SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS ON INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF BIOGAS SYSTEMS

OVERVIEW

Participants were divided into more or less three equal-sized discussion groups, each handling one of the following specific areas:

1. Rural Development and Basic Human Needs.
3. Opportunities in Commercial Size Digesters.

Because of the relatively large group size, the varied personal experience, and thus the wide spectrum in opinion, discussions were very rich, lively, and extensive. The pointers set in the questions raised in the previous paper were used to a great advantage in guiding the discussions to conclusive ends.

In the following, the general major conclusions and recommendations based on the outcome of the three groups discussions are first outlined. Next, the highlights of each group report are presented.

GENERAL OUTCOMES

Conclusions:

- The viability of biogas systems increases with the number of benefits they bring. Integrated systems serving objectives other than energy, such as recycling of organic matter and pollution control, are likely to be more feasible by meeting more needs.

- Assessment of the potential commercial biogas system is essential prior to any decision making. In addition to technical and financial aspects, socio-economic considerations and environmental impacts should be taken into account.

- From the institutional point of view, government support and endorsement is necessary. However, it seems that a major contribution from villagers/end users and a strong private sector role are needed for undertaking wide-scale implementation of biogas systems.

- There is no single distinct universal biogas system design available and hence particular considerations are needed for each particular country and particular case, perhaps from among the number of prospective accessible designs.
The role of donor agencies can be very helpful in:

- Support of R&D and demonstration plants.
- Establishment of information and data bank, data processing, evaluations and distribution.
- Technical assistance in the assessment of the potential uses of biomass wastes.
- Encouraging technology transfer, exchange of information and experience among developing countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Strong need for R&D and demonstration in the developing countries.
- Better information dissemination on the different aspects of BGT and systems.
- Need for common guidelines for the evaluation of commercial biogas systems.
- Evaluation and extraction of basic data and lessons from existing biogas programs.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE GROUP REPORT ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

- For rural people, BGT can contribute to various basic and development needs, though the effect may not be so great. Benefits accrued from biogas systems relate to energy, organic recycling, waste management, and sanitation. Though in certain instances, the rural biogas systems can be "money-makers", the positive effects are mostly indirect such as improving the quality of life, and stopping deforestation.

- BGT is site specific and thus conclusions as to the viability of the various types of systems or conditions cannot be generalized. For instance, whether a household system would be a feasible scheme or not will largely depend on the situation.

- There is a big disparity between the cities and villages of developing countries. This gap must be narrowed, and BGT can help in this process which should be counted as an added "social" benefit.

Integration of a biogas scheme in an integrated farming system is worthwhile. Under such circumstances the biogas scheme may not only be paying by itself, but it would join into the overall improvement program.

- The governments cannot support BGT forever. The villagers must contribute the main share. Only some financial support can be given by the government. The degree of subsidy would depend (inversely) on the degree of the direct benefits BGT has for the user.

The most successful countries in BGT promotion did not receive much help from outside, but mostly support from their own governments.