

CENTRE INTERNSHIPS PROGRAM
FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT
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OVERVIEW

The following report is meant to offer an overview of the work that I performed throughout the course of my internship at the Center. It highlights the lessons learned from my experience, the key challenges that I faced, and provides an exhaustive list of my key activities and outputs. The final section offers some reflections and suggestions regarding the mentoring of future interns and ways in which GEH could internalize the process of output tracking with which I have been involved. In addition, the report of my trip to Mozambique (August 2005) can be found in Appendix A. Where possible, I have provided hyperlinks to example of the type of activities that I have performed during the course of my internship.

LESSONS LEARNED

First and foremost, I must say that my experience at IDRC so far has been very fulfilling and rewarding. To be sure, and although I arrived here with a background in international development (as well as in political science and policy studies) and was somewhat familiar with the work done by the Centre, I embarked, during the first few months, on what proved to be a steep, but positively challenging, learning curve.

Looking back, I would divide my 6-month internship into three main periods: **(1)** learning and absorbing (July and August 2005); **(2)** consolidating and applying (September 2005); and, **(3)** actively participating and contributing (October to December 2005).

1. Learning and absorbing (July-August, 2005)

While I still feel that the activities I performed in my early days at IDRC contributed to the overall activities of both GEH and RM, I view this period as having mostly been a personally enriching learning experience. Not only did I

have to absorb and assimilate the inner functioning of the overall Centre and of my particular program initiative, I also had to quickly become familiar with various health and health-related issues. Having no specific background in public health, the experience was incredibly interesting and, progressively, my knowledge of, and level of comfort with, the issues and the various projects with which GEH is involved increased. In that respect, creating a table of outputs of GEH-funded projects, for the purposes of the PI's external review, proved to be a useful endeavor.

The key moment of these first few months was, for me, my trip to Mozambique and my participation in the RM team meeting. There, I had the opportunity to get to know my colleagues better and to become much more familiar and comfortable with the activities and work dynamic of RM. I was afforded a glimpse into the type of analysis and reflections that guide funding priorities and eventual decisions, and gained a better understanding of program management processes. The note taking and report writing aspect of the meeting, although strenuous at times, allowed me to absorb and reflect upon what I had learned and experienced. (For a more detailed overview of my travel, see **Appendix A**).

2. Consolidating and applying (September 2005)

I came out of the Maputo meeting not only with a deeper understanding of the program, but also with a better sense of what was to be my role within the team. We identified key activities for me to perform, and clarified the areas where my skills and contributions would be the most useful. I was also offered the possibility to extend my contract at IDRC (with RM), and my agreement to this also meant that both Sandy Campbell and Nadia Isler (SDC) were more willing to increase my responsibilities, as they knew my involvement would be sustained for a longer period. The month of September, then, saw my involvement gradually increase, and I felt more comfortable taking initiatives and making constructive suggestions.

3. Actively contributing and participating (October-December 2005)

Notwithstanding my prior activities and contributions, I believe that I became a truly active member of the RM team in late September and early October. My involvement has, since then, continuously increased. In terms of project management and administration, I learned a lot from being put in charge of creating, maintaining and updating the RM budget and project pipeline. I was also given the opportunity to take the lead in hiring the services of a research consultant that will produce a synthesis of a GEH-funded project. This allowed me to learn more about the contract making process, and to interact more closely with the Grants Administration Division (GAD). On this particular project as well as with the overall RM portfolio, I must make note of the useful assistance of Margaret Emokor whose patience I am very grateful for.

The past few months have also allowed me to work on specific projects that I was able to see through from start to finish, and for which I was given a lot of creative liberty. As such, I produced a short briefing document on 'Knowledge Translation' that was later posted on the GEH/RM Web site, and have also been working on a similar document on 'Community Participation/Voice' that is in the final stages of editing.

Being the only remaining RM team member in Ottawa also allowed me to interact more closely with the GEH team and act as a liaison between the two units. Overall, I feel that the knowledge and experience I gained during the first few months allowed my involvement to become truly meaningful and useful to the team.

KEY CHALLENGES

The first few months were, as is to be expected, the most challenging. I joined the GEH team during a very hectic period, i.e. the final stages of the PI's external review. Early on, I was asked to lead the creation of a table of key outputs of GEH-funded projects, a table that would be included in the report given to the external reviewers. Having very little knowledge of the types of projects and activities supported by GEH, as well as the intricacies of IDRC's acronyms, filing systems, resources, etc., I felt overwhelmed at times by what was being asked of me. While the team was supportive and guided me to the best of their knowledge, it was nonetheless challenging to 'take the ball rolling'. The positive side to this is that I was forced to learn and absorb in an accelerated manner, and I do believe that there is no better way to become familiar with something than to jump right in and get involved.

A second and related challenge that I faced was in getting POs and partners to provide input into the table of outputs that I was creating. Understandably so, nagging emails from a new intern was probably not at the top of their list of priorities. Support from Christina Zarowsky (team leader), as well as Nasreen Jessani (Research Officer) and Sharmila Mhatre (senior program specialist), however, allowed me to move forward and complete my task to the best of my abilities.

The final noteworthy challenge that I faced was in defining my own place within the GEH and RM team. While Sandy Campbell did act as a mentor and was very supportive, I was also given a lot of independence, which has its advantages as well as its disadvantages. Because of the peculiar institutional situation in which RM finds itself, and because of my own internship which didn't follow the standard path, I found, at times, that I didn't quite know what my role and contributions were or should be. Again, however, both Sandy and Nasreen were very supportive and discussions with them clarified some of my uncertainties. It also allowed me to take more initiative and, because of the fact that my

involvement was not strictly defined and delimited, I was able to become involved and participate in a wide variety of interesting projects and initiatives.

ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

- Create and maintain, on an on-going basis, a table of outputs for GEH and RM projects (this involves going through project folders, communicating with project leaders, keeping up-to-date on new developments, tracking down documents, etc.);
- Create and update a variety of 2-page project brochures (writing, editing, correspondence with researchers, design, following-up on printing, etc.);
- Assist with translation of short documents and items posted on the web page, as well as review translations done by others;
- Web maintenance and updating on a regular and on-going basis;
- Disseminate information on list-serves and Web-sites;
- Attend GEH team meetings and act as a note-taker;
- Assist Program Officers with specific tasks, as needed;
- Assist with the newly launched Teasdale-Corti Team Grants (part of the GHRI initiative): post the Call for Letters of Intent on-line and distribute to various list-serves, answer inquiries from interested applicants, create a Frequently Asked Questions document, etc.;
- Take the lead in editing and improving the *Governance and Health Systems Toolkit*, which is meant to be a resource for researchers (on-going project);
- Consolidate key resources on Health Systems and Health Systems Research and, where available, provide the full-text of these resources (posted on the Web, available at: http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-91505-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html).

Specific to my work with Research Matters:

- Participate in the RM team meeting, August 17-19, 2005, Maputo, Mozambique. Prior to my departure, this involved contributing to the creation of binders for the team as well as doing some background readings to prepare myself. At the meeting itself, I acted as the note taker, participated to the best of my capacities, and took the lead in writing the Meeting Report;
- Assist in the overall RM communication strategy: participate in the writing and production of brief 2-pagers, distribute documentation to partners (researchers and research-users), assist in the creation of the updates sent on the list-serve, assist with translation, etc;
- Conduct background research on topics relevant to the work of RM and produce briefing documents for other team members;
- Produce a briefing document on Knowledge Translation and its basic theories, approaches and applications. The document is posted on-line, with links to relevant resources. The document is available at http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-90105-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html;

- Produce a briefing/background document on Community Participation (theories, applications and implications) that is in the final editing stages and will be posted on-line in early January;
- Act as a liaison between IDRC's GAD and RM team members based in Senegal and Mozambique, assisting with contracts, consultancies and travel letters;
- Take the lead in creating, managing and updating RM's operational budget and pipeline, and carry out various administrative tasks;
- Review, and comment on, relevant proposals, processes and outputs
- Assist in the preparation of RM quarterly reports;
- Pay attention to events, conferences and new publications of interest to GEH/RM and its partners, and disseminate relevant information (mainly through the Web site);
- Assist with the creation of the RM database;
- Keep track of activities, outcomes and feedback from partners with an eye on RM's Outcome Mapping framework.

REFLECTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

1) With regards to mentoring of future interns:

Any new intern with GEH and RM will quickly discover what a great team, or should I say 'family' he/she has just joined. To make the intern's integration all the more easier, and with the benefit of hindsight, I will allow myself a few suggestions:

- Try to keep in mind that while the GEH lingo has no secrets to those who have been working here for a few years and are familiar with the research portfolio, it can be quite confusing to anyone else. To be sure, I recognize that any newcomer will have to make special efforts to catch up and that familiarity with the terms and issues will come with time and experience. However, a special effort should be made not to assume that what is evident to oneself will also be to others.
- If time permits, an internal orientation session should be organized for the new intern. While reading documents on the Web site and on paper is certainly helpful, there is no better way to grasp the complexities of IDRC and GEH than through face-to-face discussions. Ideally, the team leader, POs, and the RO should all try to set aside a time – even if only for half an hour each – to sit down with the new intern and briefly discuss their own role within the team and the main projects with which they are involved.
- The most fulfilling moments of an internship, in my view, are when one is responsible for specific activities, and can follow them through from start to finish. I would therefore recommend that interns be given specific projects or activities (in addition to their own research) for which they are entirely responsible (under supervision, of course).

2) With regards to monitoring project results and outputs

The creation of the excel outputs table is only the first step in the direction of better monitoring of project outputs and activities. Unless it is followed-up in a more systematic and internalized manner, however, the whole exercise might have been conducted in vain. In the end, it is much more time consuming and challenging to perform such an exercise when projects are already well under way than to install it from the very start and ensure that it is monitored on an on-going basis. The following reflections and suggestions are offered as possible ways to move forward on this issue.

- Use the simple and easy to use Excel template to keep track of project outputs (available on the 'W' drive, under W:\GEH PIAAnne-Marie's docs\Databasing). Concretely, an Excel worksheet should be created every time a new project is approved. This could be done by Nasreen, with POs then feeding her with the relevant information as it becomes available. Alternatively, POs could each be in charge of their own output tables, filling them in as the information and documents are produced, and sharing it with Nasreen at regular intervals. The third option would be to require – by incorporating it into funding agreements- project leaders to fill in the tables and report back to GEH at previously established intervals.
- The biggest challenge within GEH doesn't appear to be the lack of research outputs. Similarly, researchers, with some exceptions, do not seem to fail to share their research results and outputs with the team. Rather, the problem seems to be at the level of systematically recording and consolidating these results and outputs. In many respects, this aspect of the team's work remains compartmentalized, with every individual holding pieces of the big puzzle. Even when items do get filed in the IDRC document repository, little is done in the way of keeping track of these.
- Although this might seem like a time-consuming exercise, systematically recording all results and outputs will in the end avoid wasting a lot of time and energies at a later date. Using a simple tracking template will allow documents to be easily located and, in the end, more easily disseminated. As such, improving the outputs tracking system can feed into GEH and RM's knowledge translation efforts.

FINAL COMMENTS

I was fortunate in that I joined the GEH and RM team at a very exciting time. Indeed, both programmes have been operating for a few years and are now approaching the end of their current funding period. This has led the team to reflect on past experiences and on future directions, and as somewhat of an outsider, it was interesting to witness how everything seemed to come together. Both GEH and RM appear to have evolved a lot since their creation, leading the

two units to be better oriented and have a clearer and more focused vision of their future orientation and activities. I am grateful for the opportunity to keep working in such a stimulating setting, and look forward to the months ahead.

APPENDIX A

**Trip Report
Maputo, August 15-30, 2005**

Overview and Objectives:

This was my first travel with IDRC, as well as my first opportunity to meet with the other RM team member, Nadia Isler. The first week was devoted to an RM team meeting, which allowed the team to reflect on projects and activities that had taken place over the last year as well as map out the strategy for the next months. During the second week, I was based in the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), where the major objective was for me to learn more about the research-to-policy dynamics in Mozambique, as well as take the time to write the meeting report.

Outcomes:

- Increased understanding of the scope of RM's activities and projects as well as the inner dynamics of the team;
- Clearer definition of my own role within RM and mapping out of future responsibilities;
- Increased understanding of the research-to-policy context in Mozambique, as well as on a more general level;
- Report of RM's annual meeting and creation of a calendar of team members' activities to December.

RM annual team meeting (August 17-19):

These three days of meetings provided me with the opportunity to deepen my understanding of RM and its various projects and activities, as well better understand the team's division of tasks and responsibilities. Nadia and Sandy took the time to clarify items that I knew little about, and made a special effort to integrate me into the team. The meeting also gave us the opportunity to better define my own responsibilities and niche within RM, giving me plenty to work on over the following months. For a more detailed description of the meeting and its outcomes, see the final Meeting Report.

Work at the SDC regional office (August 22-26):

On **August 22**, Nadia and I attended the opening session of the 55th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa, in Maputo. Initially not allowed in due to my lack of an invitation, someone eventually took pity on me and I was able to sit

in for most of the ceremony, albeit under a new name and gender (i.e. Frederico Brito).

Mozambique's President, Armado Emilio Guebuza, the Minister of Health, Paulo Ivo Garrido, as well as the Director General of the WHO, Dr. Jong-Wook Lee, were among those that made presentations. While the language barrier limited my understanding of the proceedings, it was nonetheless a good opportunity to witness how such sessions unfold. What was also interesting was to see how much of an emphasis was placed on HIV/AIDS and other diseases, as opposed to a focus on health systems. Of course, these declarations should be seen for what they are, i.e. public declarations that reflect political and diplomatic requirements, but it nonetheless highlights the greater difficulty in selling the issue of "health systems" to the international public, as it is much more conceptual and subject to different interpretations.

On **August 24**, along with the SDC officer responsible for HIV/AIDS issues, Yara Lima, I attended a meeting at the Ministry of Health (MoH), where the various components of the National Program to Fight HIV/AIDS were presented. While donors and various health officials were also in attendance, the presentations were primarily meant to inform delegations from Angola and Sao Tome who were present in Maputo for the WHO meeting. Again, language (ie. it was in Portuguese) acted as a barrier, but I was able to grasp the overall issues. Issues of particular interest to RM were the identification of the need to build the capacity of community groups, to increase the coordination between TB and HIV programs, the emphasis on human resource shortfalls and the need to build capacity to prevent and treat Malaria. Although representatives from the MoH obviously based their presentations on research findings, the direct relationship that exists (or should exist) between research and policy did not appear as a topic of discussion. As Mozambique's health sector seems to be at a critical junction in terms of reassessing its past and current approaches – as evidenced by the meeting highlighted below – this is a good time for RM to contribute to the process and help make sure that future policy choices are evidence-based. It was also interesting to see how representatives from Angola, Sao Tome and Niger praised the work done in Mozambique and showed a genuine desire to learn from the country's experiences and eventually make use of some of their coordination and management methods. Again, this could be an opportunity for RM to share Mozambique and other countries' experiences with these governments.

On **August 25**, I attended another meeting at the MoH, where a consultant (Javier Martinez) presented the result of his work, commissioned by the Ministry and intended to inform the mid-term review of the country's PESS, or Strategic Plan for the Health Sector: 2001-2005-2010. The attendance included various donors (including SDC, CIDA, the Norwegian embassy, and others), health representatives from the country's various districts, as well as delegates from the MoH. A few of the interesting elements that came out of the consultant's preliminary report included the identification of the need for more and better

quality research, the need for future planning to be based on sound knowledge and on a recognition of the need to build-up health systems, the need for greater advocacy (including NGO involvement and community participation), as well as the importance of better defining the health sector's priorities. This last point is particularly relevant to RM as it offers a clear opportunity for research to really be used at the policy level and make a difference in the planning process. It also highlights the fact that the government currently neither has access to good quality and nationally produced research and statistics, nor do representatives understand how research can effectively be used to help them better determine their long-term strategies. It will be interesting to follow-up on this, as well as on Nadia's work within SDC and within national donor committees to push for the importance of research to be better recognized.

As a side note, this seems to highlight the importance for RM of maintaining a broad and long-term vision that not only focuses on immediate results, such as concrete tools and outputs, but always keeps in mind the importance of making a difference at the policy level, positively influencing policy formulation when possible.

On **August 26**, and thanks to Nadia's contacts with MSF (Médecins sans Frontières), I visited an HIV/AIDS day hospital, which provides testing, treatment, emergency medical services and counseling. After having discussed HIV/AIDS treatment and diagnosis issues, it was really insightful to witness how it actually unfolds in practice. In addition to medical services, the clinic also provides a forum for people to informally discuss their questions, concerns, thoughts, or personal stories on HIV/AIDS. According to the MSF coordinator, these have had great success and people are generally eager to participate and discuss topics that often carry much stigma and pre-conceived ideas. While this is not something that RM could do directly, it would be interesting to document such forums to measure their impact on the participants' knowledge of issues such as transmission, treatment, prevention, etc. Such discussions could also be used to inform national and local information and outreach campaigns.

Throughout the week, I devoted my time in the office to writing the meeting report, as well as brainstorming with Nadia to create the "regional linkages and relationships" diagram to be found in the report. Conversations with Nadia during that week also allowed me to identify another niche for me in RM: being based in the IDRC's offices in Ottawa, I can effectively give her the heads up on new developments, as well as have access to core documents that I can summarize for her to ensure that she is kept in the loop.