THE ROLE OF FIELD-BASED STAFF
IN MAINTAINING PORTFOLIO QUALITY:
THE CASE OF AGRICULTURE AND THE NEW DELHI OFFICE

Jochen Kraske
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Introduction

1. The New Delhi resident mission, particularly its agricultural staff, is often cited in the Bank as being a good example of a field unit that has been successful in maintaining a high quality of operation, especially with respect to portfolio management. The purpose of this role is to examine the operation and role of the Resident Mission more generally and specifically the operation of its Agricultural Unit in order to determine the relevant lessons of this to the Bank’s ongoing concern to improve portfolio quality.

Evolution of the New Delhi Office

2. Since it was first established in 1957 as a liaison office, the New Delhi Office has grown in line with the needs arising out of our relations with the Government of India and our program. In 1967, the Office first expanded beyond the representational role and became instrumental in monitoring the performance of the economy in the wake of the Bell Mission and the policy reforms introduced by the Government at that time. A staff of four to five macro and sector economists, in addition to the Resident Representative, contributed importantly to the Bank’s understanding of India’s economic problems and furthered the joint efforts of India and the consortium of aid donors to accelerate India’s economic development. To this day, the Office continues to perform a key role in our economic workprogram centered around the preparation of the annual country economic memorandum.

3. The focus of the New Delhi Office began to shift in the mid-1970s, however. The substantial increase in the level of the Bank’s lending to India and the rapid growth of the number of projects under supervision made it inevitable that the Office assumed greater operational responsibilities. The operational role of the
Delhi Office was concentrated on the agricultural sector. Some agricultural staff had been posted to New Delhi initially to work on a broad range of sector issues, and later in agricultural extension and research. In 1977, a distinct agricultural operational unit began to emerge which increased rapidly and in 1980 was formally established as a separate Agricultural Division. It was during this period that the New Delhi Office began to recruit local contract staff to handle procurement and disbursement issues and eventually take over substantial supervision responsibilities. *Ad hoc* decisions were made on the transfer of certain operational tasks from headquarters to the Delhi Office; however, from the beginning the core of the Delhi Office’s agricultural work program consisted of supervision responsibilities, especially of irrigation and extension projects.

4. More recently, responsibilities of the New Delhi Office in sectors other than agriculture have been recognized with the stationing in New Delhi of two staff members concerned with the energy and industry respectively. The addition of a staff member concerned with the social sectors resumes representation of these sectors on the New Delhi staff, which had been introduced when the bank first entered the population field in 1974, but was later abandoned because the volume of work did not seem to justify the posting of a separate staff member. There is also now a staff member dealing with water supply and urban projects responding to the very difficult implementation problems encountered in this field.

5. Another noteworthy aspect in the evolution of the Office has been the growing involvement of local economists staff and of local economic consultants. It was thus possible to extend the range of economic work and to
cover detailed analysis of special issues beyond the capacity circumscribed by the three remaining economist positions.

6. As this overview of the evolution of the New Delhi Office indicates, major shifts have taken place in the course of the 30 years of the Office’s existence. The periodic rotation of staff posted in New Delhi, particularly changes in the heads of the Office and of the Agricultural Division (or Unit as it became in the 1987 reorganization), facilitated the gradual changes in the orientation of the Office. The role and responsibilities of the New Delhi Office have been shaped by the evolving objectives and priorities of the Bank in India. But perhaps more than the organizational units at headquarters, the workprogram of the New Delhi Office and the character of the Office has been a function of the personalities of the staff members assigned to New Delhi Office and their interpretation of their responsibilities.

7. The New Delhi Office has contributed importantly to the Bank’s work in India. The performance of the Office has been of a high standard. Output of the staff assigned to New Delhi has been large and of excellent quality. Staff assigned to the New Delhi Office is of high caliber; the opportunity to enhance professional expertise through thorough understanding of specific country conditions has attracted well qualified staff members and given the Bank’s work in India a qualitative dimension which could not have been achieved without a field presence.

8. Looking at the variety of tasks which might benefit from assignment to the New Delhi Office and looking back at the many activities which have in fact been performed by the New Delhi Office with success, a reasonable hypothesis would be that there are few tasks in our country and project work that could not be
carried out advantageously by the New Delhi Office. However, since there is a
definite limit to the overall size of the office imposed by the Government and since
staff assigned to our Resident Mission is substantially more costly, it has always
been a concern to identify and select those activities for assignment to the field
office that would have greater comparative advantage which is a reason for the
growth of the agricultural function of the Office.

Role of New Delhi Office

9. Throughout its evolution, the New Delhi Office and the Agricultural
Unit enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. The workprogram of the Office,
discussed and agreed with headquarters, contained many elements which were
relevant because they could be carried out in New Delhi. The remoteness from the
pressures at headquarters and the freedom to pursue instead analytical work
intended to provide broad and detailed understanding, attracted many outstanding
economists and others to work in the New Delhi Office. The work done by staff in
the New Delhi Office served the agreed objectives of the Bank in India, but this
work was done by means and at a pace different from that prevalent at the
operational end at headquarters. The New Delhi Office sought to support the
objectives of the Divisions at headquarters through (a) its own analytical work, (b)
discussions with analysts, policy makers, and staff responsible for program design
and implementation in a wide variety of institutions, and (c) guidance to
headquarters' staff and missions in their work. The New Delhi Office thus played
an active role in seeking to understand needs for change in India, exploring the
locus and timing of decision making, and finding ways of playing a constructive role
in the design of operations and policy. The consistent high quality of the country
economic reports prepared by the New Delhi Office owed much to the fact that they were prepared in the field by a staff who could concentrate on the task without interruption and also experience first hand the problems which were analyzed.

10. The situation is somewhat different for projects staff posted in New Delhi. At the time when the agricultural group in New Delhi started to expand and became involved in project work, close coordination with headquarters became essential. The New Delhi Office staff performed functions, such as project supervision, which were an integral part of the work program of headquarters’ divisions; it performed these functions either in the role of managing specific tasks or in support of tasks managed by headquarters staff. It seems evident, however, that the transfer of responsibilities to the New Delhi Office entailed qualitative changes in the way the job was being done. Generally, the detail and intensity with which tasks were being performed tended to increase if done in the field. This has been most obvious in the way projects supervision incorporated significant elements of technical assistance. It should be noted, however, that the type of agriculture projects assigned to the New Delhi Office for supervision were often those that required intensive staff involvement; indeed, the presence of agricultural staff enabled the Bank to move into areas which it would have been very difficult to tackle otherwise, such as agricultural extension reforms, watershed development, agricultural research.

11. The reporting relationships reflect the autonomous role of the New Delhi Office. The Agriculture Unit is an extension of the single agriculture division in the Country Department and the head of the Unit reports to the headquarters
Division Chief. The model of reporting relationships for the agricultural and economic staff has been extended to the staff dealing with non-agricultural sectors; each of the four staff members now assigned to the New Delhi Office to deal with infrastructure, industry, and the social sectors report to the division chiefs in charge of the respective sector divisions.

12. The workprogram of the individual staff members posted in New Delhi is discussed and agreed with the relevant sector division chiefs who also supervise the work and ensure appropriate quality. Field staff are assigned responsibility for the management of particular tasks, as necessary the completion of these tasks may involve the support by headquarters staff. In turn, field office staff may be assigned a supporting role in the performance of tasks managed by headquarters. The Chief of Mission is consulted when setting the principal contours of the workprogram of the staff in the field, and settles ad hoc any conflicts arising out of competing claims on the staff time available in the field. This arrangement makes for effective coordination between headquarters and the Field Office, and helps achieve effective integration of the field staff into the Departmental workprogram. Agricultural staff in Delhi are responsible for all portfolio management (about 35 projects) and make significant contributions to lending (and less to economic and sector work).

13. It is important, however, to recognize that this close alignment of staff in the field with the organization at headquarters needs to be carefully managed to ensure the effectiveness of field staff and quality of their work. There is a temptation to rely on the staff in New Delhi as a convenient way to expedite the solution of the many daily problems and irritations which interfere in the smooth
progress of our work. There is sometimes also a temptation to introduce at short notice changes in the work program and the priorities of assignments for the staff working in the field. Both these problems need to be avoided in order to benefit of the comparative advantage of posting staff in the field at a considerable cost. These benefits manifest themselves in the greater intensity of the work done by field staff, the greater thoroughness of supervision, the depth and breadth of the analytical work which results from the ability of field staff to familiarize themselves closely with the local conditions, and from the fact that field staff are relatively protected from the day to day pressures of our bureaucracy and able to devote undivided attention to particular assignments. Losing these characteristics of our field work would make a field assignment less attractive and would make it difficult in the future to recruit the high caliber staff which the Agricultural Unit has been able to attract in the past.

14. The close coordination between the divisions in the Country Department at headquarters and the Field Office in setting the work program also characterize the PPR process for the field office staff. The head of the Agricultural Unit and the senior economist in the New Delhi Office are responsible for the review of the staff reporting to them. They conduct the performance review following consultations with the agriculture sector division chief and the lead economist respectively. The Agricultural Division Chief reviews the performance and performance plan of the head of the Agricultural Unit; likewise, the other sector division chiefs are responsible for the PPRs of the operational officers in their respective fields.
15. The New Delhi Office has been able to attract highly qualified and motivated staff members, above average in terms of professional qualifications and performance. This is essential given the important and exposed role of our staff in field assignments. Furthermore, the Indian environment places particular demands on personal sensitivities and diplomatic skills of resident staff. Success in matching the best qualified staff member with the available job in the field mission does not alone depend on the interest of the candidate and agreement of the hiring manager; many other factors, including family circumstances, health and dietary constraints enter into the picture. In the circumstances, it has proven useful that the grading of positions should not interfere unnecessarily in the recruiting process. Staff positions in the field office are generally graded at the 23/24 level. As a rule it has been possible to find suitable candidates at that level.

16. In sum, the arrangement affecting the Agriculture Unit in Delhi is:

- The workprogram for the individual staff members is the responsibility of the sector division chief in the Country Department;

- Expatriate staff in the New Delhi Office have a line relationship with the headquarter division, the head of the agricultural unit being responsible for day to day management of the agricultural teams;

- The Agriculture Division Chief supervises the quality of the work of the staff of the Agriculture Unit and is responsible for the PPR of the individual staff members reporting to him;

- The Chief of Mission shares the supervisory responsibility of the sector division chiefs. He has the ultimate responsibility for the management of the Field Office and the conduct of the staff in the
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Office. Together with the head of the Agricultural Unit (and the senior economist), the Chief of the Mission provides support and supervision of the staff in New Delhi within the parameters of the agreed program. He has overall responsibility for contacts of missions from headquarters and staff of the Resident Mission with Government agencies in India.

17. The effectiveness of the New Delhi Office and the role it plays is, of course, not only a function of decisions taken by the management of the Bank or of the attitude of individuals posted in New Delhi. It is also very importantly a function of the Government's attitude towards the Resident Mission and of the role it attributes to the mission. There is every indication that the work of the Resident Mission in New Delhi is appreciated by the Government. This is especially evident the closer one gets to the levels in the bureaucracy directly concerned with the practical problems of program and project implementation.

Size of the New Delhi Office

18. Apart from the Head of Mission there are three economists, four sector specialists dealing with infrastructure, industry, water supply and education respectively, and 7 agriculturists including the Head of the Agricultural Unit. There is a large staff of local professionals working alongside the staff assigned from headquarters. A total of 28 higher level local staff includes 3 economists, two projects officers supporting our work in infrastructure and population, 20 agricultural specialists, and 2 staff members with administrative responsibilities. With the exception of 7 staff members who are held against regular positions, higher level local staff is employed on fixed term with contracts of varying
durations. In addition, the Agriculture Unit employs short term local consultants for specific jobs. Fees paid to these consultants are around Rs. 1,000 per day.

19. The New Delhi Office contributes substantially to the workprogram. The New Delhi Office accounts for about 2,200 staffweeks, or about 38 percent of the total number of staffweeks invested in the country workprogram. On the face of it, the New Delhi Office would thus appear to be highly efficient -- 28 percent of the Department's total expenditures provided for 38 percent of the output measured in staffweeks. This is obviously a reflection of the relatively low cost of local professional staff time. The economies which could be achieved through expanding the involvement of local higher level staff have indeed been a principal consideration which led to the expansion of the Office in recent years.

20. By any standards the New Delhi Office looms large within the context of the Country Department. Depending on the focus anywhere from one-fifth to two-fifths of the total resources available to the Department are accounted for by the New Delhi Office. To put this in perspective: expenditures on field offices Bankwide account for 6 percent of the Bank's administrative budget; these expenditures account for 14 percent of the administrative budget of the 4 Regional Offices in the operations' complex. Given the magnitude of the resources allocated to the New Delhi Office, concern about the appropriate size of the office becomes important.

Workprogram of the New Delhi Office and the Agriculture Unit

21. Ultimately the size of the New Delhi Office as well as its responsibilities depends on the Bank's objectives and its program in India. Our country objectives and the specific program of economic and sector work, lending
and supervision are manifested in the workprogram which is determined by the management of the Country Department. Divisional managers will have the responsibility to determine which parts of the workprogram should be carried out by the field office.

22. It is not possible to establish firm rules for workprogram managers which could help in deciding which part of the workprogram must be carried out in the field. There are no definite, absolute criteria which determine those tasks in the workprogram which could be performed with advantage by the field office. It has not been possible to carry out a quantitative cost-benefit analysis of the work performed by the New Delhi Office which could provide some guidance. It is easy enough to identify the cost of the New Delhi Office but the value of the benefits is not readily measured in Dollar terms. Any comparison between the work performed in the field office and the work performed at headquarters remains a matter of judgement.

23. Nor does the tradition established by the New Delhi Office and the experience gained with the division of responsibilities between headquarters and field provide clear and unambiguous guidance. It is probably correct to say that tasks of economic and sector work, project preparation, or project supervision performed by the field mission have always tended to be qualitatively different from similar tasks performed at headquarters. Greater familiarity with local circumstances, better access to data and sources of information, the ability to work with less distraction by other demands, above all the complete immersion in the atmosphere of the country have all contributed to this phenomenon.
24. There have been extensive discussions about the most appropriate assignments for the field office in agricultural project work. The point has been made to assign to the field office staff responsibilities for the entire processing cycle of selected agricultural projects. The reasons turned on the observation that ultimately preparation, appraisal, and supervision of projects were closely linked and the experience gained through work on one phase of the project cycle would be a valuable input into subsequent phases of project cycle. It was argued that it was inefficient to separate the different phases and give responsibility for the management of the different phases in the cycle to different organizational entities.

25. The prevalent view has been that resident missions have particular comparative advantage in project preparation and supervision, while the responsibility for appraisal should be managed by the headquarters staff. Headquarters staff would be in a better position to handle the appraisal of projects mainly because of the close inter-action required between the responsible Division and other units in the Bank and because of the review process internal to the Bank. Project preparation and supervision, on the other hand, offer particular opportunities to field staff to work closely with the Government agencies and to provide detailed guidance. The experience of the New Delhi Office seems to have clearly demonstrated that supervision of agricultural projects is most effectively done by the field office. This is not only true for projects requiring substantial amount of technical assistance, but also for projects requiring less or no such assistance. Knowledge of local conditions, proximity to the implementing agencies, and ability to respond quickly when problems arise are the key factors which have made for the success of the New Delhi Office staff in supervision.
26. Indeed, agricultural staff assigned to New Delhi has devoted practically all its time to preparation and supervision of projects in several agricultural subsectors. The primary focus has been on irrigation and extension projects. The reasons for focusing on these projects had to do with the fact that these projects tended to be highly dispersed, were frequently multi-faceted, included often innovative pilot components, and invariably had important institution building objectives. Local contract staff was used to do a large share of the work involved, the ability to use local staff at great savings was often the key consideration which determined the assignment of particular tasks to the field office. This was true especially in project supervision, where local staff could take care of much of the detailed review, which headquarters staff had not the time to handle.

27. Responsibility for project supervision has absorbed the largest share of the time of the agricultural staff in the New Delhi Office. This is still the case in the current workprogram of the agriculture unit where supervision activities account for 67 percent of expatriate, and 90 percent of the total higher level staff time available. Staff in the New Delhi Office are task managers for about 35 agricultural projects under supervision today. However, the share of supervision in the workprogram is also large because the time devoted to individual projects goes far beyond the Bank's normal loan administration requirements and includes a large dosage of project implementation assistance.

28. Supervision input figures reflect the particular innovative, technical, institutional, administrative, and locational aspects of project activities. Several nation- and state-wide programs supported by the Bank in fact represent aggregates of
large numbers of individual projects, each of which of substantial size and
demanding individual supervision attention. In other projects our participation in the
implementation was instrumental to gain the experience needed to design follow up
projects. Our role in agricultural extension is a good example. As long as the
agricultural extension concepts were new and not yet firmly established, intensive
supervision and proselytization, including the organization of workshops and
seminars, were essential to the success of the program. Finally, the weak
constitutional and actual role of the Central Government in many areas related to
project implementation is also a frequent reason for extensive supervision
responsibilities falling on Bank staff.

29. Nonetheless, it is difficult to justify why on average our supervision
involvement should go beyond the Bank’s standard requirements of monitoring
progress at regular intervals for the purpose of bringing to the attention of all
concerned parties any problems which threaten to interfere with the
implementation. It is not easy to understand why it should not be possible in a
country like India with ample skills and strong institutions to reduce our supervision
effort below the Bankwide average. Apart from the specific project related reasons
referred to above which have required a heavy supervision input, there seem to
have been two reasons which have contributed to this phenomenon. First, a
natural tendency to get drawn into project implementation. While project
preparation and appraisal are phases in the project cycle which have built in
limitations on the amount of time that will be devoted to their completion, this is
much less the case in project supervision. The closer staff are to the execution of a
Bank-supported project, the greater will be the temptation to increase participation
and to get involved in project management. Second, the reluctance of the Government to accept explicit provision for technical assistance by local, and especially expatriate, consultants has tended to shift the burden for providing the missing technical advice on to our supervision staff.

30. This is not to say that the technical assistance provided by the Bank is not beneficial, rather that these activities should be covered by different means and out of separate budget. Efforts have in fact been made in recent years to decrease the Bank's absolute agricultural supervision input. These include:

- improving the operation of GOI-level project "cells" for extension, research, water management, irrigation design, watershed development and other fields, where generally do not fulfill anything like their intended role;

- having project implementation authorities hire the assistance (local or foreign) they are assessed of needing during project preparation/appraisal;

- supporting projects that primarily transfer funds into existing structures but with limited technical or institutional change (e.g, NABARD, National Dairy II); and

- assuming a relatively passive role in supervision, coupled with formally-reduced supervision requirements.

31. The Agricultural Unit in New Delhi has also made in recent years significant steps to increase its involvement in agricultural sector work. It has developed some capacity to follow developments in the agricultural sector overall and, in particular, the evolution of agricultural policies in areas such as pricing,
taxation, land tenure, and the various special programs launched from time to time by the Government in the pursuit of particular objective. Some responsibility for special sector work tasks has been assigned to the New Delhi Office where extensive field work and close interaction with Indian institutions, including local consultants, would be a factor.

32. One of the key factors in the rapid expansion of the New Delhi Office has been the recruitment of local professional staff. Including higher level staff on regular positions and fixed term appointments, and consultants employed on long term contracts, there is now a total of 28 local professional staff working in the New Delhi Office. This development reflects both the availability of large numbers of well trained and experienced professionals in New Delhi and also the relatively low cost of employing local staff. There is a large number of highly experienced professionals who retire from Government service and are looking for employment and income additional to their retirement pension. Many of these people would be competitive internationally and could well be qualified to be recruited at headquarters. Indeed, some of them are, but the majority prefer, at this stage in their career, employment in India even if it means sacrificing potential earnings. There are also large numbers of well trained and qualified professionals graduating from Indian universities and professional schools in search of employment opportunities. Many of them look to working in the New Delhi Office as an opportunity to gain additional experience and a potential springboard to finding a job abroad at World Bank headquarters or other international organizations.

33. The salaries of a local professional staff are relatively modest. On average the direct cost of local professional staff is about one-sixth of the cost of a
headquarters staff member posted in New Delhi. Two trips to or from headquarters cost about as much as one year of local consultant or two research assistants. All of the New Delhi Office consultant budget is equivalent to the cost of one headquarters position. The remuneration of local staff is determined in line with Bankwide policy, that is to say it is based on the salary structure of the UNDP. It appears that the salaries paid by the Bank are quite competitive, in particular since remuneration for service to United Nations Organizations is free from income tax. This puts local employees of the Bank’s New Delhi Office very high on the scale among net income earners in India.

34. With one or two exceptions, local professional staff in the New Delhi Office are effectively working in conjunction with the staff assigned to the New Delhi from headquarters. In other words, they do require supervision and management, and in that sense, absorb a significant share of the time of staff assigned to the field office from headquarters. This is possibly the most significant cost associated with the employment of much of the local professional staff. There are differing views on what appropriate ratios between headquarters’ and local staff should be. In the view of observers of the Agricultural Unit this ratio should be somewhere between two and three; in the case of economists the prevalent view is of a ratio somewhere between one and 1.5.

35. Local professional staff generally contribute skills which expatriate staff members usually do not possess. These have to do with the better understanding and greater familiarity of local conditions and sensitivities. Retired Government employees bring special understanding of the ways of the Government bureaucracy and frequently the ability to deal informally with the network of former
colleagues. But these advantages, unless exploited in a limited, technical context, can also lead to problems by placing local professional staff into conflicts of interests and raising suspicions about undue Bank interference.

36. The availability of well qualified local professional staff and the fact that large numbers of local professionals could be employed without going beyond the parameters of the normal allocation for consultants has, no doubt, contributed to the inflation of some of our supervision coefficients. The supervision of many of our agricultural projects, especially the supervision of local procurement arrangements, would have been prohibitively expensive without the ability to rely on local professional staff. In as much as responsibility for routine supervision responsibilities could be shifted to local professional staff, time of headquarters staff became available to focus on activities more generally in support of project implementation and technical assistance.

37. There is no doubt that the contribution of local professional staff has significantly affected the quality of Bank-supported projects. In this sense one might well ask why it should not be appropriate to expand the staff of local professionals further and rely even more on their support. This, however, raises fundamental questions about the role and objectives of the Bank in India. If there are professionals adequately qualified to supervise and manage implementation of Bank-supported projects in India, why should it be necessary for the Bank to employ these professionals? It would seem more appropriate for the Bank to explore ways and means to arrange for the Government, if necessary through contracting local institutions, to avail itself of the services of these professionals. This is not to rule out the employment of local professionals, because there are
many functions within the framework of the Bank's elementary responsibilities which can be performed by local professionals; however, there is a limit determined by the scope of these responsibilities covered through the Bank's administrative budget.

**Procurement and Disbursement**

38. Procurement matters represent a very significant element in the supervision activities of the New Delhi Office. The recruitment of local contract staff was first thought of as a cost-efficient way to deal with the supervision of the large volume of relatively small civil works contracts funded by the Bank under irrigation projects. There are now two higher level local staff dealing exclusively with procurement under agricultural projects. A total of 80 staffweeks is allocated annually in the New Delhi Office to deal with procurement.

39. The total workload arising out of procurement supervision in the Department is very significant and increasing. It is estimated that the 109 projects in the active portfolio generate as much as 2,000 contracts awarded per annum. By far the largest share of these contracts are typically small civil works contacts financed under projects in the agriculture, urban and water supply, and transportation sectors. Of the total number of civil works contracts about 200 to 300 exceed a value of $100,000 in recent years, requiring pre-award review of tender documents and of bid evaluations. The remainder are subject to selective post-award review. The large majority of these contracts are below the threshold, specified in the legal agreements, for which the borrower is required to send copies of confirmed contracts to the Bank. Practically all civil works contracts are awarded to Indian contractors either through local competitive bidding or through
international competitive bidding but with limited prospects for any foreign participant, except in the very few cases of large, multimillion dollar contracts.

40. The involvement of procurement staff in New Delhi Office has been substantial at the stage of tender preparation and invitation to bid. This has included technical assistance in the form of procurement workshops or discussions of specific procurement matters. The major advantage which New Delhi Office staff had over headquarters staff at this stage of the procurement process is the ready access to project agencies to have frequent and detailed exchanges on the preparation of tender documents. The review of bid evaluations occupied a relatively small share of the time of procurement staff because the number of contracts to be reviewed has been relatively small. In addition, procurement staff in the New Delhi Office reviews on a selective basis procurement action under contracts below the size for which the borrower is required to send copies of contracts to the Bank.

41. The nature of the activities involved, the need for close contact with project implementation agencies, and the need for good understanding and familiarity with the environment in which local institutions have to operate, all argue in favor of assignment of greater responsibility for procurement supervision to the field office. The possibility of using highly expert local staff for this purpose makes such a choice particularly attractive. It would seem sensible to extend responsibility for procurement supervision beyond agriculture and to cover the other sectors with a high incidence of civil works contracts as well.
Conclusion

42. The example of the New Delhi office represents a cost effective way of performing some of the critical project tasks. Experience has shown that the deployment of field staff has been particularly effective in project supervision. The thoroughness of our supervision of a number of projects would neither have been possible nor affordable without the large role of local higher level staff in our work.

43. Two points might be worth making by way of conclusion. First, as far as the various conventional indicators of project implementation show, the India portfolio does not significantly vary from the usual pattern. The relatively massive supervision effort in a country with a sophisticated administration and well established institutions has not reduced the number of problem projects below the trend, nor accelerated disbursements above the standard profile. In essence, the presence and the role of the field office has allowed us to deliver a different product and tackle problems which we would not have otherwise attempted to address. Occasionally, the work in the field office may have involved us more deeply in actual project implementation than should be our proper role and thus allowed Government and project authorities to avoid addressing important management and staffing decisions. Second, there should be no doubt that the conditions under which the New Delhi office experience succeeded are unique and not easily replicable. Pre-requisites are the large lending program and portfolio of Bank projects in India which has allowed us to assemble in the field a complement of staff representing all the essential skills required for the performance of operational tasks. The second pre-condition which makes this experience unique is the availability of a large reservoir of highly qualified, English-speaking technical staff at very reasonable cost.