

**MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF WARO COUNCIL OF REGIONAL
ADVISORS' WORKSHOP AND THEMATIC DISCUSSION, BAMAKO MALI,
FEBRUARY 8-10, 2006**

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SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

WARO's Council of Regional Advisors

- Established in September 2001 with the aim of reinforcing the responsiveness of IDRC to research needs in the region.
- Currently composed of ten experts from West and Central Africa (6 men and 4 women) representing fields of expertise that complement IDRC's three main program areas, namely environment and natural resources management, economic and social equity, information and communication technologies for development, as well as some cross-disciplinary areas such as health and gender equity.

The Series of Researcher/Policy Maker Workshops

- Workshop series began in July 2004 and will be implemented every six months in a different country, over the next three years.
- Aims to pragmatically explore the relationship between researchers and policy makers in Africa, identify bottlenecks to collaboration, and propose sustainable mechanisms to facilitate the transfer of research results into political decision-making.

PURPOSE OF THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION MISSION

Brief assessment of the activities during the three-day meetings in Bamako, Mali, as part of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the WARO Council's work.

- Evaluate the quality of the researcher/policy maker's workshop in Bamako, in comparison to previous workshops in the series.
- Present the results of the ex-post evaluation, which was carried out in 2005, to regional Advisors.
- Note the productivity of the thematic discussion, which was organized during the afternoon of January 10, 2006 in response to the recommendations of the 2005 Evaluation Report.

The intended audience comprises of; program and management staff in the WARO Office and at IDRC headquarters in Ottawa.

BAMAKO RESEARCHER/POLICYMAKER WORKSHOP

Findings for Bamako Workshop

The Mali Workshop entitled, Forum for Reflection and Exchange among Researchers and Decision Makers on “Drought and Desertification in West and Central Africa: The Case of Mali”, was the fourth in the series. The topic is of importance to both researchers and policy makers.

The Bamako Workshop succeeded in developing very good interaction between policy makers and researchers. Issues discussed were relevant to Mali, the West African sub-region and IDRC’s programming.

The WARO Regional Director and Research and Information Officer visited Mali before the Workshop to help prepare and coordinate support and logistics. This involvement helped to facilitate the planning process and to encourage participants to attend the workshop.

The involvement of a professional conference organizer to coordinate logistics was another new element compared to the other workshops. This enhanced the quality of the workshop and allowed the Advisor in Mali to concentrate efforts on other aspects pertaining to the workshop.

A wide range of groups were involved in the planning process for the workshop. Participants, 25% of whom were women, consisted of people from the legislature, civil society, research and government. They also contributed to the preparation and presentation of good quality of background papers for the workshop.

A draft report of the Mali Workshop was prepared only six weeks after the workshop; a big improvement over other previous workshops.

Apart from the formation of an apparently strong Follow-up Committee, it is felt that the workshop did not succeed in providing it with adequate guidance, which will allow it to rapidly obtain the desired output. This may have a negative influence on the effectiveness of this committee.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

- The involvement of all Regional Advisors in planning workshops is desirable.
- Documents for workshops should be circulated to participants in advance of the workshops.
- A summary of the Mali Workshop Report should be prepared for circulation.
- Follow-up Committees should be provided with guidelines to assist them in carrying out their work

PRODUCTIVITY OF THEMATIC DISCUSSION

The Thematic Discussion was an attempt to involve the Regional Advisors in knowledge creation that is of relevance to IDRC programming and the needs of West/Central Africa. The background paper, on which discussions were based, was prepared by a Malian NGO.

IDRC will be launching a new Program Initiative on the topic discussed by the Regional Advisors after approval by the Board in March 2006. IDRC should be able to make use of the results of this thematic discussion.

The discussion paper was prepared and circulated about two weeks in advance of the workshop. It was prepared by two women with significant experience on the subject. The background paper for the thematic discussion was of good quality and covered a good range of important issues such as women's access to resources, their role in the economy, employment and social services, participation in politics etc.

In view of the recommendations made by the 2005 Evaluation Report, to have a concise document (policy brief) as a major output of the thematic discussions, a consultant was hired to attend the meeting and prepare this summary. It should be useful in the development of future research activities.

Given the success of this thematic discussion, provision should be made for another one to be held during the Cameroon Workshop in June 2006. The planning for this should start immediately.

The presence of four of IDRC's Board of Governors, the President and gender staff enhanced the discussion and showed the interest of IDRC in the subject matter.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

- A synthesis of the thematic discussion should be prepared as an output of the Commission.

2005 EVALUATION REPORT

The mid-term evaluation report, which was submitted to IDRC in October 2005, was presented to the Regional Advisors by one of the co-authors. The Advisors congratulated the authors for the work they did, which was very participatory. They were informed that the IDRC Board of Governors was also pleased with the evaluation. IDRC-WARO had already taken steps to apply some of the recommendations during the Mali Workshop. There is need for IDRC to get involved more actively in sub-regional debates.

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Council of Regional Advisors for the West Africa Regional Office (WARO) of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) was established in September 2001 and is composed of 10 experts from West and Central Africa (4 women and 6 men). It is aimed at reinforcing the responsiveness of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to research needs in the region, according to the guidelines of its Corporate Strategy and Program Framework (CS+PF).

The Council has basically been concerned with the organization of a series of Researcher/Policy Maker Workshop Series, aimed at bringing together researchers and policy makers in West and Central Africa. This series is specifically intended to improve the interaction between researchers and policy makers, and to develop mechanisms to better align the needs of policy makers and the research activities of scientists. It started in July 2004, and will be implemented over the next three years, focusing on countries represented by current advisors (Senegal, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Cameroon and Benin).

IDRC-WARO commissioned a formative and summative evaluation of the WARO Council of Regional Advisors and its Researcher/Policy Maker Workshop Series, focusing mainly on issues of relevance, effectiveness and replicability. The report of the evaluation, which was carried out between mid-June and September 2005 gave a comprehensive account of the findings. Various recommendations were made regarding the knowledge creation role of the Council and improvements on the organization and implementation of the Workshops that would make them more effective. The report specifically recommended that *WARO should develop mechanisms that stimulate Regional Advisors to engage in reflection and discussion between workshops.*

IDRC accepted the recommendations of the evaluation and took steps to improve the quality of the next workshop in Bamako, Mali, February 8-10, 2006 and to organize a thematic discussion by Advisors on a subject of importance to the region and IDRC's programming.

As part of the ongoing monitoring process of the Council's activities, a brief evaluation of the Bamako Workshop and the above-mentioned thematic discussion was carried out during the three-day activity. This report outlines the findings of the evaluation. It is expected that it will inform management staff in the WARO Office and at IDRC headquarters in Ottawa, of progress that has been made related to the Council and the Workshop series.

1.2. Objectives of the Monitoring and Evaluation Activity

This objectives of the monitoring and evaluation exercise as outlined in the terms of reference were to:

- Evaluate the quality of the researcher/policy maker's Workshop in Bamako, in comparison to previous Workshops in the series.
- Present the results of the ex-post evaluation, which was carried out in 2005 to regional Advisors during the morning of February 10, 2006.
- Note the productivity of the thematic discussion, which was organized during the afternoon of January 10, 2006 in response to the recommendations of the 2005 Evaluation Report.

SECTION 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Sources of Information

There main sources of information for this evaluation were:

- Documents prepared for the Mali Workshop and the Thematic Discussion;
- Relevant IDRC staff members;
- Regional Advisors present at the workshop;
- Evaluation Report of the WARO Council and Workshop Series, October 2005.

2.2 Data Collection Methods

Given the brief nature of this monitoring and evaluation activity, data were collected through the review of documents, informal discussions with various participants during the meeting and by observation. This allowed for information and perceptions to be obtained, on various issues, from various sources.

2.2.1 Document review

The following documents were reviewed during this monitoring and evaluation exercise:

- An Evaluation of the WARO Council of Regional Advisors and its Workshop Series, October 2005
- Agenda for the Bamako Forum, February 8-10, 2006
- Draft Report, Bamako Workshop
- Agenda of Regional Advisors' Meeting, February 10, 2006
- "Problematic of Development and Women's Rights in West Africa", Thematic Discussion Working Document
- Bamako Workshop Background Document
- Email correspondence amongst/between Regional Advisors and IDRC staff.

2.2.2 Informal Discussions

Since the two-day Workshop and the Regional Advisors Meeting kept all participants very busy, there was basically no time to organize formal discussions with groups or individuals. Nevertheless, it was possible to have several minutes of informal discussions with groups of participants and individuals, when the opportunity existed, on various aspects of the three-day meeting.

2.2.3 Observation

Having participated in the Workshop on Private Sector Development held in Accra, Ghana in July, and having being a member of the two-person team that carried out the evaluation in 2005, this evaluator had a good knowledge of issues to address during this particular

monitoring and evaluation activity. During this workshop, the evaluator observed various aspects of the workshop and of the ensuing Regional Advisors' Meeting. Such aspects included overall organization, advance preparation of participants, the workshop site, registration, selection of participants, logistics, relevance of presentations, facilitation of discussions, conclusions, improvements over previous meetings, etc.

The Regional Advisors' meeting, which comprised of the review of the 2006 evaluation, an assessment of the Mali Workshop, discussion of the planned Cameroon Workshop, and the Thematic Discussion, was attended by the evaluator. He presented the results of the 2005 evaluation and obtained feedback from the Advisors. Information from all of these above-mentioned meetings was obtained by observation.

2.3 Data Analysis

Using the observations and recommendations of the 2005 evaluation as a reference point, the Mali Workshop and the Regional Advisors Meeting was assessed to determine;

- The overall reaction of the Regional Advisors to the 2005 Evaluation Report;
- Whether recommendations made in the 2005 evaluation report had been taken into account during the organization and implementation of the Mali Workshop;
- The level of improvements observed in the overall organization of the Mali Workshop;
- The effectiveness of the Regional Advisors assessment of the Bamako Workshop.
- The organization and productivity of the Thematic Discussion by the Regional Advisors.

2.4 Limitations

A limitation in conducting this monitoring and evaluation exercise was the lack of time to have structured discussions with various participants during the workshop or after. Most of the information was obtained by personal observation and from written information. From the point of view of continuously collecting information on the activities of the WARO Commission, this was an important monitoring and evaluation activity that will be useful for future assessments.

SECTION 3

EVALUATION FINDINGS

3.1 Findings for Bamako Workshop

It is useful to recall that the overall objective of the series of workshops is to pragmatically explore the relationship between researchers and policy makers in Africa, identify bottlenecks to collaboration, and propose sustainable mechanisms to facilitate the transfer of research results into political decision-making.

The Mali Workshop entitled, **Forum for Reflection and Exchange among Researchers and Decision Makers on “Drought and Desertification in West and Central Africa: The Case of Mali”** was the fourth in the series as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Details of Researchers/Policy Maker Workshops in West/Central Africa

<i>COUNTRY</i>	<i>DATES</i>	<i>THEME</i>
Senegal	June 29-30, 2004	Agriculture
Burkina Faso	January 27-28, 2005	Education
Ghana	July 06-07, 2005	Private Sector Development
Mali	February 2006	Desertification
Cameroon	June 2006	Governance
Benin	January 2007	Health

The 2005 Evaluation Report pointed out that the basis for holding the Research/Policy Maker Workshops was the identified lack of interaction between these two actors. These workshops were therefore initiated by the WARO’s Council of Regional Advisors and IDRC to fill this gap, i.e., to improve the chances of research results being used. The intention is therefore to have an efficient Workshop Series, which is relevant and effective in fulfilling the identified needs. The following outlines the findings of the Mali Workshop regarding its overall quality.

3.1.1 Researcher/Policy Maker Interaction.

Some of the aspects during the meeting, which highlighted the interaction between the research and policy maker groups, are the following:

- The Bamako Workshop succeeded in developing very good interaction between policy makers and researchers. There was a good balance between numbers of researchers and policy makers and no group dominated the discussions during the workshop.
- Participants representing policy makers occupied high positions of responsibility in various government and non-governmental institutions. This allowed for input to be made by high-level decision-makers.

- The topic of the workshop was of great interest to both researchers and policy makers. Its purpose was clear and obvious to everyone attending the workshop.
- Discussion papers were prepared by both researchers and policy makers, allowing different perspectives to be presented on various issues. Topics discussed were relevant to Mali, the West African sub-region and IDRC's programming. This will ensure that collective action can be taken in the future to improve interaction.
- The topics for the working groups were: the degree to which research results are taken into account in combating desertification; and, an action plan to improve dialogue between researchers and policy makers. This created good dialogue between both groups and they developed good ideas for future interaction.

3.1.2 Planning and Organizing of Workshop

The workshop planning process started during the Ghana Workshop. The topic was suggested by the Regional Advisor from Mali. He also was the main coordinator for planning of the Workshop, with assistance from other colleagues in Mali. Two Advisors in addition to IDRC personnel visited Mali to assist in the preparations.

The momentum was initially slow but picked up after the Advisor's visit. This is a positive development in the planning process and should be encouraged for future workshops, if there is a real need. It helped to increase ownership as noted by the increased interaction of Regional Advisors at this Mali Workshop, compared to the Ghana Workshop.

Some aspects of the planning were slow because the Regional Advisor was unavailable and no one could take action. This also appeared to be the case, in some instances, in the planning of the Ghana Workshop. Some arrangements should be made in the future to ensure that there is continuity in the absence of the Advisor, who is responsible for the overall organization of the workshop.

The WARO Regional Director and the Research and Information Officer visited Mali before the Workshop, to help with the coordination and logistical support. This involvement helped to facilitate the planning process and to encourage participants to attend the workshop.

The involvement of a professional conference organizer to coordinate logistics was another new element compared to the other Workshops. This allowed the Advisor to concentrate efforts in other areas. The effect of this approach on the smooth running of the workshop was noticed with regards to; airport reception, hotel accommodation, meals, workshop documentation, working groups, etc.

The Agendas for the workshop and the Regional Advisors' Meeting, the background documents for the workshop and the paper prepared for the Thematic Discussion on Women's Rights and Citizenship, were circulated by email to the Regional Advisors about 10 days before the meeting. All other papers presented by various participants were received at the start of the Bamako Workshop. It was thus not possible for participants to read all the documents before the workshop. This undoubtedly must have been a constraint to fuller involvement in the discussions by participants.

3.1.3 Workshop Theme and Title

The theme and title for the workshop were quite clear, even though the wording may have been rather long. It immediately informed the reader of the problem the workshop was trying to address. This was an improvement over the title of the theme for the Ghana Workshop, which was addressed in the 2005 Evaluation Report.

The theme treated a subject of high importance to Mali and to IDRC's programming as noted by the comments made by the Canadian Ambassador's representative, the President of IDRC and the Secretary General of the Ministry of Equipment and Transport. It was felt by some participants that it was partly responsible for the full participation obtained during the Workshop.

3.1.4 Ownership

It has been pointed out that ownership of the researcher/policy maker workshop is a necessary factor in getting the active and lasting involvement of all parties. During this meeting such ownership was observed as noted from the following:

- A wide range of groups were involved in the planning process.
- Regional Advisors assisted in contributing ideas during the planning process. Their participation was much visible as they were assigned tasks such as chairing various sessions.
- The participation of a parliamentarian particularly added to the creation of ownership of the planning process and outputs of the meeting.
- Civil society was visibly represented.
- Policy makers and researchers were involved in the preparation of background papers for the workshop.
- Government was informed of the workshop and its participation solicited. This implication and ownership by the government was manifested by a dinner being hosted by them for the participants.
- The composition of the follow-up committee, as mentioned earlier, indicates that ownership for all aspects of the workshop and future activities will be shared amongst the various groups that participated.

3.1.5 Selection of participants

The organizers of the workshop succeeded in having a wide range of participants. This enhanced the quality of the workshop as noticed from the range of different perspectives presented during its various phases. Other workshops in the series tended to have more researchers in attendance. In the case of the Mali Workshop, there were equal numbers of researchers (from academic, international, national and sub-regional research institutions), and policy makers (lawmakers, NGOs, government ministries and institutions). They enriched the quality of the meeting. It is anticipated that this will improve the chances of having a concrete follow-up after the workshop.

The presence of strong NGO groups, which understood the issues pertaining to the

meeting, was appreciated by both policy makers and researchers.

Particular mention should be made of the participation of a parliamentarian whose enthusiasm, knowledge of the subject matter, experience and ability to communicate was felt by all present. The quality of his interventions was excellent and his presence in the follow-up committee should help it to make quick progress.

About 10 of the 40 participants were women. From a gender perspective this was perhaps the workshop with the highest percentage of women participants. Future workshops should strive to match and even improve on this level of participation by women.

The spirit of the workshop was greatly influenced by the presence and participation of a parliamentarian. Such workshops need “champions”, who would show that it is possible to improve the interaction between policy makers and researchers.

3.1.6 Publicity

No heavy presence of the media was noticed before or during the workshop. The television media was however present during the opening ceremony. Since the workshop coincided with the visit of the President of IDRC and some IDRC Governors to Mali, it received added visibility and publicity. Notwithstanding this, it appears that the planning activities did not include substantial provision for wide publicity using mechanisms such as, debates and press conferences, to focus on the theme and conclusions of the workshop. Although it is not easy to deal with the media, efforts should be made to attract their interest with respect to future workshops.

Banderoles were not used to publicize the meeting outside the meeting room. Having one inside the room had an effect only when the press was present. It may have been useful to locate some at strategic locations in the city.

3.1.7 Speakers and Facilitators

The topics presented were very relevant to the workshop and their delivery was effective. The five presentations were of good quality and contained a diversity of ideas that stimulated interesting discussions in plenary and during the working groups. The IDRC presentation on results of an evaluation to examine the effectiveness of research in benefiting and influencing decision making by policy makers, showed various aspects of the policy maker/researcher problematic. Papers illustrating how research has and may affect desertification and the use of meteorological information to improve food security, were followed by descriptions of project results in Mali.

Making use of Regional Advisors to facilitate the various sessions proved to be beneficial to the meeting. It ensured that the Advisors kept the discussion focused on the topic. Whereas some of the Advisors were able to keep to the scheduled timing, most of them were unable to do so. This is because they felt the need to allow participants to express their views, even though they might have taken too much time to do so.

3.1.8 Logistics

A professional conference organizer provided logistical support to the workshop. Airport reception, hotel accommodation and transportation were well organized. The meetings took place at the hotel, allowing for participants to be on time for meetings. The meeting rooms for the plenary session as well as for the group sessions were functional and all of them had adequate audio-visual support materials. The main room for the plenary sessions was however considered to be small for the number of participants. Participants did not have adequate elbow room when the room was full of people.

The 2005 Evaluation Report recommended that future workshops should adopt and improve on the use of colored Folders to identify different groups of participants. This was not done during this workshop nor did the organizers use colored name tags corresponding to different groups.

Internet facilities, which would enable participants to keep in touch with other commitments, were not easily available. .

3.1.9 Reporting

Adequate provision was not made for the synthesis of various sessions during the meeting. In the case of the working groups, a synthesis of the working groups in Session 2 would have been useful for the continuation of the working groups in Session 3. This was noted to affect the effectiveness and efficiency of the working groups, making them slow to reach a consensus on some issues.

The organizers of the Mali Workshop should be commended for getting out the draft report only about six weeks after the workshop. This is a concise 13-page account of presentations, discussions and conclusions, which should be improved to include annexes consisting of papers presented, list of participants, etc. It will be useful for IDRC to prepare a reduced document outlining the main results of the workshop for wider circulation amongst key policy makers and researchers.

3.1.10 Follow-up Committee

Although follow-up committees have been established in each of the countries where workshops have been held, none of them have obtained the results desired. In the case of the Mali Workshop, a committee of seven persons has been set up, including a parliamentarian, producer, researcher, NGO and ministry official.. It will initially be chaired by the IDRC Advisor in Mali. This membership composition is significantly different from those in Senegal, Burkina Faso and Ghana and may increase the chances of having quicker results.

The 2005 Evaluation Report mentioned that the effectiveness and efficiency of follow up committees in completing their work have been reduced by the following: an unclear mandate, lack of specific guidelines, terms of reference with specific deadlines were not

provided to them. Apart from the formation of an apparently strong committee, the Mali Workshop did not succeed in providing the committee the above-mentioned directions. This may influence their performance negatively.

3.1.11 Working Groups

The workshop had two sessions of working group meetings. Each session had three working groups. In the first session the working groups comprised of the following participants: group 1 – researchers; group 2 – policy makers; group 3 – mixed and civil society. The second session had three mixed working groups comprising of participants from policy making, research and civil society. This was another innovation, which was closely observed for its merits and weaknesses.

Observation of the working groups showed the following tendencies:

Researchers - This group was very vocal and there were relatively many disagreements on issues. There was a tendency for a very small percentage of participants to dominate the discussions. The discussions were lively and outputs were good.

Policy makers – The group dynamics was very good. It was not a homogeneous group since participants were from the private sector, civil society, legislature, producer groups, etc. The discussions revealed that they did not share the same views. They were serious about the issues and more orderly, compared to the researchers, in expressing their views.

Mixed group – Researchers tended to be more vocal compared to others. The discussions were more agitated due to the range of different views and chairpersons appeared to have more difficulty in keeping the discussions on track and on time. It was noted that there was less tendency for a few people to dominate the discussion in these mixed groups.

This approach used by the organizers of the Mali Workshop was found to be productive although it involved more planning. It is felt that having groups comprising of only researchers, policy makers, or mixed will depend on the topic being discussed, the outputs required, the numbers and proportion of each of the groups present. In this workshop, the approach used appeared to enhance the quality of discussion that took place.

The mandates given to the working groups were substantial but they were able to produce informative results at the end of the time allocated. Written instructions given to the working groups may have contributed to the efficiency with which they carried out their assignments.

The decision to have working groups chaired by Regional Advisors was assessed to be very useful in terms of keeping discussions on track, respecting time, and maintaining the quality of outputs.

Compared to the Ghana workshop, the Mali Workshop managed the presentation of working group reports in a very efficient manner. Keeping with recommendations from the 2005 Evaluation Report, the rapporteurs used PowerPoint presentations to report their findings. This method should continue to be used in future workshops.

3.1.12 Regional Advisors Review of the Workshop

A portion of the Regional Advisor's Meeting was spent on February 10, 2006 to review the activities of the workshop. It was observed that the advisors comments on this meeting were more concrete compared to those made during the Ghana Workshop. This may have been related to a stronger feeling of ownership for Mali Workshop, which had more involvement of Regional Advisors during the planning as well and implementations stages of the workshop. Some of the points raised by the Regional Advisors regarding this workshop are:

- The quality of participation and presentations were very good. The participation of researchers and policy makers was well balanced. The presence and contribution of the parliamentarian was very useful to the workshop.
- Synthesis of the work of the first session of working groups should have been provided a background document for the second session..
- Planning of the workshop was very good. The momentum was initially slow but this soon improved.
- Documents were received on time.
- Internet connection was not easily available for participants.
- Colored badges were not used to identify different groups of participants.
- Publicity of the meeting could have been more aggressive.
- The cultural evening was very much appreciated.

3.1.13 Duration

The duration of two days was considered adequate.

3.2 Findings for Thematic Meeting

3.2.1 Choice of Theme

Taking into account recommendations from the 2005 Evaluation Report, IDRC decided to include a "knowledge creation" item in the program of the Regional Advisors. The theme for the discussions was "The rights of women, citizenship and development in West and Central Africa". Discussions took place during the afternoon of the Regional Advisors Meeting, after the workshop, around a background paper prepared by a Malian NGO.

Based on available correspondence, there did not seem to have been significant discussions before the theme was chosen. This was evidently due to constraint of time, in view of the need to commission the preparation of the background paper for the thematic discussion. It would be interesting for IDRC to start the discussions for the next thematic discussion during the Cameroon Workshop (in June 2006), as soon as possible.

3.2.2 Relevance of Theme

IDRC will be launching a new Program Initiative on the topic discussed by the Regional Advisors after approval by the Board in March 2006. The results of the thematic

discussion will allow the Regional Advisors to better formalize their advice to IDRC's Global programming to the needs for West and Central Africa.

3.2.3 Planning of Meeting

Since the Regional Advisors' Meeting took place immediately after the workshop, preparations for this thematic discussion were the responsibility of the Malian Regional Advisor. The discussion paper was prepared by a Malian NGO, Groupe Pivot - Droits et Citoyennete des Femmes. In view of the recommendations made by the 2005 Evaluation Report to have a concise document as a major output of the thematic discussions, a consultant was hired to attend the meeting and prepare this summary.

3.2.4 Working Papers for Meeting and Presentation

The discussion paper for the meeting was prepared and circulated about two weeks before the meeting. It was prepared by two women with significant experience on the subject. The paper was a concise and easy to read document, treated the subject matter very well, taking into account women's access to resources, their role in the economy, employment and social services, participation in politics, etc.

3.2.5 Potential Contribution to IDRC Programming

The issues raised appear to fit well within the preoccupations of the new gender initiative of IDRC.

The paper and discussions brought out several areas for gender research. Some of the issues that may be pursued include:

- Women's rights within the African culture that can be improved to the benefit of women.
- Identification of research that will influence policy makers. There may be need to ask them what research results they would like to have so as to help them make good decisions.
- Women's rights within the context of decentralization, to enable women to be more productive to the overall process.
- Mechanisms to make information on women available to a wide cross section of the population.
- Studies on the status of women within countries and results made available to the public.
- Literature search on the theme to assess what information is available.

Apart from this productive aspect of identifying research entry points, which will undoubtedly be brought out by the report of this knowledge creating activity, Regional Advisors, IDRC staff from Ottawa and IDRC Governors were able to exchange ideas. Global programming within the Centre should take into account regional specificities or meaningful activities will not be developed in West/Central Africa. This meeting sensitized the Centre to the problems on gender issues and should help in the development of specific projects.

3.2.6 Participation by Advisors in Meeting

All Advisors were present during the thematic discussion and each of them provided significant contributions from their own experiences. Comments from some indicated that they in turn learned a lot from the meeting.

3.2.7 Participation by IDRC Personnel and Governors

Four of IDRC's Board of Governors and the President attended the meeting. The coincidence that all five of them were women was in itself significant for the meeting. It illustrated, in the opinion of the evaluator, the important role that African women should play in the management of important institutions. This was obviously not missed by participants at the meeting.

The team leader for the gender group in IDRC-Ottawa and her collaborator from IDRC-WARO were present at the meeting. An IDRC-WARO program officer chaired the meeting and did an effective job in orienting the discussions in order to obtain the desired outputs.

In general the participation by IDRC personnel was very useful and helped the meeting to meet its objectives.

SECTION 4

IMPROVEMENTS BASED ON 2005 EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Since this monitoring and evaluation activity was aimed at assessing the Mali Workshop, it is useful to review the workshop in the light of the recommendations made in the 2005 Evaluation Report. Eleven recommendations were made regarding the workshop series.

Based on this present monitoring and evaluation exercise, six of the eleven recommendations were applied during this workshop. Two recommendations which do not apply to the organization of workshops were not taken into account.

The three recommendations, which were not fully taken into account in carrying out this workshop, are pointed out below.

2005 Evaluation Recommendation: A small debate in the form of a forum or through the media should be held before the actual workshop, to stimulate interest. During the workshop, the media should be invited to cover the opening ceremony where high level government officials are usually present. At the end of the workshop, a press conference could provide the opportunity to present the main conclusions of the workshop and generate support follow-up. In addition, IDRC could package the conclusions of the workshops in the form of concise and informative “policy briefs” for distribution to policy makers and researchers in the region. Whenever possible, media coverage of the workshop should be organized in all countries where Regional Advisors are present.

Comment: The debate, which was recommended to stimulate interest in advance of workshop, was not held. This was due to difficulties with the media in getting coverage without paying for air time. The media however covered the opening ceremony.

2005 Evaluation Recommendation: IDRC should invite other donors to workshops and develop partnerships with them whenever possible to raise funds for carrying out workshop activities, especially during and after follow up. An effective means of follow up would be to target key institutions to provide support for researchers to conduct research in areas of relevance to policy makers, rather than doing purely academic research for professional advancement. Support for such work could be provided by IDRC in partnership with other donors.

Comment: No donors were invited to this meeting. However it was noted, from discussions related to the planning of the Cameroon Workshop, that there was some positive effort being made by the Regional Advisor in Cameroon to involve other donors in the Cameroon Workshop.

2005 Recommendation: Future workshops should continue using colored folders for different participant groups, and could improve on it by giving participants colored name tags that correspond to their group.

Comment: Colored name tags identifying various groups were not used for this workshop. It appears that this was just an oversight.

The Regional Advisors and IDRC should be commended for quickly applying most of the recommendations made in the 2005 Evaluation Report to the Mali Workshop. This difference between this workshop and earlier ones was very apparent.

SECTION 5

PRESENTATION OF 2005 EVALUATION REPORT

The mid-term evaluation report was circulated to Regional Advisors well ahead of the meeting. This evaluator, who was one of co-authors of the report, made a brief presentation to the Regional Advisors of the main results of the 2005 Evaluation Report.

A summary of the feedback received from Regional Advisors is presented below:

- The authors of the evaluation report were congratulated by all present for the work done.
- IDRC's Board of Governors reacted favorably towards the report of the 2005 Evaluation Report.
- IDRC-WARO responded very positively to the report and has taken steps to apply some of the recommendations, as noted in the programming and organization of the Mali Workshop.
- Advisors should be involved in knowledge creation activities at least twice a year.
- The issue of having more effective committees needs some serious thought.
- The idea of packaging reports of workshops and thematic discussions, as outputs of the Regional Commission, should be implemented as soon as possible.
- It may be useful to involve other development partners (donors) in the workshops.
- The need to have lawmakers involved in the workshops, as encouraged in the report, has been reinforced by the good participation of the parliamentarian in the Mali Workshop.
- The participatory approach used by the evaluators to collect information from a range of stakeholders was much appreciated.
- They supported the recommendation that the Follow-up Committee should get good terms of reference and mandate to carry out their work.
- The Council felt that the development of a strategic plan for its activities should be developed and wonder whether the evaluators could do this.
- Visibility of the Commission is very important. Efforts need to be made to gain the attention of the media.
- The commission and IDRC should develop mechanisms that will allow IDRC to contribute to sub-regional debates.

SECTION 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The Series of Researcher/Policy Maker Workshops

6.1.1 Final Thoughts on Workshop

The Mali Workshop was successfully held. It started good dialogue between researchers and policymakers and good results were obtained. Workshops planned for Cameroon and Benin should consider making use of the approaches used in Mali.

The production of a draft Workshop Report within six weeks is commendable. It however needs to be finalized with informative annexes. A policy brief should be produced highlighting the main results of the workshop.

Follow-up remains a major concern. It is felt that inadequate instructions were given to the Follow-up Committee during the Mali Workshop to enhance their performance. This is important since the “overall, follow up processes for the three workshops held so far have not delivered concrete results or actions”, as noted in the 2005 Evaluation Report. Consideration should be given by IDRC to the recommendation given in that report and this one, pertaining to the Follow-up Committee.

6.1.2 Recommendations on Workshop

- Regional Advisors should be more involved in the planning process of the workshops. This will increase ownership by all.
- The workshop planning process should be designed so that the responsible Regional Advisor would delegate responsibility to others in his absence, to avoid delays.
- All efforts should be made to circulate all documents that are prepared for workshops by email, well in advance of the meeting.
- In the future, brief summaries should be produced of previous sessions, which have a direct relation to other sessions.
- IDRC should prepare a concise summary of the Mali Workshop Report for wider circulation.
- For the two remaining workshops, IDRC should consider developing a draft document terms of reference outlining the mandate of the follow-up committee, guidelines, and deadlines including an indication of the level of commitment of IDRC. It is felt that this will help future follow-up committees in achieving their work in a shorter timeframe.

6.2 Thematic Discussion

6.2.1 Final Thoughts on Thematic Discussion

This first Thematic Discussion was very successful. Background documents were of good quality and well presented, participation by Regional Advisors, IDRC Staff and others were useful. The discussion was productive in the sense that it provided IDRC with significant ideas for supporting gender research in West/Central Africa. It helped to widen the knowledge of Regional Advisors regarding gender issues in the region.

Future discussions should be planned several months in advance with significant input from the Regional Advisors.

6.2..2 Recommendations on Thematic Discussion

- The preparation of a synthesis of the thematic discussion is an anticipated outcome of this meeting. This should be quickly prepared and distributed to all program colleagues in Ottawa and Dakar so that the results of this meeting will be help in developing gender-related activities for West/Central Africa.