In his article 'Increasing National Capacity for Educational Research' (see page 326), Sheldon Shaeffer gives an excellent summary of problems related to the development of educational research and of the type of analysis that should precede any involvement with such development. The framework of research environment analysis presented there can indeed be a useful instrument in the process of identification of the nature of any such involvement by either donor agencies or local governments. I think, however, that the problems associated with it are more complex and complicated than Shaeffer shows. In the first part of this article, I will try to single out the main difficulties one might encounter in using this kind of tool, and in the second I shall try to apply it to the case of Zaire.

**Does research correspond to a need at the national level?**

The basic assumption underlying this framework of analysis is that there is a need for educational research and for developing capacity for such research in developing countries. Obviously, this raises a host of issues, the principal one being the determination of such need. As the Shaeffer article correctly asserts, issues such as the meaning of research, how it is to be organized and how it is to be carried out are not as culturally neutral as researchers and funders of research would like to believe. All these issues are related to the values of the system to which one belongs and, even within such a system, how they are perceived may vary from period to period.

That the meaning of research may be culturally determined can be seen simply in the ideological decision to deny the status of science to practices and processes of non-Western peoples. The pygmies in the equatorial forest may use the same general laws of physics in building their bridges across rivers, yet the process is not recognized as the result of scientific knowledge. As another example, we have seen that agriculturists in so-called primitive societies know of the law of diminishing return to land due to over-cultivation; crop rotation between different plots of land is therefore practised so as to permit the natural process of refertilization to follow its course. Such knowledge has been accumulated through experience over extended periods of time, but is not generally recognized as scientific knowledge.

Some of the case-studies mentioned by
Shaeffer can also be used to illustrate this value issue. The Francophone West African Education Research Training Programme is based on the assumption that there is a need for researcher training in francophone West Africa. We know of this need not because the West Africans came to us but because the Ford Foundation staff (and myself) went to discover it. Let us assume that the need is really there, since educational systems may indeed be facing problems that must be dealt with. In our environmental study we did not limit our role to the identification of the nature of the need for educational research in francophone Africa: we proposed to them the type of research they needed in order better to deal with their problems. For example, it was suggested that using social science methods or taking the social context into account in the study of such problems tells us more about them than not doing so. Let us again assume that this is equally the case, since it may be argued that the study of the external effects of education and of their influence on the schooling process may give us added insights into the problems. We nevertheless went further to suggest that qualitative methods of study are better instruments for analysing educational problems than quantitative ones. Hence we suggested that the training programme should have a computer-training component and that students should be required to use such equipment in their research.

The question, then, is to what extent these needs are, at least in part, a reflection of the Ford Foundation ideology about research in general and about educational research in particular. Are we, for example, really sure that the use of the computer is a necessary condition for doing good research, or is it used principally because it has become a part of the Western cultural heritage? If the latter is the case, then should we really be inducing people to become enslaved by an expensive technology that their countries may not be able to afford?

While an analysis of environment may be a necessary pre-condition for research capacity building in any country, what is even more important is perhaps the frame of reference and intentions of the analyst, as well as the objectives of the various parties involved. That there can be a conflict between these objectives and, as a consequence, in the definition of needs can again be seen in the Francophone West African Education Research Training Programme. While trying to determine the nature of the need for educational research in the said area, we were told by many of educational practitioners and heads of institutions responsible for educational innovation projects that the level of research capacity they needed consisted of investigatory and information-gathering skills. The cadres sought, therefore, were apparently of a relatively low level. Their reasoning in seeking this kind of capacity was that the experiments involved basic transfer of skill information and of basic scientific information and that therefore the information analyst, for evaluation purposes, had to know the local languages, to have sufficient information about local technologies and to accept working with the peasants. In their view, someone university-trained was at that time an antithesis of that kind of person.

However, both the Ford Foundation, which identified the need, and the training institution concerned decided on a university-level training programme for them. The question is therefore whether in so doing the need was actually not redefined. The justification of this apparent 'redefinition' of needs was based on two arguments: (a) the presumption that those in charge of these institutes did not know what kind of activities needed to be carried out in order to evaluate their projects (because they did not have the required training in order to be able to do so), and (b) that what was actually needed were high-quality researchers to do high-quality research.

Obviously, these presumptions are value-laden. In the first place, when we say that these