

The Influence of Research on Public Policy

An evaluation activity of IDRC

Briefing Note

Origins of the Study:

IDRC will foster and support the production, dissemination and application of research results leading to policies and technologies that enhance the lives of people in developing countries.

(IDRC program directions 2000-2005, p.16)

IDRC's program document expresses intent to increasingly focus on support to research that has the potential to influence policy. This study focuses on building a deeper understanding of what we have supported in the past that is reported to have had an influence on public policy, in order to make contributions to program improvements for the future.

Starting with three basic questions:

1. What constitutes public policy influence in IDRC's experience?
2. To what degrees and in what ways has IDRC-supported research influenced public policy?
3. What factors and conditions have facilitated or inhibited the public policy influence potential of IDRC-supported research projects?

Primary Users:

This study is primarily oriented towards program improvement at the Centre:

1. **Program staff** (to draw out issues and factors which they can consider for improving the potential of projects for policy influence)
2. **Management** (how are we doing at the corporate level; and what does this tell us about completing our current strategic plan and developing the next one)

The extent to which it may be relevant to partners will be explored in the course of conducting interviews (in selected cases, a joint evaluation workshop with partners is being developed.) Partner participation in workshops for data analysis will be actively sought.

Methodology

Two central elements to the methodology:

1. **Stories:** We think that we cannot develop lessons learned or checklists, because context is so crucial in policy influence. Therefore we will use a case approach which builds rich stories of influence, addressing the context as well as the projects themselves;
2. **Engagement in analysis:** Because we think that much of the learning from the study will happen while it is in progress, it is important to engage staff (both Centre and project staff) in understanding and interpreting the data.

Elements of the Study

Considerable background research has been undertaken, including a literature review, the development of a conceptual framework, documentary reviews of Centre documents (evaluations, PCRs, project objectives). These reviews have assisted in study design and will form part of the data for analysis of the findings in the study. These documents are posted at <http://intra1.idrc.ca/evaluation/publication4.html>

The main products of the study include:

1. **Building the history of intent at IDRC** through a series of interviews with senior staff, notably retired executives and former Governors; this will identify priority given to policy influence in different programming areas over time.
2. **Case Studies:** 27 case studies are planned in two stages (4 document studies and 23 field studies) covering the range of research areas and geographic areas covered by the Centre's work.
3. **Countries in Transition:** Because much of the work done in this area assumes a democratic governance system, a significant contribution of the Centre will be to examine what has happened in other governance regimes. Through a comparative study of four countries in transition we will build an understanding of where and how research has played a role: Chile, South Africa, Ukraine and Viet Nam.
4. **Consultations/Corporate Synthesis:** ongoing processes with Centre staff as noted above to distill key learning for the Centre from the various studies. This will include a framework document as well as other tools for the use of program staff and others (through some form of publication still to be determined.)
5. **Evaluation tools and methods:** Attention is being placed on the methods in use in this study with a view to writing up the approaches, their strengths and weaknesses so other researchers and evaluators may make use of the experience for their own evaluation work.

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