

# Annual Corporate Evaluation Report 1995

Evaluation Unit  
Corporate Affairs & Initiatives Division

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

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## 1. Overview

The [1994 Annual Corporate Evaluation Report](#) outlined the newly implemented corporate reporting system and called for: improvements in the Centre's ability to track resources used for evaluation; a consultative mechanism for identifying and setting priority on strategic evaluation issues; and the development and implementation of evaluation plans throughout the Centre. Progress has been achieved in all these areas.

- A budget category for evaluation expenditures has been added to the project summary format, to enable tracking through RADIUS.
- Eight evaluation plans have been submitted; they indicate shared concerns on the strategic evaluation issues summarized in the [box below](#).
- Twenty-eight [project and program evaluation reports](#) were received during the past 12 months, an increase over 24 received the previous year.

Over the past year, five strategic evaluations were completed. The [Project Leader Tracer Study](#) is the first comprehensive assessment of capacity building impact. Two studies, one on [Cooperative Projects](#), the other on [Networks](#), address program delivery issues. The [Participatory Research Evaluation](#) reports on a class of research methodologies. And the HIV/AIDS review summarizes the outputs of \$5.7m worth of Centre-supported research. As promised last year, this report highlights findings from these evaluations.

Important tools for corporate performance monitoring were also brought on stream this year. Their key elements are presented in boxes throughout the report. The two articles on Project Completion Reports (PCRs) and the corporate evaluation information system (EVIS), illustrate the potential usefulness of these two mechanisms for tracking Centre performance. A [cross-analysis of information from the PCR, EVIS and Tracer Study data sources](#) demonstrates that although the evaluations answer questions particular to each respective study, IDRC now has the means to synthesize findings and draw lessons of corporate interest. Two additional evaluation tools were taken to the field testing stage this year: a guide for institutional assessment, and a method for describing and assessing progress toward sustainable and equitable development.

From the evaluation findings summarized in this report, a general picture emerges of the Centre's performance. Given the current program and organizational restructuring, lessons drawn from these findings may be helpful to guide thinking, during and after the transition, in three areas: capacity building; program delivery; and IDRC's areas of strength.

### ***Capacity Building***

The most significant impacts on capacity reported by researchers have been on project management skills, scientific perspectives and professional stature.

- The **project management** skills rated most highly included: project design and monitoring; managing and motivating people; financial recording; reporting procedures; facilitating teamwork; and inter- agency coordination.
- The impact of IDRC on the **scientific perspectives** of researchers were direct and indirect. The direct influence of IDRC program staff brought awareness of new research approaches (interdisciplinarity, community participation and research utilization). Indirectly, through the linkages with other researchers fostered by IDRC, access to new ideas, research results, methods and partners influenced the perspectives and the subsequent work of IDRC-supported researchers.
- Impact on **professional stature** came about in three ways: first, through the confidence and experience gained by independently pursuing their own line of

scientific enquiry; second through the enhanced profile and credibility gained by being associated with IDRC-funded work; and third, through the relationships and communications established as members of formal and informal scientific and development networks.

### ***Program Delivery***

The evaluation material in this report says three things about the way we deliver our programs: we may not be working with the researchers we want to reach; we solicit very little independent feedback on the way we manage our projects; and project monitoring, a critical determinant of program performance, requires more attention.

- **Demographic** data from the Tracer study indicate that 79% of project leaders are male and that the trends are: a) toward older, more experienced researchers as project leaders; and b) a decreasing percentage of female project leaders.
- While very few project evaluations address IDRC's role and performance in **project administration and management**, over half of those that do, report negatively on some aspect.
- Evaluation information from all sources stresses the critical importance of **direct contact with program staff in project monitoring**. Both project performance and the utilization of research results depend on the technical inputs, linkages and follow-up which program staff make available.

### ***IDRC's Strengths***

The evaluation data generated this year give evidence of IDRC's success in empowering Southern scientists to influence development locally, nationally, regionally and globally. The data suggest that this success flows from three elements at the core of what many project leaders referred to as the "IDRC approach".

- **Response to Innovation.** IDRC pioneers new ideas and approaches and responds positively to the innovative ideas of Southern researchers. This gives it flexibility on several fronts: financial and administrative arrangements, research foci and methodologies, and development issues.
- **Respect.** IDRC's respect for the self-determination and integrity of its Southern partners encourages them to pursue their own research visions. This has strengthened capacity by fostering feelings of responsibility and confidence, and by encouraging Southern scientific ideas and leadership to emerge on the development stage.
- **Value Added.** IDRC has the capacity to add value to Southern research initiatives in three ways. First, its staff can provide technical and scientific support both directly and through linkages with other scientists and institutions. Second, nourished by these linkages, IDRC is a source of new ideas and approaches in tackling development problems. And third, IDRC's international reputation allows it to raise the profile of researchers' approaches and their research results.

As the Centre proceeds with its restructuring, the lessons on corporate performance from this year's evaluation output should prove helpful. There are strengths on which the Centre could build; there are areas of critical importance which need attention. Lessons from these and

future evaluation studies could help clarify the corporate sense of direction and assist in evolving new modes of operation.

The report which follows consists primarily of brief summaries of the studies overviewed here. Those intrigued by these findings are invited to pursue their interests further by reading the original reports.

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## **2. Summaries of reports: lessons learned**

### **2.1 Findings from the Project Leader Tracer Study**

The [Project Leader Tracer Study](#) is IDRC's first comprehensive review of the impact of its support on Southern researchers. The purpose of this study is to assess capacity building at the individual and institutional levels. As this ACE report was being written, initial analysis of the 317 questionnaires and 51 in-depth interviews with past project leaders (1970-1992) had already uncovered a number of issues:

#### ***Who are they?***

- The majority of IDRC project leaders have been highly educated males (79%), between the ages of 30-49 (75%).
- Over the years, IDRC has been selecting increasingly older and more experienced researchers as project leaders.
- The percentage of first time female project leaders has decreased, from 27% in 1986-1990 to 20% from 1991 on.

#### ***Why do they get involved with IDRC?***

- Researchers seek IDRC support primarily for help with new research and networking opportunities. Money is secondary.
- Project leaders repeatedly emphasized that one of the most important benefits of their association with IDRC was the communication and interaction with IDRC program staff. Despite the great value project leaders place on this interaction, data reveals that it has declined.

#### ***How does IDRC build individual capacity?***

- Of all the skills reported by project leaders to have been greatly improved, project management was rated the highest by the greatest number of project leaders (72%), compared with a much lower rating for technical skills related to their particular field of research (48%).
- Project leaders report that IDRC's most important influence on their career has been

in linking them to networks of other researchers and organizations.

- Personal confidence and recognition gained also helped to advance their careers.
- IDRC encouraged and enabled project leaders to try new ways of doing research, including interdisciplinary and participatory approaches, and using research results.

### ***How does IDRC build institutional capacity?***

- IDRC's main impacts on institutional capacity are: improving staff skills; exposing institutions to alternative approaches for conducting research; developing and promoting institutional linkages; enhancing institutions' profiles, which assists them in leveraging more external funding; and by improving physical infrastructure.

### ***What are IDRC's development impacts?***

- Project leaders described IDRC's impact on development mostly in terms of policy development (at local, national and regional levels) and innovations in methodologies, technologies and tools for research as well as information systems.

### ***What are IDRC's strengths & weaknesses?***

Project leaders described IDRC's strengths as its flexible approach, its expert staff who maintain close relations with researchers, and its ability to create linkages among organizations and researchers. However, project leaders complained when the close contact with IDRC program staff diminished or was interrupted by staff turnover and/or restructuring. Another weakness identified was the lack of follow-up support for the application of research findings.

### ***Summary***

IDRC is a well-respected institution whose impact goes beyond project funding. Its support enables researchers to develop their skills and enhances their career progress. IDRC projects have been influential in building both individual and institutional capacity in research for development.

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*Project Leader Tracer Study.* Archana Dwivedi and Stephen Salewicz (October 1995)

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### **2.2. Project Completion Reports: Analyzing the Data**

Project Completion Reports (PCRs) have been used by the Centre, in one form or another, for 14 years. As most Centre staff are aware, an electronic version of the PCR was introduced last year. Now each question is entered as a discrete record into a database, which allows responses to be quickly and easily combined in reports for aggregate analysis. The number of completed PCRs available for analysis continues to grow (see Table 1).

<b>Table 1: Number of PCRs "Online"</b>
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June 1995	250
September 1995	320
September 1996 (expected)	490

As more PCRs are added to the system it is expected that the database will become an increasingly powerful tool for highlighting trends and issues important to the Centre. Several issues emerged from an analysis of the database by Stephen Salewicz of the Evaluation Unit.

**Interdisciplinary and Participatory Research:** Findings suggest that even with the Centre's emphasis on pursuing interdisciplinarity in project design and implementation, there has been negligible change in the proportion of projects which are interdisciplinary:

<b>Table 2: Number of interdisciplinary projects (1979-1993)</b>			
Year	79-83	84-88	89-93
# that addressed the issue	46	178	33
% that were interdisciplinary	54	52	58

Similarly, no increase is apparent in the level of participatory research over time:

<b>Table 3: Number of participatory projects (1979-1993)</b>			
Year	79-83	84-88	89-93
# that addressed the issue	46	174	32
% that were participatory	37	41	34

Because the sample sizes are relatively small for the last period, the figures cannot be considered conclusive. As more PCRs are added to the system, a more comprehensive picture of the underlying trends will emerge. Nevertheless, this data provides some early feedback.

**Project scheduling:** 43.5% of the projects examined were completed behind schedule, on average 18.1 months. Again, this holds implications for the time and energy expended by the Centre in extending projects and administering them beyond their planned completion date. It also suggests a need for a better initial assessment of project duration.

### *Tools for Evaluation*

#### **3.1. Types of Information/Searches Available from the PCR Database**

The PCR database brings to the Centre a unique capacity to highlight strengths and weaknesses in programming efforts. For example, it allows P.O.s/R.A.s to:

- Identify and analyze past projects by type, region, country, responsibility centre, programme officer, or any combination thereof.
- List all projects that a particular institution has previously worked on, and analyze the PCR data to see if it would be a suitable host for a proposed initiative.
- Examine project performance using specific criteria, e.g. participation, interdisciplinarity, budget overruns, or schedule extensions, to determine issues and trends, and link to causes of project success or failure.
- Review projects of a similar field (e.g. primary health care, sorghum milling) to identify strengths and weaknesses in project design and implementation. Use this analysis to inform future project design and implementation.

***Project monitoring and staff turnover:*** Weakness in project management (technical and administrative) is often attributed to a lack of project monitoring associated with staff turnover or to poor transfer from one responsibility centre to another. Of the comments recorded, 38% suggested that project monitoring was lacking in varying degrees, and only 15% of the Centre's monitoring efforts were considered adequate. (Note: of a possible 276, only 68 comments were completed for Question 12a "IDRC Project Management". The absence of a larger sample makes it difficult to draw any firm conclusions from the data and points to the need for PCR authors to complete the report in its entirety. Complete information will ensure the long-term usefulness of the PCR database as a corporate learning tool.)

Many of the PCRs pointed out that the underlying causes of a breakdown or interruption in monitoring could be traced to staff turnover: *"projects that experience difficulties require extensive monitoring which is not always possible when P.O.s keep changing."* One PCR noted that at least four successive P.O.s were assigned to a project. Data from the PCR database suggests that in order to improve project success through better project monitoring, the Centre will have to work towards perfecting the seamless transfer of responsibilities between P.O.s.

While PCR data collection is still in its infancy, this analysis reveals some interesting trends already discernible in the data. Other questions for analysis could include: What percentage of IDRC projects employed a new methodology? What was their success rate? Where there any common ingredients for success or failure? Does one or more kind of development impact dominate or characterize IDRC's projects? What kind of negative impacts have been reported?

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*Analysis of the PCR Database* Stephen Salewicz (September, 1995)

**Note on the PCR backlog...**

In last year's ACE report, we mentioned a backlog of overdue PCRs which had to be completed and entered onto the PCR database. The Evaluation Unit is pleased to report that the backlog has now been eliminated!

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### **2.3. The EVIS Database: Drawing Lessons from Past Evaluations**

The Evaluation Information System (EVIS) database contains information from evaluations of IDRC projects and programs. It allows users to access summary information, read relevant quotations, and cross-tabulate data from an increasing number of evaluations (160 at present). A valuable tool for accessing corporate memory, it contains the lessons learned from past evaluations on the design, implementation, and results of Centre projects.

The database allows aggregate analysis of evaluation findings on a variety of topics. Tricia Wind of the Evaluation Unit used EVIS to investigate the lessons learned in past evaluations on project management and capacity building.

Overall, evaluators have good things to say about both project management and capacity building in IDRC initiatives. The topics which received the most positive comments had to do with training objectives being met, with IDRC's method of operation, and with research and institutional capacity being improved.

Only one of the EVIS questions analyzed received more negative answers than positive; this had to do with IDRC's project administration and management:

<b>Were the donor's administrative and management procedures appropriate?</b>		
YES	17	35%
NO	25	52%
Y/N	6	13%

The main problems with IDRC's administration were financial in nature. While Southern partners appreciated IDRC's direct funding, flexibility and timeliness, they were often frustrated by inconsistent policies or actions, unilateral changes in budgets, problems with modifying project budgets, and a lack of coordination of funding with local realities (such as fiscal years, harvest times or currency devaluations).

Evaluators indicated that Southern partners appreciate IDRC's philosophy and approach to supporting research for development. IDRC's policies of supporting Southerners to

responsiveness and flexibility in choosing modes of funding and management for individual initiatives, were often mentioned as positive factors in the evaluations.

One of the findings which emerged indirectly from the EVIS data is the lack of critical analysis directed at IDRC's side of project management. Compared with the number of evaluation reports on EVIS which evaluate hosts' project management, few comment on IDRC's performance:

<b>Number of answers to EVIS questions dealing with project management</b>	
host's administration and management	87
host's technical support	92
donor's administration and management	48
donor's technical support	59
donor's method of operation	49

This suggests that when consultants are asked to do evaluations of IDRC projects, Centre personnel fail to ensure that they do a thorough critique of IDRC's own role in the initiatives.

Some of the other findings on project management and capacity building were:

- a clear division of duties within institutions and between IDRC and its partners could alleviate many of the problems in project management. This is especially important now, given the emphasis on networking and inter-agency coordination in IDRC;
- regular monitoring and evaluation by both host institutions and IDRC would help to make initiatives more effective;
- flexibility is a valuable asset which IDRC should continue to cultivate and encourage in host institutions.

Although EVIS is cumbersome compared with recent software applications, the value of the information contained within it makes the process of doing analysis on EVIS worthwhile.

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*Project Management and Capacity Building: an analysis of information on the EVIS database* Tricia Wind (September, 1995)

***Tools for Evaluation***

**3.2. Learning Lessons on EVIS**

EVIS can generate both quantitative and qualitative data, based on previous IDRC

project and program evaluations. Analyses can be easily tailor-made to suit the research needs of R.O.s, P.O.s, interns and other Centre staff. For instance, using the numerical data, one could:

- compile *Yes* and *No* answers to find the percentage of positive and negative responses;
- identify which issues are most often covered, or neglected, in IDRC evaluations;
- examine correlations between issues by using the cross-tabulation function.

Accessing EVIS text allows one the benefit of reading direct quotations from evaluations without having to read through the entire report. This could be helpful if one wanted to:

- select reports by host institution and read how they fared in previous IDRC projects;
- select particular answers from each report to analyze lessons learned on an issue.

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### **2.4. Cross-analysis of PCR, EVIS, and Tracer Study Data**

*Analyses of the Tracer Study, PCR or EVIS databases provide valuable insights on many aspects of IDRC activity. Each source of information contains the points of view of a particular set of authors: Southern project leaders in the Tracer Study; P.O.s or their designates in the PCRs; and consultant evaluators on EVIS. Bringing the three sets of findings together, with their sources' varying perspectives, is a way to gain a richer picture of corporate performance, as is seen below.*

#### **Capacity Building**

PCR data consistently refers to the increases in capacity which grew out of "learning by doing" in IDRC projects. Capacity was developed through the experiences of taking projects through all phases of the project cycle unto completion, supervising research, using new computer software, producing reports, and facilitating teamwork.

The Tracer Study shows that the majority of IDRC project leaders gained skills in project management and communication. Project leaders emphasized these more than skills gained in their fields of research. They also felt their capacity was built through their increasing personal confidence and reputation, as well as through learning new approaches to doing research. As for institutional capacity building, respondents to the Tracer questionnaire suggested that IDRC projects helped increase staff members' skills, and enhanced the institutions' reputation as well as their links with other organizations.

The EVIS questions which have to do with capacity building received some of the highest rates of positive responses in the entire database. IDRC projects do particularly well in achieving their training objectives and improving research and/or institutional capacity. Except for the issue of increasing project leaders' confidence, EVIS data parallels all the aspects of capacity building cited in the Tracer Study.

### ***Networking***

The theme of networking comes up often in both Tracer and EVIS data. The Tracer study comments on the strong capacity-building benefits of developing "South-South" or "North-South" linkages, and exchanges both horizontally (between researchers) and vertically (with potential clients or research users). Networking was a major preoccupation of former project leaders. In EVIS data, evaluators frequently mention the importance of promoting networking in order to improve hosts' project management and to build capacity. No questions about networking were analyzed from the PCR database.

### ***Project Management***

While in the PCR database, 85% of the authors maintain that IDRC's technical and administrative management of projects was satisfactory, EVIS data differs significantly. First, evaluators are rarely required to critique IDRC's project management; only about one-third of evaluations recorded in EVIS report on IDRC's project management, whereas well over half report on the host institution's performance. Second, of those evaluations which do address IDRC's performance, the majority (65%) comment negatively on aspects of IDRC's administration and management.

Regarding project management by host institutions, the EVIS database contains many critiques of hosts' administration, management and technical support. Even so, 72% of the project leaders questioned for the Tracer Study answered that their project management skills were "greatly improved" through their experience with IDRC.

### ***Project Monitoring***

Project monitoring is a major theme in all three data sets. One of the strongest messages in the PCR data on project management is the call for better monitoring. PCRs emphasize that monitoring is essential for detecting problems early in the project cycle, in order to remedy the problem, redirect the project, or cancel funding if the problems are insurmountable. However, PCRs suggest that not all projects need extensive monitoring — only those which are likely to suffer delays and difficulties.

EVIS contains a number of suggestions on how to improve monitoring, including ideas for varying staff responsibilities and instituting more structured and detailed reporting and monitoring mechanisms and indicators. EVIS data also emphasizes host institutions' responsibility for monitoring projects.

While Tracer Study respondents also call for more extensive monitoring and closer contact with IDRC staff, their reasons for wanting interaction with P.O.s are worded differently. They want access to the international sources of experience and expertise which are available through P.O.s, to use P.O.s as sounding boards for subsequent proposals, and to receive advice on project design.

### ***Staff Turnover***

The problems which arise with IDRC staff turnover, including loss of project continuity and monitoring, are stressed in all three sources, each with its own perspective and suggestions for improvement. The PCRs and EVIS suggest ways of smoothing the transition from one

P.O. to the next, either through better monitoring, or through closer communication among staff about initiatives underway. Reflecting the concerns of project leaders, the Tracer Study points out that Southern partners must be kept up-to-date on the changes which are going on at the Centre, and how those changes might affect the status of their project(s) and their personnel involved.

### ***Philosophy/Approach***

Within EVIS and the Tracer Study, there are strong endorsements of what is perceived as IDRC's unique approach to research for development. Both evaluators and project leaders recognize the value of IDRC helping Southern researchers explore issues they have determined to be important; being supportive, but not interfering. Project leaders appreciate close contact with P.O.s, and being connected with other researchers. They benefit from exposure to new approaches (e.g. participatory research, interdisciplinarity). IDRC's approach includes a measure of flexibility, which is also mentioned repeatedly in the EVIS and Tracer data. These strengths grow out of IDRC's labour-intensive approach and form the basis for IDRC's effectiveness in building research capacity.

### **Evaluation Plans**

The Evaluation Unit has received evaluation plans from SS, CAI, ISS, MERO, ASRO, WARO, LACRO and EARO. Plans were not received from ENR, HS, and ROSA. Although the current restructuring process in the Centre complicates the implementation of these plans, the issues which they highlight remain central to IDRC's agenda for learning from past experience. The following themes are prominent in the evaluations scheduled in the Evaluation Plans:

- Networking, creating linkages
- Research utilization
- Achievement of project objectives
- Effectiveness of teams
- Project sustainability
- Building capacity
- Beneficiary impact and satisfaction
- Policy impact
- Dissemination of information and results
- Approaches to funding: multiple donors; revenue generation

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### **2.5. Participatory Research Evaluation**

*Empowerment through Knowledge* is both the mission of IDRC and an essential aspect of participatory research. Participatory research (PR) therefore plays a central role in fulfilling the Centre's mandate. The Evaluation Unit undertook an assessment of our experience with

PR in order to develop a typology of participatory projects, to provide an informed definition of PR projects, and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Centre initiatives in this area.

Some of the major findings in the report include:

- PR can be important for projects of any size and for projects of both short and long duration.
- PR should be seen as an important strength, or comparative advantage of the Centre; compared with many other donor agencies we have a long history of support for PR.
- While the use of PR has become more widespread, considerable confusion abounds concerning terminology, types of PR, theoretical underpinnings and operational practice. A common definition and framework for examining PR is suggested in the study.
- The study presents a framework to assist in the design of monitoring and evaluation for PR projects. Because of the variety in PR projects and because of the nature of PR, the study strongly advocates the need for participatory evaluation of PR projects.

This evaluation is most timely, for, as pointed out in the report, "*Consensus concerning the utility of PR among development institutions is not matched by any apparent consensus among theoreticians. This places a special burden on agencies to define clearly their meanings of PR methods and to create at least a common vocabulary for discussing PR.*"

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*Participatory Research and Development: An Assessment of IDRC's Experience and Prospects.* William C. Found (June, 1995)

### *Tools for Evaluation*

#### **3.3. Evaluation Framework for PR Projects**

In the context of the PR methods defined in the paper (see below), the PR assessment presents a framework for evaluating PR projects and activities. The framework outlines 30 factors in 10 general categories which cover the many distinct aspects of a participatory initiative. These include assessing the appropriateness of the type of PR used, the motivation of the participants, the forms of record keeping, the degree of risk involved, as well as issues of control of the research, ethics and responsibility.

#### **Some types of participatory methods**

- *participatory research*: involves a high degree of genuine involvement and control by the beneficiaries
- *mobilized research*: significant community involvement, but local participation is largely "mobilized" by external researchers
- *community involvement*: less involvement than in above. Community is involved in research, but has no control over the research agenda

- *methodological development*: concentrates on the design and testing of PR methods
- *capacity building*: local capacity is developed to eventually accommodate PR methodology
- *participatory research training*: training others in PR methodology
- *qualitative research*: some qualitative methods (e.g. ethnography) can be participatory

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### **2.6. Cooperative Projects Supported by IDRC**

The cooperative project approach was developed in the early 1980s in order to strengthen scientific research in Southern institutions, channel the results of Canadian research to Southern scientists, and to influence Canadian research towards development concerns. Between 1980 and 1992, IDRC spent \$75.6 million on such cooperative projects. This study analyzes the projects and partnerships between Canadian and Southern researchers during this time along four lines of inquiry:

- the nature of the partnerships;
- their capacity-building impact;
- utilization of research results; and
- the influence of the projects on subsequent research activities of the Canadian partners.

The study found that, while both Canadian and Southern researchers reported a high degree of satisfaction with their involvement and the results obtained, changes are needed to improve project outcomes and to respond to changing conditions, both Northern and Southern.

Findings include the following:

- Overall, there were good working relationships between Canadian and Southern researchers, however, some problems arose when Canadians saw their role as being agents of technology transfer rather than partners in joint research initiatives.
- Southern scientists placed higher value on learning and cooperation than on the material benefits of these projects.
- Regarding research utilization, cooperative projects seemed less directly concerned with achieving results in social service areas such as increasing equity and improving the situation of women and children.
- Involvement in cooperative projects reinforced Canadian scientists' interest in and commitment to development and enhanced their appreciation of the difficulties faced by Southern scientists as well as the value of interdisciplinary work.
- The dissemination of research results was often confined to the scientific community. Policy makers, extension workers and farmers tended not to be treated as potential

users of the research.

### **Recommendations**

The evaluation ends with several recommendations to be considered by those in the Centre who are involved with cooperative projects. Among them are:

- IDRC should identify Canadian institutions that are leaders in research fields relevant to the Centre's programs. These institutions would become the focus for Canadian contributions to future cooperative program initiatives.
- Establish a clearer vision for the role of the Canadian partner. Should the Canadians expect to teach, train and transfer technology, or are they involved in cooperative partnerships, looking forward to the joint ownership of research?
- Canadians are sometimes unprepared to deal effectively with the conditions of doing research in poor countries. Increased North / South communication during initial stages could be beneficial in this regard.
- IDRC should ensure that partners are abreast of changes within the Centre. Some researchers were frustrated at the way IDRC cancelled their funding during program changes and restructuring.

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*An Evaluation of Cooperative Projects Supported by IDRC.* Andrew Asibey, Marcel Zollinger and Michael Graham (June 1995)

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## **2.7. IDRC-Supported HIV/AIDS Research Projects**

During a secondment to the Evaluation Unit from Health Sciences, Zeinab Adan conducted a review of IDRC's 37 AIDS-related projects (with a total budget of \$5.7 million), emphasizing themes of gender, interdisciplinarity and capacity building. The report summarizes the results of this set of projects. Although IDRC is not undertaking any new AIDS research for the present, the study is an example of how to consolidate findings from a set of projects in order to plot new courses for research and application.

The study reveals that researchers were surprised by a number of their findings. For instance, the level of awareness about AIDS was much higher than researchers initially expected. Conversely, the rates of vertical transmission of AIDS from mother to child, as well as child mortality and morbidity were much lower than expected, according to researchers. Further, although condom use was more acceptable than anticipated, condoms were often not available or accessible. Finally, dialogue about sex across age, gender and parental lines has become less taboo.

The review also uncovered a problem in the dissemination of results from IDRC AIDS-

related projects. While many projects produced publications and seminars, these were predominantly in international journals and conferences. The dissemination of results on local and national levels was largely neglected. Some researchers claimed this problem arose due to the absence of any budgetary allocation for dissemination, and they could only find funding for presentations in international fora.

The strongest project impacts of AIDS-related projects were on education, mental health and well-being. Fewer impacts were reported on social or economic factors. In rare cases, negative impacts were reported: e.g., cases of divorce or separation, or child and wife abandonment due to being found HIV-positive.

Overall, IDRC's AIDS-related projects seemed to have had a stronger impact on women than men. Three reasons for this were suggested: women see themselves as more vulnerable and therefore are more willing to change their risk behaviours; women feel more responsible for AIDS prevention and the care of infected people; and women believe that AIDS education can be empowering. 76% of AIDS-related projects incorporated gender considerations in their design or implementation.

74% of the AIDS projects used interdisciplinary approaches. Of the other 26%, half of the project leaders regretted their failure to use interdisciplinary teams and methods in their initiatives.

The review shows that IDRC AIDS-related projects consistently met their capacity building objectives. Researchers were affected most positively, and communities, less so. However, there were lingering problems with the sustainability of project results after IDRC support expired.

The study shows that IDRC-supported research has made significant contributions to international AIDS research in Southern contexts.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Interdisciplinary approaches should be encouraged in AIDS projects;
- more social and economic aspects of AIDS should be included. Special consideration should be given to income-
- generating activities for women and their social and economic status;
- AIDS projects should be more participatory in their design phases so communities' needs and concerns are
- incorporated in project objectives;
- the social marketing of condoms should be investigated; and
- greater priority, including budgetary allocation, should be given in support of local dissemination of results.

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### **2.8. Networks**

*The Centre's Network Evaluation, with its numerous components (see box below), is almost completed. One aspect of the review demonstrates the potential of networks for promoting sustainable capacity development, but we must get beyond seeing networks as ends in themselves. Among network members and donors, there is an emerging trend to try to use networks to strengthen the voice of civil society, to enable linkages among indigenous communities and to build democracy. However, as in the case of the network highlighted below, such new networking arrangements are not easy to effect.*

#### ***The Network***

The Regional Development and Indigenous Minorities in Southeast Asia Network linked people engaged in research on indigenous minorities in Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines. Externally mobilised through IDRC from 1988-1994, the network involved five components: two NGOs, two academic institutions and another which is a mix of both. The aim was to link researchers and indigenous groups to create a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of development on minority communities. Despite the clear merit of the initiative, the consensus is that, as a network, the project failed.

#### ***The Issues***

- Neither the proposal nor the project summary explicitly articulated the utility of creating a network to fulfil its objectives, and no arguments were made for a network.
- Component leaders, when asked specifically about their feelings of being part of a network showed no excitement and little recognition of this dimension of their role in the project.
- The fracture between academicians and activists proved an enduring and pernicious one, as were the cultural, linguistic, religious, political and economic differences among the researchers and their mandates.
- While the indigenous groups under study did have much in common, despite their historic and ethnic particularities, little was done to involve them as a common reference base for the network. Efforts to recruit them were limited by language, education, etc.

#### ***Lessons Learned***

- A network with large gaps between participants needs to be carefully coordinated both to avoid drift and to create common accord. It must be loosely coordinated to respect and learn from the differences.
- Networks seeking to link indigenous populations under the assumption they "belong" together must recognize the diversity that exists. Focussing more tightly on an ecoregion, with attention to cultural identities might have been a more natural base for building networking relations than defining the link in terms of a political body

- (Southeast Asia) which actually has only a short history.
- Mixing NGOs and academic institutions in a network requires a lot of mutual understanding. Neither indigenous nor modern knowledge can be assumed "right"; both must be accommodated within an evolving *network* culture.
  - The point of departure for all development networks must be the members' sense of shared purpose: to meet to express and reconcile their motivations and expectations.

**The Networks Evaluation is made up of a number of initiatives:**

- papers on network issues and cases
- a review of the state of the art
- interviews with approximately 50 IDRC network project leaders
- a file analysis of a cross-section of IDRC networks
- evaluations of selected networks
- a review of donor networking

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From *Mobilizing Regional Network Linkages*. Jean Michaud (September 1995)

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## **2.9. Improving Database Integrity: A Case of Using Evaluation Results**

As part of a preliminary analysis of the new electronic PCR system, the Evaluation Unit hired a consultant to develop applications for analyzing and reporting on PCR data. Part of the task involved assessing the quality of the data in RADIUS (the main Centre database) on which the PCRs depend. Looking at referential integrity and data consistency between fields, the project found significant data inconsistencies which had implications not only for analyzing PCR data, but for the entire RADIUS system. The resulting report suggested ways for verifying and dealing with these problems.

Having generated information for improving data management in areas beyond its immediate concern, the Evaluation Unit shared this evaluation report with other parts of the Centre: MIS, PUG and the Data Control Committee. The result was an increase in awareness and concern about the quality of the data in RADIUS. The responses of MIS, PUG and the DCC clarified points raised in the report, and increased IDRC's commitment to take appropriate action. The responses of the three groups are now included in the final version of the report.

As a result of an exercise initiated by the Evaluation Unit, concern and action by various stakeholders in the Centre's data systems have been mobilized. Commitments to action and to new responsibilities were the immediate outcomes along with increased probability that data quality problems will be reduced and better managed in the future.

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### **3.4. Institutional Assessment: A Framework for Strengthening Organizational Capacity for IDRC's Research Partners**

by Charles Lusthaus, Gary Anderson, and Elaine Murphy

Research institutions everywhere are increasingly concerned with obtaining the maximum benefit from investments aimed at building their capacity and performance. Institutional Assessment is the result of an IDRC project sponsored by the Evaluation Unit, begun in 1987, on strengthening research institutions. The book provides a comprehensive framework and instructions for diagnosing and documenting strengths and weaknesses within organizations. Whether for self-evaluation or for external evaluation by a funding agency, Institutional Assessment will ensure that investments go where they are needed most, for the organization's long term effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness to change.

#### ***Who should use this guide?***

- newly formed organizations
- groups preparing for funding requests or negotiations
- institutions attempting to identify and address "capacity gaps"
- donors assessing the effects of ongoing support
- groups planning to select or establish an institution to play a specific role.

The *Short Guide for Institutional Assessment*, included with the book, provides a framework and checklist for rapid institutional assessments during one or two day visits.

IDRC May 1995  
xiii + 67 pages, paperback  
ISBN 0-88936-771-X  
CA \$20.00

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### **3.5. Monitoring and Assessing Progress Towards Sustainability**

*This multifaceted project (930816) on evaluating sustainable and equitable development is supported by many groups within and outside IDRC. At the funding phase, financial contributions came from the Evaluation Unit, ENR, PRISM, Social Sciences and the IUCN. We asked David Brooks, as Program Director of the Environmental Policy Program and as one who has critically considered issues in sustainable development to comment on the project's progress thus far:*

The project entails the development and field-testing of tools, indicators, and methods for monitoring, assessing and describing progress towards sustainable and equitable development. It is coordinated by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in collaboration with NGOs in three countries: India, Zimbabwe and Colombia. The three countries represent in part a case study for applying and testing results but equally a network for proposing and comparing tools and indicators. The final output of this project will be a toolkit intended for wide distribution. The project is now approximately at its mid-point, and is already producing promising-looking results.

One telling point that emerged early on from meetings in each of the areas was the need for each of the groups to undergo a sort of self-assessment before they could undertake effective assessment of the natural and social environment in which they are working. Participants realized that indicators are not universal and objective, but value-laden, and therefore only appropriate for particular societies at particular times in their development.

The over-riding lesson from the foregoing is the need for participation: within groups, among groups; within communities, among communities; within agencies, among agencies (including donor agencies) — as well as between each of the above. If there is any qualification to this lesson, it is only that participatory processes play the greater role in defining the key questions than in choosing and applying the tools to answer those questions. That is, there remains a key role for professionals in monitoring and assessing progress towards sustainability, but it is a more responsive role than what many conservation and development professionals have been used to in the past. As stated in an interim document produced by IUCN with the aid of the IDRC grant:

*Informative indicators can be developed only when we are clear about the question we are asking. A few well-chosen indicators are likely to be more useful than volumes of statistics. Indicators should emerge from discussion and where possible should be those that are already being used. In many rural communities, indigenous technical knowledge can supply more precise and revealing indicators than externally-defined scientific indicators. — David Brooks*

### ***Tools for Evaluation***

#### **Excerpt from *The Barometer of Sustainability***

Since it is not possible to measure ecosystem and human wellbeing directly, indicators are used instead. Indicators are developed via the following hierarchy:

- system: ecosystem; human system
- dimension eg ecosystem quality; health
- indicative issue eg land quality; longevity
- indicator eg eroded land as % of land area; life expectancy at birth...

Both dimensions and indicative issues are too broad to be measurable. But indicative

issues are more specific, providing a focus for the selection of measurable indicators. Being more specific, they are less universal. Although some indicative issues may be common to many assessments, different societies may choose to use some and not others... Indicators are measurable; but are specific to a particular society, time and place. What may be suitable for one community or country may not be for another.

*From Robert Prescott-Allen, p. 6 & 9*

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### **4. Evaluations received in 1994/95**

The Evaluation Unit and the library keep a copy of each evaluation undertaken throughout the Centre. Within the Evaluation Unit, project and program evaluations are entered onto the EVIS database, as well as kept in hardcopy form for reference. Centre staff who wish to read past evaluations may contact the library for copies.

The Evaluation Unit received 28 project and program evaluations in the past twelve months:

#### ***Environment and Natural Resources***

- Alley Farming Network for Tropical Africa (AFNETA)
- Asian Fisheries Social Science Research Network - Phase III - Program Review (Draft)
- Priority Setting in Agricultural Research: a comparison of different types of networks
- Utilization of Research Results
- The Utilization of Sugar Cane Waste
- Assessment of the IDRC-Supported Projects on Agroforestry at NRCAF and
- Silviculture at IGRI at Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, India
- Urban Environment Management Program - Review of Selected 1980-1992 IDRC Project Literature

#### ***Health Sciences***

- Rapport d'évaluation du projet anémie nutritionnelle

#### ***Information Sciences and Systems***

- Network of Networks - Latin America
- Review of ISD - Project Completion Reports and Proposals for a PCR Database
- Evaluation of IDRC Project: 88-1010 - Enseignement de l'informatique documentaire (Sénégal, Maroc, Canada)
- Evaluation of Project Results: Development of Data Bases - Use in Canada

#### ***Corporate Affairs and Initiatives***

- John G. Bene Fellowship in Social Forestry: awardee tracer exercise and awardee profiles
- Proyecto Para El Fortalecimiento De La Administracion De La Investigacion Agropecuaria En América Latina Y El Caribe, Informe De La Evaluacion Final
- Centre Training Data Study
- IDRC and the Canadian University Community

### ***Social Sciences***

- The Municipal Development Programme for Sub-Saharan Africa: A capacity building programme to strengthen local government in Africa

### ***Regional Office for West and Central Africa***

- An Analysis of IDRC-Funded Projects Relevant to Desertification - Western and Central African Region
- Enquête socio-professionnelle de suivi et d'évaluation des boursiers du CRDI

### ***Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa***

- Report on Results Utilization in Eastern and Southern Africa: The Initial Stage

### ***Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean***

- Latin American Work and Education IDRC-CENEP Network
- Evaluation of the Andean Farming Systems Project, Puno, Peru
- Project Evaluation for Public Affairs
- Tracer Study of LARO/FAD Awardees; In Depth Follow Up of IDRC's Awardees in Latin America

### ***Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa***

- An Analysis of IDRC-Funded Projects Relevant to Desertification - Middle East and North African Region

### ***Regional Office for Asia***

#### ***Cambodia Branch Office***

- IDRC's Environment Program in Cambodia: an assessment of the first two years

#### ***Representative Office for South Asia***

- Review Mission Report for Chinese Academy of Forestry-IDRC Farm Forestry Programme in P.R. China

- The Marga Institute, Colombo - An Evaluation

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[evaluation@idrc.ca](mailto:evaluation@idrc.ca) | 3 March 1998

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