



Memorandum / Note

TO / DESTINATAIRE IDRC Board of Governors
DATE 19 February 2015
FROM /
EXPÉDITEUR Dominique Charron, Acting Director, Agriculture and Environment
Stephen J. McGurk, Acting Vice President Programs and Partnerships
SUBJECT / OBJET Management response to the external reviews of the Agriculture and Environment Programs on Ecosystems and Human Health, and Climate Change and Water

Purpose: For discussion

This memo presents management’s response to external reviews of two Agriculture and Environment programs approved in March 2010: Ecosystems and Human Health, and Climate Change and Water.

Management is satisfied overall with the conduct and findings of the external reviews of both programs and has drawn important lessons from these reviews. As with all IDRC program external reviews, the review findings are an important, but not sole, contributor to decisions about future program design. Recommendations from these reviews were integrated into the proposed Agriculture and Environment Program Area Implementation Plan 2015-2020.

Management is also satisfied with the results achieved by the programs. The success of the programs is notable given the context of staff changes and of budget and resource contractions as part of the Deficit Reduction Action Plan of the Government of Canada. The good results of both programs point to the strengths of IDRC’s business model, as well as the innovativeness and adaptability of staff. These are key assets to the Centre and align these two programs well with the vision and objectives set out the IDRC’s new Strategic Plan.

Question 1: How did the program perform in implementing its prospectus?

Management acknowledges findings of sound and appropriate programming strategies in both programs.

We agree with the finding that Climate Change and Water demonstrated considerable agility to absorb the unexpected \$37.5 million in Fast Start Finance. Management is pleased that the field-building strategies of the Ecosystems and Human Health program showed promising results.

Both external reviews noted weaknesses in program learning from project performance. Management acknowledges this finding, which has been raised in previous reviews. In seeking an appropriate balance between learning and other responsibilities, management commits to develop and implement specific strategies for improved program learning from projects within the year.

Question 2: Overall, was the quality of research supported by the program acceptable?

Management acknowledges the finding of good to very good quality research supported by both programs, particularly noting the trend toward increasing quality in recent years.

Management recognises that the methodology used by the reviews limited them to older, completed projects, precluding capture of recent actions by programs to improve quality. However, management accepts that still more can be done to improve research quality, and that projects that fail to produce peer-reviewed publications should be much fewer than the 53% noted for the Ecosystems and Human Health review. Data from the program indicate that the number of projects publishing in peer reviewed publications is trending upward from only 2 projects ending in 2011, to 13 projects ending in 2014 and publishing over 30 papers. Similar analysis was not available from the Climate Change and Water review.

Gender aspects were found to be weak in both programs, and that Climate Change and Water projects were weaker in addressing the negative consequences of research results. Management recognizes that both programs have already implemented strategies to improve the quality of proposals and management will continue to monitor this aspect. Increased attention to research ethics has been noted by management in projects approved recently, concomitant with the capacity building efforts of the Centre's Advisory Committee on Research Ethics. Management commits to ensuring more consistent documentation of ethics approvals in all projects, for example by using grant agreement milestones as a lever to ensure compliance by recipients. Management also commits to strengthening the emphasis on gender responsiveness of programming, by drawing on strengths in Agriculture and Food Security as well as other programs of the Centre; and by ensuring that gender is explicitly included in expected outcomes and metrics for all programs proposed under the new Agriculture and Environment Implementation Plan 2015-2020.

Question 3: To what extent are program outcomes relevant and significant?

Management acknowledges the finding of high degree of relevance for both programs.

Management acknowledges findings that Climate Change and Water improved multi-stakeholder processes to better manage water resources; developed innovative methods for adaptation research and for their economic assessment; and catalogued over 100 adaptation strategies. Incomplete documentation hampered reviewers' assessment of significance. Since

many of the projects developed during the prospectus were mid-course at the time of the external review, evidence of substantial benefits and impacts for intended beneficiaries of the research was scant. By interviewing recipients, reviewers ascertained that many projects were having influence and impact, but that projects did not adequately document progress made. Management commits to improving the collection of data from recipients on indicators of positive influence for change, to be integrated into program reporting on indicators of large-scale positive change.

Management is satisfied with the findings of the Ecosystems and Human Health Program review of significant progress in Ecohealth field-building, the program's key outcome area. As expected, the success is uneven and commensurate with underlying capacities, with results in Latin America and in Canada being largely successful and field-building somewhat successful in Asia and Africa. The program's progress in devolving leadership of the field to Southern organizations has been strong, but management accepts the findings that the institutional, leadership and capacity conditions, as well as other donors needed for an independent and self-sustaining field, are only partly in place. Under the Agriculture and Environment Implementation Plan proposed for 2015-2020, the Food, Environment and Health program would strategically provide support and continuity for the strongest elements of Ecohealth programming. Management accepts that the effectiveness of capacity building efforts (42 courses in 17 academic institutions, 9 graduate degree programs) should be separately assessed and commits to commissioning an independent evaluation of this in the next year.

Management acknowledges the finding of 30% of Ecohealth projects having substantial impact on policy and practice, particularly on emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases and agriculture and health, the program's priority themes. Management will ensure that these successes are communicated going forward, through program communications and the website.

Question 4: What are the key issues for IDRC's Board of Governors and senior management?

Management acknowledges the concept of innovation trajectory, and agrees that results are often achieved only after several cycles of research funding and with suitably favourable external contexts, a number of features of which are often beyond the control of IDRC or researchers. Management also notes that the methods and approach of Ecohealth remain suitable for consideration by a number of IDRC programs, including Agriculture and Environment programs proposed for 2015-2020.

Management acknowledges the findings by Ecosystems and Human Health review of inadequate recognition of IDRC's contribution to field-building, in part the result of a deliberate strategy to shift focus to southern leaders and away from IDRC. That said, the book, *Ecohealth Research in Practice*, published in 2012, is one of the most cited of IDRC's books and in consequence the Centre's contribution is increasingly recognized. Nonetheless, management agrees that recipients must acknowledge IDRC support in publications. Grantee practices and

management oversight have improved in recent years and new Centre approaches to supporting the costs of open access publications will provide an additional control that IDRC is acknowledged in print.