# FORMATIVE EVALUATION REPORT No. 2
## (4.18 - 8.15)

Submitted to: Dr. Humberto Álvarez, Investigador Principal del Proyecto TIC
Universidad Tecnológica de Panamá

**RE: PROJECT ENTITLED: "Usando Tecnologías de Información y Comunicación (TIC) para mejorar la productividad y el ingreso en el sector informal urbano de la economía: un estudio de caso y proyecto piloto en la Ciudad de Panamá"- No. 104121**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The project is found to be progressing on time and according to the proposal benchmarks. However, I recommend a request to extend the due date for the final report (including research agenda) in order to allow for project activity to be finalized and adequately documented prior to release of results; it is common practice to allow for at least 30 and up to 90 days with externally funded projects.
- The bottom-up approach & area-emergent methodologies are considered to be both satisfactory to the nature of the project as well as to be implemented effectively by the project team.
- Because the volume of data and intensity of information compilation goes well beyond what was expected in the proposal stages, the transition from data collection to analysis/interpretation has not been fully completed; PIs will need to continually adapt human resource activity accordingly.
- PIs have balanced the need to capture the enthusiasm of the community for the project and maintain neutrality and control of the research activity.
- One significant key to success has been the incorporation of a team member from the area itself with experience as an informal worker and connections to the community.
- PIs are urged to focus on continually managing expectations of team members, participants, collaborators, donors, and the public-at-large as the project continues.
- The project website is appropriate, up-to-date, and visually informative: http://www.utp.ac.pa/secciones/vipe/sector-informal/index.html

## RESUMEN EJECUTIVO

- Se encuentra el proyecto progresando segun el cronograma y los objetivos de la propuesta. Sin embargo, recomiendo que se extiende la fecha limitada para la entrega de los informes/documentos finales, cual es una practica muy común (desde 30 hasta 90 días).
- Se considera que el enfoque de "abajo hacia arriba" y el enfoque innovador denominado "emergente de área" no solamente son apropiadas para el tipo de proyecto pero también están funcionando de manera efectiva por las gestiones del equipo.
- Se excedió las expectativas con respecto a la cantidad de datos; entonces la transición desde recolección de información hasta el análisis aun no ha terminado; los IP tendrán que adaptar las actividades de manera continua en acuerdo con las necesidades del proyecto.
- Los IP han podido establecer un equilibrio entre la captación de interés de la comunidad / los colaboradores y el requisito a mantener la credibilidad / la neutralidad y el control de las actividades de investigación científica.
- Un clave para los éxitos fue la estrategia de incorporar personal del área mismo con experiencia como trabajador informal.
- Se urge los IP a incluir un enfoque continuo en manejar las expectativas, tanto del equipo de trabajo, de los participantes, los colaboradores, de los donantes, como del público.
- El sitio web sobre el proyecto se encuentra adecuado, actualizado, y informativo de manera visual: http://www.utp.ac.pa/secciones/vipe/sector-informal/index.html

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**Introduction/Purpose**

The intent of this formative evaluation report is to comment upon progress ongoing from the end of the previous reporting period (April 18, 2008) through August 15, 2008. It thus covers activity scheduled in the proposal for the numbered months 5 through 8. (For evaluative commentary on activities planned months 1 through 4, dates of November 21, 2007 through April 18, 2008, please refer to Evaluation Report No. 1).

It bears repeating that *formative* evaluations focus on how the project has proceeded and offer suggestions for how it may continue or improve its actions during the actual course of its implementation. This kind of intervention does not repeat or replace project reports, but adds to them from an external point of view. The evaluative observations and recommendations in this report are based not only upon the initial technical draft report of the project (provided on 8/15/08) but also upon inspection of products, processes, participation, and conversations with staff[*].

Four formative purposes are thus addressed here, in this order:
1) to review and assess progress noted in the project, especially timing and quality with respect to the proposal and timeline approved;
2) to review how the team has responded to previous recommendations for improvements to the project;
3) to comment on results reported and recognized in order to highlight potential opportunities or strategic actions that may be enhanced or subsequently taken into effect toward optimizing project results; and
4) to provide recommendations and highlight priorities for anticipated immediate next steps to ensure focus on project outcomes, delivery of products in a timely fashion, and optimizing project impact (even though it may already be understood or in planning by the PIs).

**1. Progress Review and Quality/Timeframe Assessment**

With reference to the original monthly timeframe of activities of the project (reproduced below), significant advances have been made and represent a general level of progress well in line with the plan for the second four-month period. Activities 1 through 3 were noted as completed on schedule during the first period. Activities 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 have been mostly completed during the current

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[*] ISO/IEC 19796-1:2005 Information Technology -- Learning, Education and Training and the IDRC donor guidelines at http://www.idrc.ca/es/ev-57097-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html serve as assessment framework for this report.

period, with the exception that studies that include greater depth of analysis beyond descriptive results should be forthcoming (to the extent that these relate to and overlap with activity 11). Activities 7 and 10, are also now underway, and should be completed during the next period of the project (as noted below).

The deliverables for activities 11 (analysis) and 12 (dissemination) must await finalization of the nexus of ongoing research-project activity and have not yet formally commenced. This will be the focus of the ending period. However, while there appears to be enough time to finish the deliverable of a final report within the project period, it is my recommendation that an extension request be made to adequately allow for finalizing all analyses (11) in order for the results to be properly incorporated into the two last deliverables: the final report and the research agenda. It is common practice with externally funded projects to allow a period of between 30 to 90 days for final reporting after the actual end date of the project. The rationale for requesting a time extension for submission of final documents is to ensure that all results are adequately captured. Current due date is November 21, 2008. I recommend extending that period at least until December 31, 2008.

***Timeline for Evaluation Period***

| # | Month ==> | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4† | | | | | |
| 5 | | ██ | ██ | ██ | |
| 6 | | ██ | ██ | ██ | |
| 7 | | | | | ██ |
| 8 | | ██ | ██ | | |
| 9 | | ██ | ██ | | |
| 10 | | | | | ██ |

[Reproduced from proposal – Activities planned (completed) 4-5-6-8-9]

| # | Descripción de Actividades | Productos Entregables |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | Prueba piloto en campo: con ejecución de ajustes al protocolo caso sea necesario | |
| 5 | Ejecución del Estudio de Caso: entrevistas con personas que se desempeñan en actividades informales en Calidonia (entrevistas de experiencias previas tanto a participantes como no-participantes para propósitos de control). Investigar cómo los individuos y las comunidades obtienen, utilizan, circulan y de cualquier otra manera comunican la información crítica para sus actividades económicas Se observará e indagarán a los involucrados para identificar las redes existentes y potenciales de trabajadores informales para definir acciones tendientes a propiciar su fortalecimiento y proporcionar asistencia a través de la capacitación Incluye el levantamiento de datos socioeconómicos a través de la encuestas, informaciones de ingresos, medidas de productividad y otros indicadores | Estudio de línea de base en el uso de TIC en la economía informal en Panamá Estudio de la adopción y adaptación de TIC en la economía informal del área de estudio (habilidades existentes) con tipología detallada de las actividades informales que ocurren localmente y caracterización del contexto Mapeo de redes existentes y potenciales Lista de los Centros de accesos de bajo costo localizados en el área |

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† Activity 4 was generally complete in the first period, as planned, but the adjustments taken as a result of the trials were not yet implemented into the project until this period, so its completion is noted here rather than in the first evaluation report.

| | | económicos que se utilizarán como referencia o base para medir el logro de los objetivos de investigación | Sitio Web del proyecto actualizado |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | | La organización, procesamiento y análisis de datos recabados será realizada a medida que avanza el estudio de campo para garantizar que todos los datos relevantes han sido identificados | |
| 8 | | Diseño del plan de implementación y de talleres, ambos ejecutados por el especialista en docencia, preparación de material y programa (contenido) conforme los resultados y modelo | Programa para la generación y fortalecimiento de capacidades, además de difundir y sensibilizar entre los diversos actores las virtudes y el potencial ofrecido por el uso de las TIC como instrumento de apoyo para mejorar la calidad del empleo en la economía informal |
| 9 | | Medición previa de habilidades usando a los grupos de control (no-participantes) y a la población clave de trabajadores informales con especial atención al género y edad.<br><br>Identificación de trabajadores informales innovadores que servirán de co-facilitadores en los talleres | |

[Reproduced from proposal – Activities planned (in progress) 7, 10]

| # | Descripción de Actividades | Productos Entregables |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | Taller de presentación de resultados preliminares ante grupo de participantes y asociaciones interesadas con el objetivo de obtener consideraciones y poder definir los lineamientos para la estrategia de intervención de forma coordinada. (Que será ejecutada bajo la responsabilidad del equipo investigador) en atención a criterios específicos de desarrollo potencial de las TIC en la actividad informal. | **Proceso modelo** para el uso de TIC y mejorar las actividades en la Economía informal en LAC<br><br>Lineamientos definidos de forma coordinada para la estrategia de intervención<br><br>Beneficiarios clave identificados para participar del desarrollo y fortalecimiento de capacidades<br><br>Taller ejecutado con la participación de los actores claves de las instituciones |
| 10 | Puesta en marcha del plan de implementación/proyecto piloto | Ejecución de 4 Talleres de Capacitación |

**Explicitly, IDRC questions can be answered as follows:**

- *¿Está el proyecto encaminado para alcanzar sus objetivos?*

Yes, it is my estimation that the project is making sufficient advances towards objectives, and at a notably more intense pace than in the first project period. This may be due to the fact that initial questions that had been pending have all been resolved, the team has been oriented and trained, and workflow has been managed to enable the project to move forward more quickly. Advances are being made and activity sustained on course with the project plan.

- *¿ Ha cambiado su campo de aplicación?*

No. Changes in the project stemming from negotiations with the donor agency had already been finalized during the very first months of the effort, and the scope of work has been settled. PIs and staff have successfully transitioned to implementation that focuses on those objectives and outcomes as earlier agreed upon.

- *¿Qué actividades fueron apoyadas por el proyecto durante el período del informe?*

Please see the technical report for these details, and refer to the above activity set for a summary.

- *¿Eran todas ellas parte del plan original del proyecto?*

All of the work completed form part of the original project plan. Activities have been intensive and focused upon data collection, organization, and management, amassing a wealth of detail that will serve the project well in the remaining months and beyond. The initial and positive response from the Panamanian community toward the project has been managed effectively, but the PIs should continue to be alert toward managing expectations of collaborators as the currently funded phase of the project draws to a close in the next few months. Again, this can be done in part by emphasizing that this is a long-term research process that seeks sustainable improvements and a basis for further action, rather than *only* immediate results.

- *¿Ha cambiado el enfoque o la metodología?*

The focus (bottom-up approach) and methodology (area-emergent) have not changed and have been appropriately implemented in a recursive way, one that allows results generated to inform continued progress. The technical report includes tangible examples of how what is being learned in the research aspects is being applied in the programmatic and training areas of the project. The analytical activity set (#11) is expected to clearly and explicitly tie these aspects together: case study / research with pilot project /action.

- *¿El proyecto concluirá antes o a tiempo de la fecha de vencimiento (lo que supone la preparación de los informes finales)?*

At this point, assessing progress to date, it is reasonable to expect that the project will conclude on time and in a complete manner. (However, note my recommendation to request a one-month time extension for submitting the final report/research agenda.)

## 2. Team Response to Prior Recommendations for Improvement

The first formative evaluation report submitted identified a set of four (4) items that warranted the project team's attention as areas of current or potential opportunity for improvement or optimization. They have responded well to these recommendations, in the following ways:

a) Building a shared vision and common work process among team members:
As the research activities and knowledge production work began, the significant amount of background and secondary information gathered in the first stage helped to not only provide a contextual basis for the project itself, as originally intended, but it also doubled as an orientation tool for the team members working on the project. Project managers were indeed able to use this repository to help solidify a common vision for strengthening the effort overall. Formalizing a shared vision that is knowledge-based also helped to maintain alignment of the various perspectives of project staff, particularly in infrequent cases of confusion or diversion of activity from the project core. Particularly key to this process was the inclusion of Mr. Austin, a former informal economy worker, to the team, as noted in the technical report.

b) Acknowledging collaborators and managing expectations:
After my prior recommendation, the technical report was revised to include more information about the contributions of collaborators at UDELAS, and in this phase, information about collaboration with INADEH has been reported.  This documentation is important not only for the sake of archival purposes, but also for acknowledgement toward building future collaborations.  I also warned about managing expectations and successfully channeling the enthusiasm expressed from the institutional community.  While the need to address this remains, the team was able in this period to navigate diplomatically between the goal of engaging with external collaborative organizations and the requirement to maintain strict control and legitimacy over the research efforts themselves.  For instance, PIs have taken great care in data collection efforts, including training of interviewers to project neutrality in order to avoid tainting results; that is to say that the reputation of the UTP as a scientific institution rather than a political, state, or union-related one facilitated openness of responses from interviewees and likely resulted in greater accuracy and fidelity of the data.  The final months of the project, however, will necessitate a return to greater engagement with external organizations, as noted below.

c) Engaging with participants in the informal economy sector:
Results from the pilot interviews had reinforced a potentially serious obstacle to the project, namely the willingness of people working in the informal economy to actually participate in the research and the process.  PIs addressed this aspect well by emphasizing the stance of the UTP; by incorporating a team member from the area itself with experience as an informal worker and connections to the community; by effectively employing the area-emergent methodology for revising instruments and protocols; and by orienting the team of interviewers appropriately to the project vision.

d) Shifting from data collection to analyses:
The non-traditional methodology employs a particularly data-heavy and empirical endeavor in the beginning, but during this second phase, the team has begun to shift its focus toward the "emerging" conceptual innovations and toward paying attention to recognize research questions.  PIs will have to continue to reorient human resource efforts as the project moves forward into meeting the needs of the more analytical activities of the project, a process which has not yet been completed.  In my estimation, it has not yet fully transitioned due to the sheer volume of data and intensity of information compilation that goes well beyond what was expected in the proposal stages.  PIs have segmented the study area to assist in organization of data and ease of analysis which itself has implications for the analytical activities planned in the next phase and should be duly noted.

**3.  Commentary on Current Results and Impact Optimization**

The bottom-up approach & area-emergent methodologies are considered to be both satisfactory to the nature of the project as well as implemented effectively.  The feedback mechanisms for improvement have worked as expected and have lead to the development of an *organically derived system of classification of informal economic activity* that appears sound and may indeed be more accurate to current realities as lived within the communities of informal workers.  The recursive approach has also led to the refinement of research methodologies and project implementation, particularly with respect to the strategies used for capturing information from respondents, and to the reorientation of logistical considerations to obtain

representative data over space (by geographic subarea) and time (per schedule during the day). The technical report documents the outcomes of this approach adequately.

Results of the project at this stage still relate mainly to the project database and organization of the very large and detailed volume of information. Analysis *per se* has only just begun, and so results beyond descriptive ones have not yet been released. However, the team has produced a series of maps that allow for early interpretation potential and that are published on the website. This visualization should be able to lead to the development of additional research possibilities to be captured in the final stages of the project as well as to the effective communication of results to a broad audience (including the community of informal economy workers).

The project website can be found at http://www.utp.ac.pa/secciones/vipe/sector-informal/index.html. Assessment of the site reveals that it is well organized, easy to navigate, and includes plenty of information that seems to rather up-to-date. It is visually appealing, particularly including a gallery of photos as well as the maps section displaying queries from the GIS database. However, there are some hyperlink errors that the team is already aware of and scheduled to fix. It was a nice touch to include a sidenote about the internationally significant helicopter accident in Calidonia on the website. Links to communities of interest reside on an internal page and provide an appreciated nod to external collaborators.

The webpages will of course need to be continually updated and expanded as the project continues. For future versions, it is my recommendation that a User area become a major focus for development. Also, the value of the project should be featured and highlighted more, which will probably be an easier task after the upcoming workshops are finished, a venue which may offer comments and quotes about the usefulness of the effort ("what people in Calidonia are saying").

**The following IDRC questions can thus be answered as follows:**

- *¿Ha producido el proyecto importantes hallazgos y resultados de investigación? ¿ Cuáles son y qué se hará con ellos?*

While the project has indeed produced important successes and progress benchmarks as noted above and in more detail in the technical report, actual research results have not yet been generated. This will be the subject of future formative assessments.

- *¿Está el proyecto colaborando a desarrollar la capacidad de investigación de su institución o de los individuos participantes?*

The project indeed has shown an extensive capacity for collaboration as noted above and in the previous report. The important next phase will determine the extent to which this can and will be realized.

 **4. Formative Recommendations and Next Priorities**

This section will answer the IDRC questions regarding:
- *¿Qué ajustes se necesitan para perfeccionar el desempeño futuro?*

- *¿Cuáles son las actividades programadas para el próximo período y hasta la conclusión del proyecto? ¿Podrá terminar el proyecto conforme al presupuesto?*

The next phase of work will focus mainly on activities 7 and 10, which are already in progress and on commencing with and finalizing activity set 11.  No major adjustments appear to be needed at this stage for the project to stay on track with deliverables.

However, it was my previous recommendation, and I reiterate the suggestion that the PIs attempt to further accelerate the research part of the process and the production of deliverables to the extent possible within the earlier part of the next phase of work, in order to allow more time for the interpretation and dissemination of the results.  To some extent they were able to do this already, as noted above, but it is better that dissemination activities should be held off until after the project activities are complete.  In addition, because the limited nature of the project will not be able to address all of the ideas and emergent questions or opportunities, these activities should *explicitly* incorporate a process to capture needs for future projects, funding proposals, or collaboration agendas.  The identification of these are encouraged in the next technical report, not only to document future possibilities, but also to help the team continue to effectively manage the expectations of team members, collaborators, participants, and donors.

The team appears poised to do well in the workshop and training activities coming up, mainly due to the careful evaluations and application of pilot training as an integral part of the pre-tests conducted.  Because of this attention to knowledge-based, recursive and emergent methodologies, it seems that programmatic activities and capacity building will be better oriented to actual (rather than assumed) realities; for one example, actual computer skill levels of the target community, and other characteristics as discovered in pilots.   The workshop/training phase that has been planned presents a current opportunity to link back now to other organizations that had originally expressed interest in the project.  Work accomplished to date and the documentation of that progress in these technical reports provides an excellent framework to reconnect with external collaborators in a way that is well-structured, based upon real content and includes a plan for future action.

Firmado:

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Dra. Patricia Bennett de Solís, Evaluadora Externa
Entregado el 28 de Agosto de 2008