countries; IFS should only play a supportive role (mainly through its network of external experts) and its financial engagement should be minimized.
- A thematic focus is necessary. The thematic focus on sustainable management of biological and water resources is still justified. Within this general thematic focus a few

(2-3) research programmes should be defined. Important criteria for deciding on the programmes are relevance to the MDGs, relevance to issues of great global concern such as mitigation and adaptation to Climate Change, and existing expertise within the IFS network. Each Research Programme should have its own budget based on performance previous year(s).

- To improve effectiveness, the upper age limit for male and female grantees should be reduced to 35 years. The 40 years upper age limit was considered too high for the grant to give any premium leverage to the awardees in their scientific careers. All candidates both men and women should be able to compete ably for the grants since the grant does not require them to leave the country.
- To manage more strategically, efficiently, effectively and in keeping with current development management practices, IFS has to adopt Results-Based-Management in all its operations, especially programming. Although significant expected and unexpected results have been achieved in the past years, the lack of a “results (outcome and impact) focus” is a current concern for several of IFS’ key donors. IFS has to urgently develop an M&E system that effectively tracks progress on implementation, as well as progress on the realization of planned results on outcome and impact level, and facilitates learning. It must also be able to show value for money.
- To manage better, and as part of creating a leaner, flatter, more flexible, efficient and effective organization, IFS has to reorganize the Secretariat: The Management Team should comprise the Director, Head of Programme and Head of Administration; and the Programme Department should comprise one Scientific Programme Manager responsible for each research programme and 1-2 Scientific Programme Officers (in relation to the size of the programme). All administration tasks should be done within the Administration Department (finance, HR, IT, administrative support). The Scientific Programme Managers should be mainly responsible for the scientific aspects of the granting programme: pre-screening and external evaluation process of the proposals; and double as the secretary of the SACs for each research programme. Working together as one team might help re-culture IFS from a negatively competitive organization to a synergetic efficient and effective one.
- The IFS Governance structure should be maintained, however, the Board of Trustees should consider the following adjustments in the way of work. First, the Board and its Committees should use distance spanning techniques as often as possible. The Board should meet at least twice a year using distance spanning techniques. One meeting should be held at the end of the year to approve the work plan and budget for the next year; the other meeting should be held in the beginning of the year for adoption of the annual report and giving directions for the next budget- and planning process. The number of SACs should also be reduced having one SAC per Programme. The SACs should also meet physically only once a year and the Board should meet physically only every second year. Specific ToR’s for Board members should be developed and broadened to allow for pro-activity, especially in financial and programmatic issues.
- If IFS is going to develop a distributed organization, it should comprise of HQ in Stockholm and at least 3 regional IFS offices (at least one each in Africa, Asia and Latin

America). The HQ and the regional offices should have the same brand name and should preferably be parts of the same legal entity.

Having only one regional office in Africa does not give IFS a global image. The regional IFS offices should be mainly responsible for: identifying suitable courses and workshops in the region on proposal and scientific paper writing, support to partner organizations in the development of such courses and workshops through the IFS network of external experts, developing other partnerships with public and private sector institutions to leverage its efforts, developing and implementing the collaboration packages with LICs and MICs with stronger scientific infrastructure, and last but not least identifying ways how IFS can complement the other research and capacity building efforts in the region of the IFS support organizations. Partners and regions will be more effective when they work collaboratively than when they work in isolation. Further, the financial engagement of IFS in organizing and conducting workshops and courses on proposal development and scientific writing should/can be reduced significantly.

- To do better, IFS has to start giving greater attention to capacity building for staff especially in managing for results. A strategy should be developed for continuous education and linkages with current scientific intelligence from academic institutions.
- IFS should actively look for more cost-effective location.
- For greater stability, IFS should broaden its funding base especially its range of long term funders/donors. Although it has a considerable number of funders, the present dependency on one main donor creates financial uncertainty and instability which in turn constrains long term strategic planning.

## IFS Response to the External Evaluation of 2010

### Background

An external evaluation of IFS was conducted 2000/2001. On the basis of the evaluation recommendations IFS prepared a *Medium Term Strategic Plan 2002-2004* and then a *Five Year Programme Framework 2006-2010*. The major features of the five year programme were a concentration of support to young scientists in low income countries with vulnerable scientific infrastructure, a capacity enhancing support component (through courses and workshops) which adds value to the grant as well as the first steps towards decentralization.

As the five year programme neared its completion, the IFS Board of Trustees (BOT) and the IFS Donors Group (DG) decided to commission a forward-looking external evaluation in 2009 with the purpose of assessing IFS achievements and challenges and outlining a proposal for the future (post 2010) course of the IFS programme.

The Evaluation Report was presented to and discussed at the DG meeting (5<sup>th</sup> February, 2010) and the BOT meeting (6-7<sup>th</sup> February, 2010). The report includes an assessment of IFS achievements in the last ten years, an analysis of IFS main strengths and weaknesses as well as specific recommendations for the future. The Board and the Donors Group commended the Evaluation Team for its appreciating as well as its critical observations and constructive recommendations for the future.

### How to read this response

These comments have been formulated by the Board Chair and the Director based on the discussions held at the IFS Board of Trustees meeting. Comments provided by IFS Secretariat staff have also been consulted. In this response comments on the general analysis are given first and then comments referring to the specific recommendations as listed in the Executive Summary (section 1.4) of the Evaluation Report.

## General observations and analysis – IFS strengths

The Evaluation Report is positive about the key elements of the IFS Programme in the past several years:

- The Mission Statement is still highly relevant
- IFS grants are widely recognised
- IFS has an unparalleled network of researchers, technical advisers and partnerships in developing countries
- The rigorous granting process “brings out the best” in the researcher. The process is perceived to be fair, transparent and time efficient from the grantees’ point of view.
- Direct contact and feedback from advisers to grantees and applicants is perceived as a high value input
- IFS model of focusing on individual young scientists is unique
- The IFS grant is recognised as a valuable stepping stone in the academic/professional career
- The Capacity Enhancing Support gives methodological tools to young scientists to apply for grants and adds value to grantees’ research endeavour
- The establishment of a “hub” (regional office) is an important innovation for improved field contacts and closer relations to the academic communities in IFS priority countries.

The Board takes note of the analysis which indicates that the five year programme has been successful.

## General observations - IFS weaknesses and challenges

IFS weaknesses: The Evaluation Report states that the most important weakness of IFS is related to the institutional environment in which IFS operates. It is especially mentioned that the rules and policies of many donor organisations is to provide contributions to IFS on a year-to-year basis without longer term commitment. Hence short and mid-term planning becomes very difficult for IFS.

The Board fully agrees. The Director and staff spend much time, effort and creative energy on maintaining current donors and attracting new ones. This entails high transaction costs. However, it has always been the reality of IFS to struggle for funding on a year-to-year basis. IFS lacks an endowment fund or similar long-term guarantee. The challenge to secure long term funding is high on the agenda for the future programming exercise.

Secretariat internal organisation: The Evaluation Report states that the current internal organisation of the Secretariat to handle applications within eight different Research Areas is not cost-efficient and promotes a negative competing atmosphere among staff.

The Board acknowledges this. Comments are given in the section on specific recommendations.

## The Evaluation Report's recommendations for the way ahead

### *Rec. 1:*      A common vision

The Evaluation Report recommends that a common, institutional, strategic vision for the IFS programme 2010-2020 should be developed.

The Board welcomes this major recommendation that IFS embarks on an institutional strategic vision for the future programme. It will be developed through an inclusive, consultative and participatory process. IFS stakeholders will be invited to take part in the consultation. The envisioning exercise will take place in 2010. It will cover the substantive issues discussed in the evaluation report (content of the support programme, rationale for IFS in the context of the emerging research landscape in developing countries, disciplinary versus thematic approach, individual versus team support, eligibility etc.). The envisioning process will also address the organisational issues such as the size and staffing of the Secretariat, decentralization, and systematic collaboration with partners worldwide. The new Director will lead the process to develop the final proposal for the Board of Trustees meeting in late 2010.

The Board has instructed the IFS Secretariat to prepare an action plan focusing on how to respond to the future challenges discussed in the external evaluation.

### *Rec. 2:*      Gender balance

The Evaluation Report calls for an improved gender balance among IFS beneficiaries.

IFS will in the future, in addition to providing research grants to women on a competitive basis, provide special support to women scientists in various ways. The future envisioning process will include a strategy for systematic promotion of women scientists in the IFS programme.

### *Rec. 6:*      Thematic focus

The Evaluation Report recommends that IFS replaces its current eight Research Areas with a limited number (2-3) of broadly defined themes.

The Board agrees that IFS should define the content of its support in thematic terms, not in academic disciplinary terms. At the same time IFS should not spread outside its current "biological and water resources" mandate. However, the eight research areas can be merged into a smaller number of broad research issues. These could be defined in order to attract applications from all developing continents. IFS should help building solid science for development, to address under-researched issues in natural resources and local issues related to global challenges. In this way IFS can welcome new research topics while sticking to the original mandate. The definition of IFS priority research themes will be one of the most important issues in the future envisioning process.

### *Rec. 6:*      Relevant projects versus scientific excellence

The Evaluation Report recommends that IFS pays much more attention to development relevance of the research projects it finances.

The Board recalls that, throughout the history of IFS, it has been debated whether IFS should lean more towards building scientific skills for individual scientists or focus more on the content of the research projects and their applicability to development projects. The Board maintains that the primary role of IFS should be to help young scientists getting established by supporting them to produce excellent science. By encouraging them to do research at their home institutions IFS will contribute to building solid, science-based societies in developing countries.

**Rec. 3; 4; 7; and 8:**      Eligibility of countries and individuals; age limits, size of grant

The Evaluation Report gives recommendations for a restriction of eligible countries to only the Lower Income Countries, a reduction of the age limit to 35 years and a differentiation of grant size to two categories (USD 8,000 and USD 15,000 respectively).

These issues have been on the Board meeting agendas on several occasions. The evaluation recommendations will be taken into consideration in the envisioning process. It should be considered, however, that IFS would benefit from continuing to work with a broad base of countries, perhaps playing different roles according to their level of development.

**Rec. 9:**                      Monitoring and evaluation

The Evaluation Report recommends that IFS adopts Results-Based-Management (RBM) in all its operations, especially programming.

The Board notes that, currently, IFS monitors the achievements by means of systematic tracer studies of former grantees. IFS has developed the Monitoring and Evaluation System for Impact Assessment (MESIA). Since the year 2000, nine (9) impact assessment reports have been published. Nevertheless, the Board endorses the recommendation that IFS systematically employs RBM in programming. Secretariat staff has already been registered for RBM courses. The process to build a future programme vision will use the RBM methodology.

**Rec. 10 and 11:**        IFS Secretariat

The Evaluation Report recommends a reorganisation of the Secretariat for two reasons (i) overhead costs (salaries and occupancy etc.) are considered by donors to be too high, and (ii) the future envisioning process will have implications for the general staffing in the Secretariat.

The Board confirms that the envisioning process will include an analysis of required Secretariat staff capabilities as a corollary of the nature of the research support programme which will emerge. The Director has been instructed to consider administrative cost savings already in 2010.

**Rec. 12:**                      Decentralization

The Evaluation Report recommends that if IFS is going to develop into a distributed organisation, it should comprise the HQ in Stockholm and at least three regional IFS offices (at least one each in Africa, Asia and Latin America). The HQ and the regional offices should have the same brand name and should preferably be parts of the same legal entity.

The Board has noticed the achievements of the IFS hub in Uganda. In 2010 the Work Plan will be amended to clearly show how the hub is integrated in the IFS Secretariat, with appropriate lines of

communication, reporting and command. Experiences from the hub will be analyzed and systematized for use when IFS prepares to establish additional regional offices. This will be part of the envisioning process.

**Rec. 13:**     Staff training

The Evaluation Report recommends that IFS Secretariat staff should receive more training in subject matter issues and in Results-Based-Management.

The Board agrees. Staff training will be part of the new institutional vision.

**Rec. 14:**     Location of the Secretariat office

The Evaluation Report recommends that IFS Secretariat should actively look for a more cost effective location.

The Board notes that in 2003 IFS Secretariat moved away from expensive office facilities in Stockholm central business district into much cheaper, but still better, offices in its present location. In due time before the present rental agreement expires, IFS should once again survey the market for cheaper facilities.

**Rec. 15:**     Funding base

The Evaluation Report recommends that IFS tries to broaden its funding base.

IFS Secretariat staff and Board members are continually approaching funding agencies for fund-raising purposes. IFS has prepared a number of project proposals which can be modified for the requirements of different donors. This approach has yielded results and provided funding for the Five Year Programme (2006-2010). However, for the post-2010 period IFS' first priority will be to develop a future-oriented programme which is innovative in content, relevant to young scientists and attractive to funding agencies. A resource mobilizing strategy will be built around this programme and marketed to a broad range of donors.

15 March 2010

Ana María Cetto

Chair of IFS Board of Trustees

Michael Ståhl

IFS Director