FORMATIVE EVALUATION REPORT No. 1

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.
- The bottom-up approach & area-emergent methodologies are considered satisfactory thus far.
- Expectations were exceeded regarding the level of interest generated in the community and PIs are encouraged to strategically consider how to best capture this enthusiasm.
- Obstacles related to credibility and willingness of participants in the informal economy to engage are being addressed, especially via the incorporation of a team member from the area itself with experience as an informal worker and connections to the community.
- PIs are encouraged to accelerate the pace of research and deliverable production, in order to allow sufficient time for dissemination and reporting.
- PIs are urged to also focus on continually managing expectations of team members, participants, collaborators, donors, and the public-at-large as the project unfolds.
- The next phase will begin movement from data and information collecting to recognition and direction along the emerging research questions, and the team and project will need to reorient to new approaches and integrate lessons with programmatic design.

RESUMEN EJECUTIVO
- Se encuentra el proyecto progresando segun el cronograma y los objetivos de la propuesta.
- Hasta ahora se considera que están funcionando de manera razonable el enfoque de "abajo hacia arriba" y el enfoque innovador denominado "emergente de área."
- Se excedió las expectativas con respecto al nivel de interés de parte de la comunidad u otras organizaciones; y se recomienda que los IP planifiquen estratégicamente como captar la energía de aquellos.
- El proyecto esta exitosamente embarcando a los obstáculos potenciales generado por la credibilidad y voluntad de los trabajadores informales a participar, específicamente a través de incorporar personal del área mismo con experiencia como trabajador informal.
- Se sugiera a los IP a acelerar progreso hacia resultados de investigación y producción de entregables para permitir suficiente tiempo de cumplir con fases de diseminación y divulgación.
- 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.
- La próxima fase consiste en ajustar actividades desde la colección de los datos/información hasta el reconocimiento a preguntas emergentes; a la reorientación del equipo y el proyecto hacia nuevas actividades de investigación; y a la integración de los resultados con el diseño de los programas de capacitación.

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Introduction/Purpose

The intent of this formative evaluation report is to comment upon progress ongoing from the initiation of project activity (November 21, 2007) until April 18, 2008. In keeping with *formative* evaluations, review and commentary focus on how the project has proceeded and suggest 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 (dated 4/25/08) but also upon inspection of products, processes, participation in team planning meetings, and in this case, also attendance at the project launch event.

This evaluation also takes into consideration international standards, specifically ISO/IEC 19796-1:2005(E) " ISO/IEC 19796-1:2005 Information Technology -- Learning, Education and Training." In addition, the project donor guidelines for reporting published by IDRC are also explicitly considered, particularly assessment related questions that may or may not be explicitly address in the technical report. (CF: http://www.idrc.ca/es/ev-57097-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html).

Three 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 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
3) 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 first four months. Activities 1 through 3 have been completed, as planned, and activities 5 through 9 are underway, although not finalized in every instance. These will become the focus of the following period (as noted below).

The deliverables specified have been produced to a reasonable degree, although it will be necessary for updates to some of these products, particularly the website, throughout the course of the remainder of the project, as new discoveries are made or additional information is accrued. Key: the fact that pilots have already been conducted indicate that substantive progress will enable the project to complete subsequent activities as planned. The deliverable for activity 9 (the capacity program) has not been fully developed, but work has begun, which adequately corresponds to the project timeframe.

Timeline

#	Month ==>	1	2	3	4
1		■			
2		■	■		
3		■	■		
4				■	
5					■
6					■
8					■
9					■

[Reproduced from proposal – Activities planned (completed)]

#	Descripción de Actividades	Productos Entregables
1	Organización de reuniones informativas de consulta y lanzamiento del proyecto: con participación de diversas Instituciones gubernamentales, representantes del sindicato de buhoneros, de ONGs y Asociaciones gremiales especializadas en microempresas, representantes del Ministerio de Trabajo y proveedores en telecomunicaciones en Panamá Con la definición formal del estudio de caso/proyecto piloto se iniciará el diseño del sitio web del proyecto como forma de divulgar el resultado de reuniones y la información relevante al mismo, tales como: agenda, antecedentes, documentos de base, resultados etc. contribuyendo a su diseminación.	Propuesta formal de estudio de caso/proyecto piloto discutida y lista para iniciar el proceso Diseño de sitio web
2	Selección de recurso humano, realización de entrevistas, establecimiento y ejecución de plan de capacitación intensiva del personal seleccionado	Plan de ejecución del proyecto incluyendo la descripción para los componentes investigación e implementación
3	Recolección de datos secundarios: se consultarán las estadísticas y datos provenientes de diversas instituciones representativas de carácter local y revisión de literatura y estudios a nivel internacional. Diseño del protocolo (cuestionario), materiales y métodos para el estudio de caso	
4	Prueba piloto en campo: con ejecución de ajustes al protocolo caso sea necesario	

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

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).	Estudio de línea de base en el uso de TIC en la economía informal en Panamá
	Investigar cómo los individuos y las comunidades obtienen, utilizan, circulan y de cualquier otra manera comunican la información crítica para sus actividades económicas	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
	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	Mapeo de redes existentes y potenciales
		Lista de los Centros de accesos de bajo costo localizados en el área
	Incluye el levantamiento de datos socioeconómicos a través de la encuestas, informaciones de ingresos, medidas de productividad y otros indicadores 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.	
	Identificación de trabajadores informales innovadores que servirán de co-facilitadores en los talleres	

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. It is notable that these team members as well as the PIs are also working on various other projects, but management strategies have facilitated a pace of work that aligns with the project calendar. This means that progress is sometimes made in bursts of activity, and activities at other times occur with less momentum; but overall throughout the course of the first four-month timeframe, adequate advances are being made and activity sustained.

- *¿ Ha cambiado su campo de aplicación?*

Changes in the project had in fact been realized during the very first months of the effort, including a good deal of time prior to the project award and the project official start in November of 2007. This was due to cutbacks and negotiations with the donor that were quite confusing and contradictory because of a frequent turnover in assigned program officers, each of whom contributed substantively, but variously. In the end, it seems that the project scope has now been settled, although this is something to be aware of during implementation phases so that expectations are

managed and met. Obviously, the limited time and resources for this project cannot address all of the ideas raised over the period of its development, and PIs should take care to focus on those objectives and outcomes as agreed upon with the donor, even while taking advantage of excellent opportunities for improvement as they arise.

- *¿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 was part of the project plan. However, a much greater response from the Panama community was achieved than (at least I had) anticipated. The interest level is very high locally, and the project moving forward will need to seek ways to capture and direct the enthusiasm in a productive way, as well as to manage expectations from collaborators. 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 are deemed appropriate thus far. I comment more below on the efficacy of this.

- *¿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.

2. Commentary on Results and Impact Optimization

In terms of quality control, the weekly project meetings achieve a great deal toward normalizing work activity and ensuring alignment with project benchmarks. However, due to the rather non-traditional nature of the project, a good deal of time has been necessarily spent on building a shared vision and common work process among team members rather than quality management per se. This should become a higher priority in next stages of work, particularly as the research activities and knowledge production ensues.

The technical report should place greater emphasis on the contributions of collaborators. Namely, researchers at UDELAS have been involved already (and likely more as future phases ensue) but are not documented in the technical report to the extent expected. As noted above, an impressive response from the community was generated, thanks to the vision and outreach efforts of the PIs but in order to optimize impact, this enthusiasm should be directed and expectations managed on a continual basis. The opportunity to capitalize on the energy and involvement of additional organizations presents itself already, so timely and frequent, on-target communications could improve the impact of collaboration, not to mention help to capture the talents and skills of other volunteers or synergistic activities. While the PIs should maintain a focus on this particular project, it would be productive to strategize a bit more on how to achieve this, beyond the website interactions as planned. For instance, perhaps interested organizations could be invited to contribute additional

data to the database, to the extent that these could be integrated within the project. However, issues related to maintaining credibility (by virtue of it being a university project) should not be sacrificed.

Results from the pilot interviews reinforce a potentially serious obstacle to the project, one that was not previously unknown. This relates to the willingness of people working in the informal economy to actually participate in the research and the process. It is not realistic to assume this can be 100% overcome, but a couple of actions taken by PIs have begun to address this and should be noted. First, the instruments themselves will be revised to better and more appropriately capture the information that will advance the project work, on the basis of the pilot responses. Secondly, interview staff is being trained to use these instruments as a guide, to maintain conversations, an approach that can build relationships rather than create the image of a project *about* the informal economy rather than *with* people engaged in it. Finally, and most importantly, the project now includes a team member who has himself worked for many years in the same project area in the informal economy and who has a great number of personal contacts in the community. This grounded experience is very well suited to the effort, and not only will provide an internal source of interpretation and testing of approaches, but also is aiding tremendously in access to the community and credibility of the project and its team. This kind of action should be continued and enhanced to the extent possible as the project unfolds.

One additional word of caution on this issue: all project team members and collaborators should be sensitized to the nontraditional perspective and methods of this project. In academic settings, it is easy for some people to claim authority or power because of degree or background. However, especially in this project on the informal economy, the information, knowledge, interpretation, perspective, and contributions of people who would otherwise be considered "subjects" of the research, is very valuable and they are "protagonists" in the effort, in fact.

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. The important next phase will determine the extent to which this can and will be realized.

3. 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 5, 6, 8, and 9. However, it is my recommendation that the PIs attempt to accelerate the research part of the process and the production of deliverables to the extent possible, to allow more time for the interpretation and dissemination of the results. 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 incorporate an explicit process designed to capture needs for follow-on phases. Perhaps identifying these in the next technical report would also be of value, not only to document future possibilities, but also to help the team avoid "scope-creep" by setting aside these interesting, but potentially distracting avenues as well as to manage the expectations of team members, collaborators, participants, and donors.

Particularly notable are two advances made during this period that are critical for future steps: First, the team has indeed successfully gathered a significant amount of background and secondary information that helps not only to provide a contextual basis for the project itself, as originally intended, but it also doubles as an orientation tool for the team members working on the project. This secondary advantage could be enhanced in future steps, by paying explicit and particular attention to the ways in which this repository may help to solidify a common vision, not only among team members, but also collaborates, which as I note as a recommendation for strengthening the effort overall.

Secondly, it appears thus far that the non-traditional methodology in use is in fact working well, at least in this initial phase. The "area emergent" approach that the project employs is a particularly data-heavy and empirical endeavor in the beginning, and the team's activities have indeed focused as needed on this important harvesting of information. However, it will be important for future steps that the team is able to shift its focus, in line with the selected methodology, toward the "emerging" conceptual innovations, and eschew (a common) tendency to continue data gathering as the main objective. The methodology now calls for attention to not only recognize research questions as they are now emerging, but also to allow those questions to start driving more and more of the on-going activity. This will take some attention from the PIs to staff to reorient human resource efforts as the project moves forward, but represents a significant opportunity for capacity building.

Finally, I redirect attention to the need for overseeing the recursive nature of the project, whereby what is being learned in the research aspects is applied in the programmatic and training areas of the project. This will be an important management consideration during next steps.

In the next phase, this assessment will also include remarks on the web page, which is scheduled to be launched later this month.

Firmado:

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Dra. Patricia Bennett de Solís, Evaluadora Externa
Entregado el 5 de Mayo de 2008