Annual Corporate Evaluation Report 1994

Evaluation Unit
Corporate Affairs & Initiatives Division

Contents

All documents mentioned in this report can be obtained from the IDRC library.

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1. Overview

This first Annual Corporate Evaluation (ACE) Report aims to provide an overview of IDRC evaluation activity over the past year. Prepared annually by the Evaluation Unit for submission to the Senior Management Committee and the Board of Governors, the purpose of the report is to:

- Review the Centre's progress in measuring program performance;
- Highlight the new evaluation tools and systems which have been introduced for measuring results and development impact; and
- Summarize findings from recent evaluations.

This year the report emphasizes progress in implementation of evaluation systems and tools across the Centre.

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2. Improving IDRC's ability to manage for results

2.1. Evaluation at IDRC

Increasingly, IDRC's challenge for the future is to ensure that development research achieves results. An external environment characterized by dwindling ODA envelopes, reviews by the

Auditor General and demands for tighter fiscal responsibility, means that the "value added" of IDRC's existence is under intense scrutiny as never before.

In response, IDRC has undergone significant programming and management reorganization aimed at becoming a more results-oriented organization. It has focused its programs, strengthened its evaluation function, created new program performance measurement systems, and changed staff responsibility and incentive structures, all with the intention of improving IDRC's ability to manage for results.

A key component of IDRC's effort to improve its ability to manage for results has been the creation of a corporate Evaluation Unit and the Board of Governors' approval of its strategy in January 1993. In keeping with the mandate of the Corporate Affairs & Initiatives Division, the Evaluation Unit places first priority on:

  i.   the development and coordination of the Centre's evaluation activities and systems; and
  ii. conducting strategic evaluations which cut across Divisional and Regional boundaries on program and policy issues.

The responsibility for specific project and program evaluation is decentralized and rests within Divisions and Regional Offices (Responsibility Centres). The Evaluation Unit provides coordination and technical support for some of these activities. The Unit also assists the Centre in applying evaluation information to improve management.

In the Centre's evaluation system the various elements are articulated so that they compliment and support each other in contributing to decision-making and to meeting accountability requirements. For example, Project Completion Reports (PCRs) provide useful information for designing strategic evaluations and which, when aggregated, can be reported in the ACE Report and Theme and SED Progress Reports. Information from these feeds into corporate planning and is also synthesized for presentation to Parliament in the IDRC Annual Report.

Corporate Evaluation Resources
While IDRC needs to improve its ability to track expenditures on evaluation through its management information systems, an estimate, prepared for the Auditor General of Canada, indicates that the Centre as a whole spent over 2 million dollars on evaluation related activity in FY 93/94 (Table 1). In terms of human resources, over the same time period, the Centre invested 10.28 Person Years in evaluation.

Table 1: IDRC Expenditures on Evaluation FY 1993/94[a]

Type of Expenditure	Person Years (PY)	Expenditures in $Can

Expenditure on Evaluation by Evaluation Unit	4.83	1,350,481[b]
Evaluation Expenditures by other IDRC sources	5.45	1,1 04,419
Total Corporate Evaluation Expenditures	10.28	2,204,900

a. Most of the information necessary to generate these figures was not available through existing Centre databases or filing systems. It was aggregated from several sources, including information solicited from individual Responsibility Centres for the purposes of the Value for Money Audit by the Auditor General.

b. A major expenditure during this fiscal year was the Evaluation Unit support for the IUCN (World Conservation Union) project on Monitoring and Evaluating Sustainable Development. The Evaluation Unit contribution to this project alone was $569,450 CAD.

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2.2. Strategic Evaluations

On issues of corporate importance that cut across programs or regions, the Evaluation Unit undertakes strategic evaluations, either independently or in collaboration with other responsibility centres. Although few in number, these strategic studies are designed to codify lessons learned and contribute to corporate decision-making and policy development. Over the past year, 4 strategic evaluation studies have been undertaken. Briefly, these are:

i. *Project Size Study:* An assessment of the inter-relationships among project size, efficiency and effectiveness (completed).

> **Key finding from the Project Size Study:** "although in some instances either large or small projects create more administrative stress, there is no convincing evidence of one or the other category having, typically, a higher overall administrative cost." (p. 29)

ii. *Canadian Partnerships:* An in-depth assessment of the effectiveness of Centre-funded partnerships with Canadian researchers in contributing to development research in developing countries (near completion).

iii. *Project Leader Tracer Study:* To provide the Centre with a socio-demographic profile of where Southern researchers are when they become Project Leaders, where they are now, and to identify and assess the areas in which IDRC has had a capacity-building role in their work and achievements (data collection phase).

iv. *Networks:* As networks are becoming more and more common as a means of implementing development projects, this study examines the conceptual and practical applications of a wide range of networking arrangements (design phase).

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2.3. Program and Theme Performance Monitoring and Reporting

Reporting System
In collaboration with the Policy and Planning Group and working with various units within the Centre, the Evaluation Unit has coordinated the development of an integrated reporting system which builds on the strategic directions of the Centre outlined in *Empowerment Through Knowledge*.

The system is designed to increase the Centre's capacity to report on achievements at the corporate level. The elements of the system are outlined below:

- *Quarterly Report* to the Minister by OSGC (ongoing);
- *Theme/SED Reports* proposal to SMC and BOG, October 1 994 (replaces overview memoranda);
- *Regional Reports* (in development);
- *Annual Corporate Evaluation (ACE)* Report (first report to the Board, October 1994);
- *Annual Report* to Parliament (ongoing - revised to call for Board approval of the approach to the report, each year in January); and\
- *Centre Review* - An external review (under development for presentation to Board March 1995).

Theme Progress Reports
For the first time Theme and SED progress reports will be an annual part of the reporting system, with Theme Leaders reporting on achievements in March of each year. To initiate the process, the Health and Environment Theme will be reporting to the Board in October 1994.

Evaluation Workplans for Responsibility Centres
In order to track and assess "what works", the Responsibility Centres have recently begun to design evaluation workplans that are output oriented. Since Evaluation Workplans for Responsibility Centres (RCs) are relatively new, RCs are at different stages in the planning process. The following box illustrates where the RCs are in developing their workplans:

Design Phase: EARO, LARO, MERO, ROSA, ASRO, SARO (ASRO & SARO on hold due to a proposal for restructuring of the Asia Program)

Nearly Completed Workplan: HS, ENR, CAID, SS, WARO

Completed Workplan: ISS

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2.4. Project Monitoring and Evaluation

The evaluation of IDRC-supported projects is an integral component of the evaluation strategy. Project monitoring and evaluation occurs at the divisional and regional office level. In the past year, fourteen evaluation reports covering projects and programs of the RCs have been received by the Evaluation Unit and are listed in the corporate *Evaluation Inventory* maintained by the Evaluation Unit.

An analysis conducted for the Auditor General found that there has been an increase in the number of projects that had previous phases formally evaluated and projects that have proposed evaluations for current phases (Empowerment through Knowledge, IDRC's Strategy, Evaluating the Results: Utilization & Research System Effectiveness, Evaluation Unit, 1994).

The comparative analysis of selected Project Summaries for 1987/88 and 1993/94 found that number of project proposals with built in evaluation components increased from 6.7% in 1987/88 to 26.7% in 1993/94. (p. 25) (See Figure 1)

Figure 1: Percent of Project Summaries that mentioned formal evaluations of previous phases and intended evaluations for current phase.

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2.5. Evaluation Capacity

To further the Centre's goal of "empowerment through knowledge", the Evaluation Unit pursues the objective of strengthening the evaluation capacity of both IDRC and recipient staff.

Training and Support Activities
Training and support activities in the past year have involved training of Centre staff and recipients on various evaluation tools and guidelines.

- **Annual Program Meeting Training and Support**

  Arnold Love, an evaluation expert, facilitated a session entitled "Meeting the Challenge: Evaluating for improved performance in a time of rapid change."

  Charles Lusthaus, consultant with Universalia, chaired a session to demonstrate the utility of his Institutional Assessment tool.

  Evaluation Unit conducted an evaluation of the APM assessing its utility and format (November, 1 993 and February 1994)

- **Training Sessions**

    For   Leishmaniasis project - Costa Rica, (January 1994.)

Recipients:	Sustainability indicator workshop by IUCN (World Conservation Union) in India, November 1993.
	Doug Horton from ISNAR, in Costa Rica (July 1994).
	Evaluation workshop introducing the evaluation function at IDRC to university students (December 1993)
For IDRC staff:	Doug Horton workshop on Program Evaluation (December 1993)
	PCR database training (85 staff trained) (ongoing)
	EVIS, Evaluation Information System database training (35 staff trained). EVIS', manual developed and distributed. (December 1993 - March 1994)
	Program Evaluation Guidelines Worksheets developed and presented to Centre staff and recipient institutions (ongoing).

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Recently Acquired Evaluation Resources
Horton et al. ISNAR, *Monitoring and Evaluating Agricultural Research: A Sourcebook*, CAB International, UK, 1993.

Murphy, J. ISNAR, *Monitoring and Evaluation in Agricultural Research: Concepts, Organization, and Methods*, 1993.

ISNAR, *Training and Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation for Agricultural Research Management, Module 1, The Strategic Approach, Module 2, Planning, Module 3, Monitoring, Module 4, Evaluation*, 1994.

Lewis, E., *Evaluation Manual for SIDA* (Swedish International Development Agency), 1994.

Rothe, Peter, J. *Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide*, RCI Publications, Toronto, 1 993.

Evaluation Secondment Program
As part of its efforts to strengthen evaluation capacity within the Centre and to document "what works" in research for development, the Evaluation Unit established in January 1993, an evaluation research "secondment" program for IDRC program staff. The program recognizes IDRC's vision of its self as a "learning organization" and recognizes the value of providing staff with opportunities to undertake "in-house" evaluation-focussed research. This program offers staff from divisions and regional offices the opportunity to join the Evaluation Unit for periods of three to twelve months to conduct evaluation research on

topics of corporate interest.

There are currently three secondments in progress:

1. Nobayeni Dladla, ROSA, evaluating the Macro-Economic Research and Policy Programme operating in South Africa.
2. Zeinab Adan, HS Division, evaluating IDRC-supported research on HIV/AIDS.
3. Hugo Li-Pun, ENR, evaluating research networks in agriculture.

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3. Tools for measuring results and impact

Over the past year the Evaluation Unit has developed and introduced two new evaluation tools aimed at improving IDRC's ability to measure and document the development impact of its project support. These are (i) a methodology for measuring institutional capacity building and; (ii) an automated IDRC Project Completion Report (PCR) System.

3.1. A Framework for Institutional Assessment

Strengthening the research capacity of Southern institutions is a fundamental corporate objective for IDRC. While the long history of association and support among many now established Southern research institutes attests to IDRC's success in this area, the Centre as a whole has very little documented evidence of the impact of its support. Drawing upon the body of literature dealing with organization performance, Centre staff now have a practical assessment tool which will enable IDRC to systematically document and evaluate the effects of institutional capacity-building efforts. Depending on the depth of analysis required, staff have the option of (i) a rapid appraisal technique (suitable for preliminary appraisals of potential partner institutions, preparing project summary documents, etc) or (ii) a more in depth methodology for comprehensive institutional assessments (suitable for more thorough impact evaluations). Both techniques are based on the same conceptual framework (Box 2). In addition, the tool is being adapted for use in self-assessment by both donor and recipient institutions.

Box 2. Framework for Assessing Research Institutions

- **Environment** - the key forces that have a bearing on the institution
- **Institutional Motivation** - the mission, goals and culture, and incentives that drive performance from within
- **Organizational Capacity** - the underlying forces that support institutional performance, including systems of strategic leadership, human resources, other core resources, program management, and inter-institutional linkages
- **Organizational Performance** - the extent to which the organization reaches its mission (effectiveness), provides good value for the resources invested

> (efficiency), and meets the needs of stakeholders over time (relevance)

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3.2. Project Completion Reports (PCRs)

The PCR, at the IDRC, is the primary tool for self-evaluation and reflection on the part of the program officer at the completion of a project.

IDRC, like many development agencies, has had a chronic problem with overdue Project Completion Reports (PCRs). By May 1994, the Centre had a backlog of over 800 projects which have terminated but have not had their PCR completed. In June, SIVIC decided that 55% of all projects in the backlog should receive PCRs. This accounts for over 85% of the funding to backlogged projects. SMC requested the Evaluation Unit to assist by doing PCRs for orphaned projects and by monitoring progress towards the goal of clearing the backlog by the end of the calender year.

PCR Backlog Status, 15 September 1995

Division/RO	Total Backlog	PCRs Due (55%)	PCRs Completed	Remaining
OSGC	7	4	0	4
SS	53	29	12	17
ISS	11	6	2	4
FA	7	4	0	4
CAID	14	8	1	7
ENR	80	44	35	9
HS	60	33	31	2
Regions	306	168	12	156
Orphans	355	195	54	141
Total	893	491	147	344

From now on all projects over $100,000 will require PCRs, accounting for over 90% of

continues. Smaller projects may have PCRs based on the discretion of the Regional Office or Program.

As the final project document on an IDRC-supported activity, the PCR requirement was established in 1980 to fulfil three main roles:

    i.   corporate accountability;
   ii.   corporate memory; and
  iii.   project evaluation.

The lack of a standard format and a Centre-wide mechanism for accessing and retrieving PCRs limited their use as a policy and planning tool. Cognizant of these problems, in July of this year the Evaluation Unit, with the support from Program Officers in all Divisions and Regions, introduced a new redesigned, standardized and automated PCR database system (Box 3).

Box 3.

The new PCR system asks the staff responsible for the project to:

    i.   assess achievement of project objectives
   ii.   note beneficiary participation in the different phases of the research process
  iii.   record actual project outputs
  iv.   assess the capacity-building effects of the project
   v.   note the development impacts of the project
  vi.   assess various aspects of project management
 vii.   formulate recommendations on the basis of project experience in order to contribute to future design and implementation of Centre projects

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A key feature of the new PCR system is that it permits aggregate assessment of project results. Taken together, PCRs can now be used by responsibility centres, to report on program and project performance and as a source of information for annual reports to Senior Management and the Board of Governors. On an annual basis the Evaluation Unit will analyze PCR data to summarize critical issues, highlight areas of expected development impact, identify outputs, and formulate strategic lessons. Section 4.1 of this report, provides a preliminary demonstration of the type of analysis which is now feasible with the new PCR'system.

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3.3. Evaluation Information System (EVIS)

As a stimulus to corporate learning, EVIS, the Evaluation Unit's database of evaluation reports, provides readily accessible evaluation information for project planning and policy-making within the Centre. The database contains "lessons learned" across a broad range of IDRC projects and programs. This corporate memory is critical to program staff who draw upon the lessons of past experience in the design and implementation of new research projects. The database is also a research tool for both internal and external use. It provides information on projects and programs that have been evaluated, information on the evaluation reports themselves and summaries of the major findings of each evaluation report.

There are three main types of information captured in the EVIS database:

1. Project\Program Information
2. Evaluation Report Information
3. Evaluation Findings
    i.   Planning and design
    ii. Implementation and operations
    iii. Results and outcomes
    iv. Lessons learned and policy issues

EVIS presently contains 128 evaluation reports (some reports have several components entered as separate reports, totalling 151 EVIS reports). New evaluation reports are entered into the system by the Evaluation Unit. This past year the Evaluation Unit has added 30 new evaluation reports to the EVIS system; and an additional 30 will be entered in the near future.

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4. Fingdings from PCR and evaluation databases

This section illustrates how evaluation information can be accessed in assessing and reporting on the Centre's performance.

4.1. PCR Findings

As more PCRs are completed and entered into the system, the PCR database will become a rich data source. At the corporate level the information can be used to: (1) identify groups of projects with particular characteristics; and (2) aggregate project performance data. The PCR database is very new and there are only about 56 PCRs currently on the system. Consequently, the information presented here is illustrative of its potential and cannot be taken as representing actual Centre performance. It should be remembered that PCRs contain the views of IDRC program staff about six months after project completion and thus provide somewhat of a self-assessment early after project completion.

The following table shows how anticipated impacts of completed projects were classified. An analysis of this kind will be useful for identifying groups of projects according to the areas in which they are expected to have an impact.

Areas of impacts or anticipated impacts of IDRC-supported projects.

Areas of Expected Impact	% of Projects
Utilization of results	69.6
Public policy	42.9
Public health & safety	41.1
National research system capacity	35.7
International cooperation	32.1
Technology development & management	25.0
Economic productivity	21.4
Equity (gender, ethnic, intergenerational)	19.6
Information management	19.6
Environment & resource management	17.9
Community process	16.1
Canadian research and development	14.3
Social services	12.5
Employment	10.7
Governance	7.1
Household economy	7.1
Other	0

Note: Individual projects are often flagged in more than one area of impact.

The PCR asks about the quality of project management. According to this small sample, the technical and administrative aspects of IDRC's management of projects are rated as satisfactory;

IDRC	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	No response

Technical	96.4%	1.8%	1.8%
Administrative	92.8%	5.5%	1.8%

and the technical and administrative management procedures of recipient institutions are rated as satisfactory in three-quarters of the PCRs.

Recipient	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	No response
Technical	76.8%	21.4%	1.8%
Administrative	75.0%	23.2%	1.8%

The last section of the PCR form asks program staff to write recommendations categorized into 14 areas. In this sample, recommendations on methodology, project objectives & design, and project management are the most frequent.

Recommendation categories	Number of PCRs
Methodology	19
Project Objectives & Design	19
Project Management	12
Results & Dissemination	10
Development Impact	9
Beneficiary Participation	9
Canadian, Other Donor Collaboration	8
Research, Project Sustainability	7
Networks	6
Evaluation	5
Technology Transfer	5
Gender, Equity Issues	4
Other	2

Recommendations on methodology fell into three groups: issues involving researchers and research institutions; political obstacles; and project specific recommendations. It is recommended that during the project planning stage specific attention be given to assessing and addressing the capabilities of the researchers and the research institutions. The political situation in the recipient's country also needs to be assessed and allowances made in the methodology for possible delays.

Recommendations in the project objectives and design category centred on the issue of focussed objectives. Well-focussed project objectives help to ensure a more effective and efficient project.

Recommendations on project management stressed three factors:

1. on-going monitoring of projects is essential, specifically on-sight visits;
2. avoid delays and complications by taking time during the design phase to assess recipient institutions, name alternate project leaders and arrange logistics; and
3. it was noted that administration costs of the projects have the greatest potential to rise disproportionately.

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4.2. EVIS Results

The following analysis has been done to demonstrate the utility of EVIS as an information tool across the Centre. It is based on 128 evaluation reports that are currently on the EVIS database. To show trends and current developments, further analysis has been done of the 30 most recent evaluation reports on the system. This information is taken from evaluations of Centre projects which are entered onto the database by the Evaluation Unit.

Was the design of the intervention consistent with the research problem that was to be addressed?	N	Yes %	No %	Yes/No %
	92	46.7	31.5	21.7

Ninety-two evaluations from across the Centre have dealt with the issue of the relevance of the project design to the research problem. Of these evaluations, close to half (46.7%) explicitly state that the design of the intervention was consistent with the research problem. However, a significant percentage of evaluated IDRC projects have not been designed consistently with the research problem (31.5%) or have elements which are not consistent with the research problem (21.7%). At the same time, for the 30 most recent evaluations in the system, 85% demonstrate a good match of the research design with the research problem. This is a dramatic increase and a positive trend.

Generally, were the overall objectives of the initiative achieved?	N	Yes %	No %	Yes/No %
	103	60.2	10.7	29.1

The above statistics demonstrate the relatively high level of success of IDRC-supported projects in the achievement of objectives. This level of achievement is even higher for the 30 most recent evaluations on the system, with 79.3% answering this question with a yes; while 20.7% report combined success and failure (answered yes/no).

Did the report comment on the adoption of new "research" results, technology, methods or knowledge?	N	Yes %	No %	Yes/No %
	151	8.7	91.3	0.0

Of the total number of evaluations in EVIS, only 8.7% comment on the adoption of new "research" results, technology, methods or knowledge. However in the 30 most recent evaluations, 36.7% discuss the adoption of new research results. his reflects the recent Centre-wide emphasis on the utilization of research results.

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5. Further steps in strengthening performance monitoring and evaluation

Effectively managing for results will require a continuing commitment to evaluation by Senior Management and individuals at all levels within the Centre. Over the next year, the Evaluation Unit plans to enhance the value of program performance information by drawing benefit from the reporting systems established this year. Centre-wide, evaluation activities are increasing and efforts are needed towards improving data quality, strengthening impact analysis, and increasing evaluation feedback, dissemination, and utilization.

5.1. Recommendations:

1. IDRC needs to improve its ability to track evaluation expenditures (dollars spent, PYs and number of activities) through its management information systems.
2. The Centre as a whole needs to help identify strategic evaluation studies, in order to enhance their relevance and impact on planning and decision-making. The Evaluation Unit should put in place a mechanism for consultation in this regard.
3. The number of program/project evaluations conducted across the Centre varies greatly by Responsibility Centre. This can be addressed by a conscientious effort over the next year to develop and implement evaluation plans throughout the Centre.

5.2. Next Year's Annual Corporate Evaluation Report

This report reflects the efforts made this year to establish an effective corporate evaluation system. The increased level of evaluation activity across the Centre, as the system takes hold, will allow the report in subsequent years to focus more on the presentation and analysis of evaluation findings.

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