



Safe and Inclusive Cities Program: Formative Mid-term Evaluation Report

Prepared for the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

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List of Acronyms

CFP – Call for Proposals

DFID – Department for International Development

IDRC – International Development Research Centre

IRB – Institutional Review Board

KII – Key informant interview

KS – Key Stakeholder

LC – Learning Case

MTW – Mid-term workshop

OSD – Open Space Discussion

PG – Project Grantee

SAIC – Safe and Inclusive Cities

SAIC Grantees Included in the Evaluation:

Project Title & Location(s)	Research Partners
Sub-Saharan Africa	
Assessing the Impact of State-Community Collaboration to Address Urban Violence in South Africa Johannesburg, Tshwane, Cape Town (South Africa)	Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
Unearthing Exclusions: Towards More Inclusive Zimbabwean Cities Harare, Bulawayo, Kadoma (Zimbabwe)	Oxfam-Canada-Lead, University of Zimbabwe - Southern and Eastern African Regional Center for Women's Law lead research institution
Exploring the Crime and Poverty Nexus in Urban Ghana Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Tamale (Ghana)	Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research-Lead, and Department of Geography and Resource Development, University of Ghana
Phenomenology of Criminal Violence and Challenges for Local Urban Governance in Côte d'Ivoire Abidjan, Duékoué, Bouaké (Côte d'Ivoire)	Unit for Communication, Place and Society Université Alassane Ouattara (former Université de Bouaké), (with administrative support from UNESCO Bioethics Chair)
The Nature and Actors of Urban Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo Kinshasa, Mbuji-Mayi (DRC)	Chaire de Dynamique Sociale-Lead, Université de Kinshasa, and the Institut Congolais de Recherche en Développement et Études Stratégiques
South Asia	
Poverty, Inequality and Violence in Urban India: Towards More Inclusive Urban Planning Ahmedabad, Delhi, Guwahati, Patna (India)	Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology-Lead and Institute of Human Development
Gender and Violence in Urban Pakistan Karachi, Rawalpindi/Islamabad (Pakistan)	Institute of Business Administration-Lead, partner Kings College London
Involuntary Resettlement: A Cross Country Study on Urban Inequality and Poverty Colombo, Jaffna (Sri Lanka); Cochin (India)	International Centre for Ethnic Studies-Lead in Sri Lanka Centre for Development Studies in India
Latin America and the Caribbean	
Exclusion, Violence and Community Responses in Central American Cities Heredia, Limón (Costa Rica); Santa Tecla, Sonsonate (El Salvador)	Facultad Latinoamericana de las Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO Costa Rica with FLACSO El Salvador)
Violence in Three Latin American Cities, a Comparative Study Between Bogota, Lima and Santiago Bogotá (Colombia); Lima (Peru); Santiago (Chile)	Universidad de Chile, Centro de Estudios en Seguridad Ciudadana del Instituto de Asuntos Públicos-Lead, Universidad Diego Portales, Santiago, Chile, Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos, Bogota, Colombia, Centro para el desarrollo de la Justicia y la Seguridad Ciudadana, Lima, Peru
Institutions for Safe and Inclusive Cities in Venezuela Caracas, Ciudad Guyana, San Cristobal, Cumana (Venezuela)	Instituto de Investigacion – Laboratorio de Ciencias Sociales, Venezuela
Cross-Regional	
Social Cohesion: The Missing Link in Overcoming Violence, Inequality and Poverty? Cape Town (South Africa), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	Human Sciences Research Council-Lead in Cape Town, Laboratory for the Analysis of Violence at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, and the Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy at Oxford University, UK
People, Places and Infrastructure: Countering Urban Violence and Promoting Justice Mumbai (India), Durban (South Africa), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	Tata Institute of Social Sciences–Center for Urban Policy and Governance, School of Habitat Studies–Lead in Mumbai, University of Kwazulu-Natal (South Africa), Instituto de Pesquisa e Planejamento Urbano e Regional, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, (Brazil)
Ending Non-violent Identities for Safe and Inclusive Cities Maputo (Mozambique), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	Instituto Promundo-Lead (Brazil) & Centro do Estudos Sociais

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Executive Summary

Safe and Inclusive Cities (SAIC), jointly funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), is a global research program that brings together leading experts in order to understand the drivers of urban violence, poverty and inequalities and "what works – and what doesn't – to reduce violence in urban centres."¹ The program currently supports 15 teams across 16 countries and 40 cities in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. The teams use a diversity of research methods to explore a variety of themes related to urban violence. Projects range in their scope from the use of participatory methods in localised, urban contexts; to national-level surveys; to cross-contextual projects that explore violent urban landscapes in multiple countries.

This report is a mid-term formative evaluation of the Safe and Inclusive Cities Program. This evaluation recognises that both **assessment** and **learning** are important factors for ensuring program accountability. Therefore, the report includes 'recommendations for assessment' – which are intended as recommendations to help the program to meet its objectives given the current logframe. In addition, the report includes 'opportunities for learning,' which suggest changes for strengthening the program beyond its current scope, but which may or may not be considered high priorities to SAIC coordinators.

The evaluation covers six broad thematic areas. The first five were selected by IDRC: **Program effectiveness, research quality, research uptake, ethical practice and gender analysis**. The sixth area, 'cross-cutting programmatic' issues,' was identified during early stages of discussion with IDRC as important for iterative learning and includes emergent findings over the course of the evaluation. While the thematic areas have been divided for the purposes of this report, there is a high degree of overlap and interdependency between them. Lessons learned are often applicable across multiple thematic areas and improving the program and any follow-on work will require attention to this interrelatedness.

The methods used in the evaluation enabled open and reflective conversations with IDRC program staff, SAIC project grantees and external stakeholders around the five core themes. The evaluation was learning-oriented so was open to new areas of inquiry. As such, the evaluation makes visible three further themes important for further learning within SAIC: IDRC's role in defining and building a global learning network; strategies for peer-oriented capacity building in SAIC; and facilitating cross-program learning and knowledge synthesis.

Specific evaluation processes included a document review, key informant interviews, an online survey, observations and participation in the mid-term workshop (MTW), as well as learning cases developed through extended group sessions with selected project grantees.

SAIC is diverse in many ways and this diversity is often a strength of the program. However, this diversity has implications for the nature of recommendations in a formative evaluation. Taking this diversity into account, it is not possible to have all recommendations apply equally to all projects. Recommendations, particularly those orientated towards learning, may apply to a subset of grantees and should be considered in this light. IDRC's approach and that of this evaluation is to see how programmatic diversity can be a continued strength of the program; and to offer recommendations on how to build on areas of diversity to continue to improve program performance and results.

Key Findings of the Evaluation

Overall, our assessment of the implementation of SAIC is that **the program is on track to meet its overarching objective** to generate high-quality evidence that informs decision-makers, policy-makers, researchers, and

¹ IDRC, 2014 – Safe and Inclusive Cities, Request for Proposal document

practitioners on the connections between violence, poverty and inequalities in urban areas, and the most effective strategies for promoting safe and inclusive cities.

Our evaluation of **Program Effectiveness** sought to understand the overall progression of the SAIC program towards achieving its intended outputs and outcomes. The SAIC program is well-managed, coordinated and supported by IDRC, which has contributed positively to its progress up to this point. IDRC staff have comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the research issues and program operations. There are varying relationships between IDRC program officers and project grantees and further work is needed to ensure the positive contributions of program officers in relation to the diversity of grantees. Areas for expansion within future SAIC initiatives include looking at intersecting forms of inequality in relation to violence, and more contextualised and collaborative approaches to research uptake. IDRC and DFID facilitated a well-developed call for proposals and external review process; future processes should consider the direct implications of this process on applicants, grantees, and the structure of the program. There are effective monitoring procedures in place to ensure accountability between grantees and IDRC. The M&E strategy could, however, make a greater contribution to program effectiveness by strengthening the learning and feedback mechanisms in conjunction with grantees. The diverse range of empirical, conceptual and programmatic research projects enables substantive conceptual and theoretical contributions led from the global South.

In terms of **Research Quality**, IDRC selected a group of highly experienced, academic research teams to undertake projects as part of the SAIC program. However, the use of research quality mechanisms across the program is variable and does not necessarily allow for thorough assessment of research quality. IDRC's flexibility and openness within the research cycle has enabled adaptation and responsive research design, thus strengthening research quality; IDRC's contextualised understanding of how to achieve research quality has been highlighted as important for grantees. Procedurally, the emphasis on research quality mechanisms at the outset of research, such as proposal review, has played a key role alongside the support provided by IDRC program officers throughout the project cycle. The role of IDRC within the program has ensured that most project grantees are achieving high levels of research excellence and have made steps towards meaningfully integrating ethical practice and gender analysis into research projects. However, both gender analysis and ethical practice need further attention from inception, given the diversity of their application across the program. Current peer review mechanisms enabling knowledge exchange between project grantees are valued but need to be strengthened and to focus on key elements of research quality. There is a bias towards academic peer review as a tool to assess research quality at the end of the project, which needs to be adjusted for applied research projects. The MTW highlighted the opportunity for further exchange between project teams on research methodologies as well as the importance of continuing to facilitate opportunities for project teams to be able to connect their work with others in the network.

The **Research Uptake** theme assessed the ways in which knowledge produced by SAIC is being positioned for uptake and influence in order to address and respond to urban violence. At this point, the extent to which SAIC is positioned to impact policy and practice is unclear, although most evaluation participants are optimistic about their prospects. Recognising that long-term influence requires particular strategising and positioning, engagement strategies need to be embedded in a deep understanding of local, socio-political realities. More attention is needed to undertaking this analysis at the outset of the program. There appears to be some tension between the objective of the research program to generate 'applied and policy-relevant research', and the capacity of grantees, of which more than two-thirds are from traditional academic universities. Of these, some are very well connected to policy and practice and others less so. IDRC could consider how to improve and provide support for the processes used to translate findings from grantees into different policy and practice spaces from local to global levels and with diverse audiences including citizens living in research communities.

In terms of **Ethical Practice**, IDRC has been successful in ensuring that each project has submitted an ethics and security protocol, and program officers offered support to develop ethical procedures in contexts where institutional review boards did not exist. Ethical practice involves considering risks to the researchers, participants/respondents and members of the wider community as all are potentially affected within the localities the research is conducted. Ethical practice varies across the program and support is needed for grantees to evolve their approaches towards good practices emerging across the program: responsive and iterative integration of ethical practice into all stages of research design, data collection and dissemination. IDRC could consider collaborating with project grantees to design a set of ethical principles specific to violent contexts. There is an opportunity for IDRC to support and encourage safe and reflexive opportunities for ongoing dialogue about ethical practice to ensure the communication of any ethical dilemmas, while supporting capacity development through peer learning. SAIC grantees recognise the significance of researching the issues that affect the most marginalised with a view to addressing the inequalities and violence in their lives, and best practices have included the negotiation of informed consent throughout the research process and ethical considerations within the communication of research findings.

Integrating **Gender Analysis** into research programs is an overarching goal of IDRC. IDRC's positioning of gender analysis as integral to research excellence on urban violence, and mechanisms of accountability for SAIC grantees on this issue have been embedded throughout the program. In the SAIC program, gender issues were considered to some degree in the call-for-proposals process, within the program's logframe, theory of change and interim reporting templates. The research of three projects focuses quite extensively on understanding how themes of gender are related to urban violence, poverty and inequality. Understandings of gender analysis are variable across projects and while there are some SAIC grantees and program officers with expertise in gender, the opportunities for capturing it, sharing and peer exchange could be strengthened. Project grantees are all committed to generating sex disaggregated data in their research, which will provide an important contribution of evidence to the field. While there has been some success in collecting information around gender, there is little indication of attention at this point with regards to how this information will be disseminated and taken up by whom. For those interested in deepening their gender analysis, further support can be given to move beyond sex-disaggregated data towards a qualitative and nuanced understanding of both women and men's gendered realities in violent contexts and the gendered causes, dynamics and consequences of violence. A discussion of men and masculinities can be strengthened in the program and there is grantee leadership to support this.

Through the evaluation process, three **crosscutting issues** arose, which should be considered as key opportunities for learning within SAIC. **IDRC's role in building a global knowledge network (1)** is important, given that 'network building' was noted as a priority by IDRC staff and has been included in the program's theory of change and logframe. While IDRC has had some success in facilitating dialogue among project teams (through webinars, the MTW and regional workshops), IDRC could consider further opportunities for network building and peer learning. Going forward, IDRC should continue to promote initiatives developed directly by SAIC grantees and consider the input of grantees into the program's structure and objectives from inception. Strengthening **opportunities for peer-centred capacity development (2)** is important for ensuring that grantees have the chance to benefit from the diverse skillsets that exists within SAIC. A strategy for peer-centred capacity development could follow a demand and supply system that could be facilitated by IDRC via a baseline assessment of research skills and capacity building needs among grantees. Grantees could have the opportunity to select which peers and skillsets they would be interested in sharing and learning more about. Finally, to **strengthen program-level learning and synthesis (3)**, IDRC could consider facilitating additional opportunities for project grantees to share and discuss emerging findings along thematic, geographical or methodological lines. Grantees could reflect on how these findings speak to one another and how they may feed into a Theory of Change for urban violence in the various social, economic and political settings in which they work.

Key Recommendations and Opportunities for Learning in SAIC

Program Effectiveness	Assessment-based recommendations	Opportunities For Learning
Call for Proposals Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide links in the Call for Proposals (CFP) document to IDRC protocols (and/or resources) on gender, ethics, quality standards in research, and approaches to influencing (where available). • Clearly outline the ‘grants-plus approach’ within the CFP document. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively diversify the type of institutions funded and amount of funding available. • Consider unsuccessful program applicants as a target audience for dissemination about program results
IDRC’s role in SAIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solicit further feedback on the ways in which IDRC program officers provide technical support to project grantees during the implementation of projects. • Communicate more clearly with prospective and current grantees about the nature of the ‘grants-plus’ approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider how to maintain the substantial contributions of program officers while also expanding the network of contacts between IDRC and the grantees. • Create a process for agreeing a program approach in a collaborative manner with grantees.
SAIC Logframe and M&E Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the baseline study to take into account the specific contexts of chosen research teams, to assess where, how and at what level change happens due to SAIC influence. • Improve the monitoring and evaluation strategy by allowing for more time and resources during the initial stages of the program. • Adjust the logframe to include qualitative indicators for measuring network cohesiveness and peer learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise program reporting and monitoring to make space for more empowering, reflexive and meaningful contributions from individual research teams and the larger SAIC program cohort. • Create specific space in technical reports for reporting issues, lessons and developments that could be meaningful to other research teams within the program.
Research Quality	Assessment-based recommendations	Opportunities for Learning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage support from Program Officers in the data analysis phase of the program, particularly in regards to analysing and interpreting data captured using participatory approaches. • For the final assessment of research quality achieved by project grantees IDRC should develop a strategy that takes into account differential outcomes between academic and more applied research. • In future rounds of the program, IDRC should provide clear communication to project grantees on the intention and purpose of peer review and support mechanisms through the form of a ‘peer review strategy’ for research excellence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IDRC could evolve the definition of research quality within SAIC even further by grounding the definition in the experiences of grantees working in different contexts (such as adverse political environments, etc). • Consider identifying groups of project grantees that could provide peer review of research outputs for key elements of research quality and rigor. • Develop regionally based mechanisms for peer review that support knowledge exchange and learning.

Research Uptake	Assessment-based recommendations	Opportunities for Learning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop tools for bridging communication between researchers and diverse stakeholders at project and program levels. • Develop incentives and support processes to enable research teams to project their influence for achieving program objectives. • Focus on positioning research in the public domain, in addition to an emphasis on academic journals. • Encourage future project grantees to build research uptake strategies into research designs from the outset, to facilitate strategies tailored to local contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop metrics to assess influence that are learning oriented; take into account the position of the researcher/team; distinguish between different types of influence in the short and longer term; and recognise the non-linear nature of policy change. • IDRC / DFID could revisit the type of institutions selected for the program and consider increasing the number of institutions that are directly involved in policy-making or service delivery. • Once proposals have been approved, IDRC could work with grantees to develop a comprehensive context analysis of their respective policy environments, to inform a project uptake strategy. • Capacity-building efforts within research projects (training of field workers or students, communication capacity for senior academics, etc.) could be recognised as an important dimension of research uptake
Ethical Practice	Assessment-based recommendations	Opportunities for Learning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop protocols for follow-up reporting around ethical practice in different stages of research. • Encourage Program Officers to dialogue with research teams on the ethics of research communication. • Continue to make ethical guidelines and protocols that are specific to particular projects and contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support grantees to go beyond ethical practice as a procedural issue. • Encourage reflection and peer-exchange on ethics at a network/program level. • Encourage grantees to manage expectations of the impact of research results. • Raise awareness among other funders about the ethical complexities of research in violent contexts. • Generate a set of ethical principles on researching violence that all grantees and IDRC could support. • Build on the knowledge and practices captured in this evaluation and develop learning cases to inform future work and capacity of grantees • Develop more robust and rigorous ethical practice across future programs by disseminating data on key practices

Gender Analysis	Assessment-based recommendations	Opportunities for Learning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage accountability in meeting commitments outlined in project proposal documents through on-going monitoring of gender analysis by program officers. • Invest more time in ensuring gender analysis is made concrete in research design from the inception of research projects. • Develop a strategy at the program level regarding how connections between gender and violence are communicated as research findings and policy recommendations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on whether learning on gender approaches from the projects is being effectively used. • Cultivate substantive discussions on the process of gender analysis and the integral nature of gender in research on violence at every level of the program. • Provide leadership and capacity building to incorporate analysis of the roles of men and masculinities in enabling equality and addressing violence. • Prioritise peer-learning opportunities to strengthen gender analysis within the research grantee cohort. • Within the research design, consider going beyond sex disaggregated data towards ensuring gendered dynamics are explored through qualitative research. • Challenge gender binaries in order to strengthen IDRC's position on gender analysis as cutting edge.
Cross-cutting	Opportunities for Learning	
IDRC's role in Network Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and encourage emerging activities and developments initiated by SAIC grantees. • Diversify opportunities for peer learning, and allow SAIC grantees to take the lead within these spaces. • As funding bodies situated in the Global North, critically consider IDRC and DFID's roles in the context of driving a South-South research network. • Be intentional about network building from the program's inception. • Establish network building fully as an indicator of program success. 	
Peer-oriented capacity development in SAIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elect thematic leads from within the grantee group for final communication projects. • Design a strategy for targeted, demand-driven capacity building activities within the SAIC program. • Collect baseline data on the capacities (strengths and weaknesses) of project grantees in future programs. • Develop strategies for enhancing intellectual leadership potentially through use of external advisors. 	
Program-Level Learning and knowledge synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a space where project grantees can share emerging findings to allow for program-level learning and synthesis. • Facilitate a process that involves project grantees in analysing research results of all projects. • Develop feedback loops for how emergent findings from SAIC could be fed back to others in the GSJ team and to other projects funded by IDRC and DFID. 	

1. Introduction

Safe and Inclusive Cities, jointly funded by Canada’s IDRC and the UK’s DFID, is a global research program that brings together leading researchers in order to understand the drivers of urban violence as they relate to poverty and inequalities and “what works – and what doesn’t – to reduce violence in urban centres.”² The program currently supports a diverse group of fifteen research teams across 16 countries and 40 cities in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Latin America.

The **primary objective of the Safe and Inclusive Cities program is to produce evidence on the linkages between violence, poverty, and inequalities in urban contexts of the Global South**, and to strategically position knowledge and tools to influence policy for violence prevention and reduction. The program was initiated in 2012 and is now halfway through its intended five-year cycle.

This report presents the findings and implications of a formative, mid-term evaluation of SAIC. It highlights lessons from the first-half of the program and makes recommendations about how the program can be strengthened. The evaluation has two purposes. First, it acts as an **accountability and assessment tool**, through evaluating the extent to which the SAIC program is on track to achieve its objectives, as measured in relation to the current SAIC logframe and Theory of Change. Second, the report highlights **opportunities for program learning** that could be considered in order to build an even stronger program in future. It is not intended for all learning opportunities to be implemented, but to open up possibilities for discussion and critical reflection, where IDRC, DFID and project grantees find them relevant. With both of these purposes at its core, the findings and consequent recommendations/opportunities are divided based on their contributions towards the assessment or further learning within the SAIC program.

This evaluation was driven by IDRC’s commitment to achieve research excellence within all funded programs.³ With this commitment, combined with IDRC’s philosophy that “evaluation should be strategic, not routine,”⁴ the Evaluation Team used a variety of methods in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the way SAIC operates. The evaluation combined qualitative methods (document review, key informant interviews, participant observation, an open-ended online survey and group discussions), with iterative analysis through on-going feedback from IDRC staff and research grantees.⁵ The process was grounded in a commitment to ethical practice – including informed consent, the right to anonymity for respondents, and an iterative and participatory approach to analysis with grantees and IDRC staff. Throughout the report, findings and examples have been cited anonymously.⁶

IDRC selected five thematic areas to be covered in this evaluation. These include program effectiveness, research quality, research uptake, ethical practice, and gender analysis. As the evaluation progressed, a sixth thematic area, ‘cross-cutting issues,’ was added. This encompasses emerging themes that have important implications for program learning. In practice, these six thematic areas often overlap, with program effectiveness incorporating many elements of the other five areas.

² IDRC, 2014 – Safe and Inclusive Cities, Request for Proposal document

³ IDRC, 2015 – “Why does research excellence matter?” <http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Programs/Evaluation/Pages/evaluating-excellence.aspx>

⁴ IDRC, 2015a – “Evaluation at IDRC” <http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Programs/Evaluation/Pages/Approach.aspx>

⁵ For a more detailed explanation of the methodology and its limitations, see Annex 1.

⁶ For example, “KII, IDRC1” refers to findings from “Key informant interview with IDRC staff member 1” while “MTW, PG5” refers to “Midterm Workshop interactions with project grantee 5. For a full list of primary citations used to inform the evaluation, see Annex 6.

The section on **program effectiveness** looks broadly at IDRC’s implementation of SAIC in relation to the planned purpose and objectives of the program. The section on **research quality** looks at the measures IDRC has put in place for achieving research excellence within the program, and to what extent they have been effective in generating high-quality data and analysis. The section on **research uptake** examines the extent to which the program has been successful in positioning research for uptake by targeted audiences. **Ethical practice** seeks to understand how standards of ethics and security have been communicated and applied by IDRC and the SAIC grantees – particularly in regards to vulnerable populations. **Gender analysis** examines the extent to which SAIC meaningfully promotes and advances analysis of the differential impacts of violence on men, women, girls and boys within the grantees’ projects and across the research cycle.

The sixth area, **Cross-cutting issues**, looks specifically at:

1. Strategies for peer-centred capacity building in SAIC,
2. IDRC’s role in defining and building network cohesiveness, and
3. Facilitating cross-program learning and knowledge synthesis.

In order to strengthen the SAIC program throughout the final phase, and particularly for the re-design of future programs, the Evaluation Team recommends a learning process that allows IDRC staff and grantees to reflect on these dimensions of the program as key opportunities for strengthening and broadening the current programmatic framework.

The evaluation highlights key differences in regards to experiences, skills, and institutional cultures of SAIC grantees. While some are more skilled in academic research, others are better positioned for research influence and uptake. In addition, while some have institutional and practical backgrounds that have sophisticated understandings of ethical practice, gender analysis and/or participatory methodologies, other teams may be less skilled in these domains. Indeed, the diversity of research backgrounds and skillsets is a strength of SAIC and these capacities can be leveraged for individual capacity-building purposes and for strengthening momentum towards achieving programmatic objectives. Section 3 examines these issues in greater detail.

The primary users of this report include IDRC and DFID staff members who will have an ongoing role in ensuring the program’s advancement over the remainder of the project timeline and in any programming that builds on SAIC. Some findings of this report will also be useful to a broader audience – including SAIC grantees and their networks, academics, practitioners, students, policymakers and donors interested in urban violence.

The next section of the report outlines the key findings and recommendations for all evaluation areas. At the start of each sub-section, a “traffic light” ranking system has been used to summarise our analysis of the extent to which implementation of the SAIC program is currently on track to achieve its planned objectives, in response to key evaluation questions and sub-questions.

Colour	Definition
	Meets or exceeds objectives. Minor areas for improvement.
	Meets some objectives, but significant areas for improvement.
	At risk of failing to meet objectives, major improvement required.

Throughout the report recommendations positioned in yellow boxes are directly associated with the primary evaluation questions being assessed based on current indicators. Opportunities for learning, positioned in green boxes, are linked to wider program learning and are not necessarily tied directly to the current objectives of SAIC. Blue boxes highlight examples of good practice within the SAIC program.

2. Findings and Recommendations

2.1 Program Effectiveness

Evaluation Question	Ranking	Explanation
<p>Thematic Question: How effective and appropriate has IDRC's implementation of the program been, relative to the purpose and objectives of the program?</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program is well-managed and the emerging research is generally of high academic quality. • The diverse range of projects spanning empirical, conceptual and programmatic research is enabling a comprehensive and cutting edge evidence base to be developed. • Substantive conceptual and theoretical contributions led from the global South are emerging within SAIC, including from cross-regional initiatives. • Areas for expansion within future initiatives that build on SAIC include looking at intersecting forms of inequality in relation to violence, and more contextualised and collaborative approaches to research uptake. • Ownership and commitment of the network-building and collaborative aspects of the program would be better supported by foregrounding these aspects in future calls for proposals.
<p>How could the call for proposals and other implementation processes be improved for greater effectiveness currently and in future?</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Call for Proposals process was generally well developed and implemented. • There were procedural points that could be improved, such as having an initial concept note stage.
<p>What role if any has IDRC's grant-plus model played in contributing to the program's effectiveness?</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substantive involvement of program officers has ensured meaningful inclusion of gender analysis and ethical practice in research programs. • Program officers with regional expertise are valued for their understanding of internal and external constraints, and for linking grantees to opportunities within local contexts. • Further work is needed to ensure consistency in the positive contribution of program officers, and how and why this is the case. • Evidence of over-reliance on a sole point of contact within IDRC for grantees.
<p>To what extent are the SAIC Logframe and M&E Strategy contributing to the program's effectiveness?</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are effective monitoring procedures in place to ensure accountability between grantees and IDRC. • The logframe could be revised to include more responsive indicators on capacity building, indicators for research uptake that take account of the different contexts for influence, and indicators that reflect the importance of quality of the network in the achievement of other program objectives. • The M&E strategy has been limited in its effectiveness by the lack of a comprehensive baseline at the outset of the program. • The M&E strategy could make a greater contribution to program effectiveness by strengthening the learning and feedback components in conjunction with grantees.

2.1.1. Key Findings for Program Effectiveness

The current SAIC program-level outputs are as follows:

- **Output 1:** New high-quality knowledge or analytical tools on the relationship between urban violence, poverty, and gender and other inequalities are generated and communicated to key stakeholders.
- **Output 2:** SAIC-funded researchers produce and communicate relevant evidence on the most effective strategies and interventions to reduce urban violence to key stakeholders
- **Output 3:** A multi-disciplinary urban violence research network supports knowledge exchange among researchers and research partners, particularly in the Global South, and fosters a new generation of specialists to engage in high-quality policy-relevant research.

Summary of Progress towards achieving SAIC Program Objectives

Our overall assessment of the implementation of SAIC is that **the program is on track to meet its overarching objective** to generate high-quality evidence that informs decision-makers, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners on the connections between violence, poverty and inequalities in urban areas, and the most effective strategies for promoting safe and inclusive cities.

The selection of a diverse portfolio of research projects (from those undertaking programmatic evaluations, to exploring the complexities of particular problems, to developing theoretical frameworks grounded in Southern knowledge) has contributed towards meeting this larger objective. The role of IDRC within the program has ensured that to date most **project grantees are achieving high levels of research excellence and have made steps towards meaningfully integrating ethical practice and gender analysis into research projects.**⁷

The SAIC program is well positioned to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between urban poverty and violence. Several external stakeholders emphasised that the SAIC program is at the forefront of research on urban violence in the global South (KII, KS1, 3, 4, 5). To ensure that the program achieves its three intended *outcomes* and *outputs*, it is critical that research communication and targeted influence are prioritised during the remaining years of the program, and that research results continue to be refined and articulated for their policy relevance.

Interactions with program stakeholders suggest that SAIC is administratively well managed by IDRC:

'It's not the absence of problems that marks out a good program, but dealing with them in the best way that shows how good the program is.' (KII, KS 1).

The design of the SAIC program and the approach to management and leadership within IDRC gives ample space for researchers to shape theoretical and conceptual frameworks at the project level. The review of project proposals and interim reports, as well as observations at the MTW revealed considerable emphasis on conceptual discussions of key thematic concepts – including 'social cohesion,' 'structural violence' and 'gender.' This suggests that SAIC research will be able to make substantive conceptual and theoretical claims and contributions to the field of research on urban violence, poverty and inequalities. **The strong empirical grounding of research in the global South is opening avenues for the development of theoretical and conceptual frameworks that will have deeper contextual relevance.** For example, in some cases, SAIC grantees are engaging critically with theoretical framings grounded in 'Northern' academic scholarship.

It is a notable achievement that **most of the lead organisations and institutions within the SAIC program are located in urban centres of the global South.** Most grantees are based at well-established academic institutions and the majority are well equipped to undertake high-quality academic research. In some cases, project grantees are very motivated to conduct policy-relevant and applied research, but for other teams, this is an area of weakness. For instance, the uncertainty faced by some teams in positioning research for policy uptake emerged prominently during a large-group discussion on Research Uptake at the MTW, as well as during Learning Case discussions (MTW; LC Team 9). This variance is likely due to program-wide variations in terms of the applied and policy-relevant nature of research, particularly within traditional academic institutions that do not always incentivise policy-relevant research. Indeed, several key informants pointed out regional variations in terms of the quality of tertiary education systems and the overall levels of research capacity within some contexts (KII, IDRC 5, 3).

⁷ This statement does not include research projects that are still at the fieldwork and analysis stages.

Although there is demonstrated progress at the grantee level, observations at the MTW and the learning cases revealed that there is an opportunity for building strong conceptual frameworks across SAIC project teams at a regional or program level. If the SAIC program is committed to generating new theories and strategies to reduce urban violence, then cross-comparative work at the program level could be further considered and supported. There is real potential within the SAIC program to find ways of challenging global knowledge hierarchies that often privilege research from the North.

External stakeholders identified some **areas where the portfolio of SAIC research could be expanded** in the future in order to strengthen knowledge and strategies for addressing urban violence. These include:

1. The role of young people in violence and how young people can be involved in violence prevention (KII, KS 5);
2. How to interrupt cycles of violence and how best to train police for citizen security (KII, KS 4);
3. Implications for the global North of findings from the global South (KII, KS 3); and
4. Co-constructed research with policymakers and practitioners (KII, KS 4).

Strengthening the Call for Proposals Process

Those closely involved in the Call for Proposals (CFP) process have noted its rigorous nature (KII, KS 1, 2, IDRC 5) and have linked this process to the high-quality research that is beginning to emerge from the program, for example:

'The selection process was very rigorous. There were a lot of proposals and so many were good that [funding was expanded]. The profile of the grantees is good and the quality of the research is very high.' (KII, KS 1).

Strengths of the CFP were **the extensive initial distribution of the call and the comprehensive peer-review process that followed proposal submission**. The CFP was sent to a contact list of over 1200 stakeholders. On the basis of our information, however, it was difficult for the Evaluation Team to assess the extent to which IDRC was able to target the most relevant and qualified applicant pool within this cohort. For example, we were unable to uncover much program activity on social media – either by project grantees or IDRC. Improving the use of social media in the future could extend the reach of calls for proposals to a wider set of possible actors that engage in innovative communication.

For some grantees, the work required to complete a high-quality proposal was extensive. Many grantees relayed that the proposal was 'standard,' given that they had previously received funding from IDRC. Several others reported that it was incredibly time and resource heavy. There is a trade-off in terms of the profile of applicants that will have the time and budgetary resources available to commit to developing an extensive proposal and smaller or more applied research organisations that struggle to complete such an extensive proposal. Key informants noted that **it would have been preferable to call for an initial 'expression of interest'** in order to reduce the burden on prospective grantees (KII, KS2) and reviewers. A carefully structured Expression of Interest stage in future calls could address this problem.

A major success of the call for proposals process was the quantity and quality of submitted applications from the research community. The enthusiastic response to the CFP led to IDRC doubling and DFID tripling their investments, funding fifteen projects rather than five or six. This decision enabled SAIC to evolve into a program where Southern-led global research and a knowledge network could grow. **However, this expansion of the number of projects led to major structural constraints for SAIC, including an under-resourced central coordinating team** (KII, IDRC 1, 3, 5). Our understanding is that other IDRC programs of a comparable size have one senior program coordinator and a communications officer in order to ensure capacity requirements are met. In SAIC this role is implemented by one person. Given the time constraints of this dual role, there are

trade-offs in terms of what can and cannot be accomplished. This has implications for other areas, including the time available for intellectual leadership and strategic program communications (KII, IDRC 1, 5).

IDRC's role in contributing to Program Effectiveness

IDRC provides not only funding to research projects but also technical support from decentralised program officers during the implementation of the project. Discussions with IDRC program officers and project grantees have defined this approach to include: knowledge sharing, capacity building, peer review, and an accountability relationship. Our assessment of IDRC's role, based on the document review, key informant interviews and direct observation at the MTW, **reveals the importance of IDRC's contributions and leadership towards achieving SAIC's objectives in many ways**. However, opportunities for learning could consider important questions around the nature of IDRC's role in achieving the ambitions of the SAIC program.

In some cases, the involvement of program officers within the program has been substantive. For example, some program officers have contributed significantly towards the integration of gender analysis, the implementation of ethical protocols, and the development of communications activities. Some projects attribute some of their achievements directly to IDRC's support, mainly via program officers and the program coordinator (KII PG2, 3; MTW PG 3, 4, 26 and 27). Some of the specific attributes that grantees appreciated from IDRC include:

- The research background of program officers and program coordinator;
- Program officers' regional expertise, their understanding of constraints and opportunities for institutional research excellence within a local context.
- Ability to communicate in local language of grantees;
- Detailed knowledge of relevant methodologies;
- Advice regarding the development of research uptake strategies and pushing to ensure that research is policy relevant.

In addition, some grantees also noted **that IDRC's flexibility has been important for allowing adaptation to changing circumstances and the successful delivery of the research** (KII, PG2; MTW PG26, 27, 28). This has included changes to methodologies, in research partners, and in reporting deadlines. While the contributions of some program officers were seen as positive (by both IDRC and the grantees) (KII PG2, 3 and PG9; MTW PG3, 4), in at least one case, the program officer was not seen as making a substantial contribution to project development, and even as hindering project success, from the perspective of the grantee (KII, PG1).

The role of program officers needs to be considered in relation to the diversity of grantees, with different relationships and contexts coming into play. Still, conversations with project grantees at the MTW and in key informant interviews revealed that both grantees and program officers do not always view this relationship as fully effective. **These findings suggest that it might be useful to specify expectations between grantees and program officers; and that there may be a danger in an over-reliance on a relationship with one contact person in IDRC, via a designated program officer.** If that relationship functions well, this is a positive factor in project success. If it is not functioning well, it leaves the grantee without clear recourse, particularly as the SAIC program coordinator also manages individual projects and does not have time to take on this role with all grantees.

Assessment of the 'grants-plus' model and research excellence

On the issue of **research excellence**, IDRC's 'grants-plus' model positions program officers to work to enhance research excellence in collaboration with grantees through providing technical advice and support (in most cases in the language of the grantee), facilitating peer review among grantees (e.g. through meetings between cross-regional research teams, sessions at MTW and Webinars) as well as supporting work towards conventional academic peer review through academic, peer-reviewed journals. However, there were areas of

disagreement across the project cohort regarding the extent to which this peer support role was recognised or valued at the project level; some, for example, felt that they did not need IDRC's technical input to ensure research quality (KII, PG5; LC Team 8 and 9).

SAIC Logframe and M&E Strategies for Improving Program Effectiveness

IDRC, in partnership with DFID, developed a logframe and theory of change for the management of the program, outlining short and long-term objectives, outputs, outcomes and indicators. A comprehensive review of the logframe and theory of change is outside of the agreed scope for this evaluation. However, on the basis of findings relative to the evaluation questions, we developed suggestions for improvements to output statements and some indicators (see Annex 2: Feedback on the SAIC logframe). The view of the Evaluation Team, based on a comparison between the overall data obtained about the program and a review of program documentation, is that **the three existing outcome statements are strong and seem to mostly capture what SAIC is trying to achieve**. This evaluation highlights some challenges in the ability of external evaluators and/or program staff to measuring some of the indicators. These are noted in Annex 2.

There are also some important areas of the program that are not adequately represented by the current logframe. Although there is an assessment of knowledge-exchange, **the logframe does not adequately take account of the importance of building a strong and cohesive Southern-driven network**.⁸ There are two reasons for this. First, there were not adequate resources (in terms of the budget and time at the IDRC level) to support the development of the network as the size of the program changed dramatically at the outset, although this also created the potential for a larger network component (KII, IDRC 1, 2, 5). Second, based on observations at the MTW, the issue of the nature of the network was not discussed with grantees from the outset of the program. This gap has likely influenced the program's theory of change and ways of working, as mechanisms for peer-learning could be substantially improved (see Section 3 on network cohesiveness). In the future, it is our view that IDRC/DFID could put more emphasis on network-building from the outset – including full inclusion both in the logframe through appropriate indicators and in the theory of change, and with adequate resources to support this component of the program. IDRC has taken advantage of funds gained through exchange rate variations to focus on network-building activities. While some funding for this element was included from the outset (funding for Inception Workshop, communications, closing workshop), network-building specific activities could have been stronger.

Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

A Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Strategy was developed for the project in 2013. Key informant interviews showed that the development of the M&E strategy was hampered by the initial increase in the size of the program as a result of the CFP process, and the resulting compressed timeline for launching the program (KII, IDRC 2 and assessment of M&E documentation from concept to practice). The unexpected program size increase and short timeline for program launch did not allow for adequate time to design and implement a strong M&E strategy concurrently with the start of the program. Key informant interviews also highlighted some tensions between perspectives in DFID and within IDRC about approaches to evaluation. The resulting strategy reflects a compromise between these different perspectives. Based on our observations at the MTW, key informant interviews and the document review, it is clear that there was limited opportunity to design and implement the M&E strategy, given the changes to the size of the program and the extent of the responsibilities of the program coordinator. IDRC staff were substantially involved in revising the M&E strategy and logframe, which was prepared by an external consultant. Additional M&E support from within IDRC to the SAIC program is advisory in nature (KII, IDRC2). As a result of all of these factors, the M&E strategy does not contribute as well as it could to the program's effectiveness.

⁸ See more information about suggestions to the logframe in Annex 1

The evaluation component of the strategy includes a baseline study, the current formative mid-term evaluation and a summative final evaluation. Monitoring is carried out primarily through written reports by grantees. While two grantees mentioned field visits by program officers, no documentation was provided in regards to the specific purpose or outcomes of these visits, and the topic did not emerge through key informant interviews with other grantees or IDRC staff (MTW, PG20, PG27).

The **baseline study** was a survey of existing research and knowledge in the fields of urban violence, inclusion and poverty. It is a useful document for program effectiveness as it provides a reference for the knowledge gaps that SAIC aims to address. However, it does not provide information that can be used to assess progress towards most of the indicators in the logframe, particularly those related to the capacity of the grantees to carry out high-quality, policy-relevant research. IDRC could consider a baseline study for future programs that provides detailed information about the ability and positioning for influence of project grantees. A program-specific baseline could be helpful in terms of informing priorities for program management, such as the areas covered by this evaluation (capacity building, network development, research quality, research uptake, gender analysis and ethical practice).

Reporting

The design of interim technical reports has a strong management or administrative emphasis. IDRC guidelines for drafting these reports stipulate that grantees should report on topics such as: change in scope of research/methodology, key findings and outputs, contributions towards capacity building, any need for change within the project to improve performance and activities planned during the next 6 months. The way in which projects perceive and use the interim reports varies across SAIC. In some projects the reports are used to provide mutual feedback (KII, PG2), while other grantees have experienced the reports as a one-sided effort to serve the purpose of accountability without on-going learning objectives or support for strengthening research quality (KII, PG1). Levels of support and feedback generally varied according to responsible program officer.

2.1.2 Recommendations and Opportunities for Strengthening Program Effectiveness

Recommendations based on the assessment of the Call for Proposal Process within SAIC

Provide links in the CFP document to IDRC's protocols (or useful resources) on gender, ethics, quality standards in research, and approaches to influencing (where available).

- The Call for Proposal document did not include links to IDRC's policies on gender, ethics and security and it was unclear for prospective applicants how to respond to these aspects. This was particularly disadvantageous for potential applicants who may not have existing institutional capacities within these domains.

Solicit further feedback on the ways in which IDRC program officers provide technical support to project grantees during the implementation of projects.

- This could involve a shift towards making suggestions that are more contextually relevant and within the scope of grantee's existing skills in some cases.

Communicate more clearly with prospective and current grantees about the nature of the 'grants-plus' approach, including in the CFP document.

- Specifically, more clarification is needed on the set of principles that underpin IDRC's emerging benchmark for "Research Excellence" (e.g. ethical practices, gender analysis and specific methodologies); the type of technical support provided; type of influence on research projects envisioned by IDRC; and peer review mechanisms to engage with research quality.

Strengthen the baseline study by including an assessment of project grantees' capacities for research uptake, gender analysis and ethical practice relative to the program's indicators.

- A baseline assessment of research skills and capacity building needs among research grantees could be a useful step in developing a consolidated supply-and-demand-based capacity-building strategy that facilitates peer learning between grantees. This could be based on four key learning areas of this evaluation: research quality, research uptake, ethical practice and gender analysis. This data could also inform strategic, peer-learning opportunities for network building, which could be particularly useful for some junior research staff.

Improve the monitoring and evaluation strategy by allowing for more time and resources for design of the strategy during the initial stages of the program.

Adjust the logframe to include qualitative indicators for measuring network cohesiveness and peer learning.

- If network building is considered an important tool for enhancing research excellence and theory building, logframe outputs and result statements should be adjusted to include qualitative indicators for these areas, while recognising the limited resources to support this. See Annex 2.

Learning Opportunities to Strengthen Program Effectiveness

Actively diversify the type of institutions funded and amount of funding available

- Consider grants of different sizes to allow for different methodological approaches, scales of collaboration, and a wider diversity of research organisations. This could include smaller organisations working more directly on applied research, and those working in partnership with government or other policymakers. Institutional reputation and past performance are good indicators for selection but are not always an adequate indicator for quality in current work.

Consider unsuccessful program applicants as a target audience for dissemination about program results

- There was a large body of unsuccessful applicants for SAIC. IDRC could involve unsuccessful applicants in the communication about the program's results.

Consider how to maintain the substantial contributions of program officers while also expanding the network of contacts between IDRC and the grantees.

- Peer relationships between project grantees will provide additional and alternative opportunities for mentoring and mutual learning. This means that IDRC staff can more effectively tailor their role to specific grantees.

Create a process for creating/agreeing a program approach in a collaborative manner with grantees.

- This will help to increase ownership and sense of partnership between IDRC and grantees instead of a top-down approach that may create conflict with IDRC aims such as building a Southern-led network.

Revise program reporting and monitoring to make space for more empowering and reflexive contributions.

- This includes encouraging the use of a reporting system for exchange and peer review purposes, in addition to its purpose as an accountability tool.

Create specific space in technical reports for reporting lessons that could be meaningful to other grantees.

- E.g. changes to and experiences with methodologies, sampling, analysis and other issues that IDRC seeks to enhance such as gender analysis and ethical practices. The review of current monitoring and reporting systems should build on positive examples already in use by some project grantees.

2.2. Research Quality

Evaluation Question	Ranking	Explanation
Thematic Question: How well have research quality mechanisms been established and applied in the program's first year of implementation?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IDRC's contextualised understanding of how to achieve research quality is important for grantees working in insecure, violent and complex contexts; there is a diversity of research approaches within the program, which shows that this is valued. IDRC's flexibility and openness within the research cycle has enabled adaptation and responsive research design, thus strengthening research quality. Project grantees value IDRC'S review mechanisms that emphasise learning and knowledge exchange in order to enhance quality; assessment for accountability should be situated in this learning relationship. Research quality mechanisms at the outset of research, such as proposal review, have played a key role in ensuring excellence. Multiple dimensions of research quality, including theoretical and applied aspects as well as ethics and gender analysis need strong support/investment from inception. Current peer review mechanisms enabling knowledge exchange between project grantees are valued but need to be strengthened and to focus on key elements of research quality. There is a bias towards academic peer review as a tool to assess research quality at the end of the project; mechanisms for assessing excellence need to be equally relevant to applied research projects, and used throughout the research cycle.
What are some examples of good practice?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>See examples under 2.2.1</i>
How could SAIC peer review mechanisms be strengthened?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>See Recommendations under 2.2.2</i>

2.2.1 Key Findings for Research Quality

IDRC's Role in Research Quality

Our review of IDRC documents shows that **IDRC has spent considerable effort developing its understanding of Research Excellence in the field of applied international development research.** IDRC uses the term 'research excellence' rather than 'research quality' to mark the need to go beyond traditional academic definitions of research quality as scientific merit, towards a broader concept that considers the potential and real impact of research. The diversity of research projects included in the SAIC program and the wide range of research designs and methodologies being used suggest that IDRC has a broad and flexible understanding of research quality, which allows for adaptation within specific contexts (Document Review – project approval documents, interim project reports).

Contextual relevance is an important aspect of how research excellence is articulated within IDRC.⁹ Given SAIC's emphasis on constructing knowledge on urban violence through research in repressive, violent and insecure contexts, **there are a number of practical challenges that teams have encountered during project implementation.** Often these challenges have demanded a revision of research design, including changes to methodologies. IDRC's flexibility and openness in this regard and commitment to understanding the context throughout the SAIC program has been appreciated by project grantees. From their perspective, this flexibility has enabled them to strengthen the overall quality of their research (KII, PG2 and 3). Grantees also valued

⁹ See Zenda Ofir and Thomas Schwandt (2012) [Understanding Research Excellence at IDRC](#). Ottawa: IDRC

IDRC's commitment to support high quality research on issues that are often poorly resourced, or censored, within their contexts (LC, Team 3).

Observations at the MTW as well as interviews with project grantees revealed that **there is significant diversity in definitions of 'Research Excellence' across the SAIC program**. 'Research quality' also does not have a single, universal definition within the program. There are multiple aspects to these definitions. From an assessment and accountability perspective, this evaluation has found that grantees, due to their different strengths and skillsets, may meet some criteria of 'research excellence,' but not others, and yet overall, can still be considered as being on a positive trajectory toward delivering 'research excellence'. Different understandings not only emerged between IDRC and grantees, but also between project grantees and among research partners working together. Project grantees suggested that these differences may arise due to different research backgrounds (theoretical versus applied research); language differences (using the same terms but attaching a different meaning to them); the varying social, economic and political conditions in the research sites; and varying institutional cultures to which research partners are accountable (KII, PG 1,2,3 and 9).

At the MTW, those grantees that used participatory and ethnographic methods extensively were also able to contribute to the discussions on ethical practice and gender analysis in a more sophisticated and nuanced way. This suggests a relationship between the incorporation of reflexive approaches (such as gender analysis and participatory research) and multi-dimensional understandings of research excellence. In the view of the Evaluation Team, **improving the approach to gender analysis and participatory research where relevant across the program is likely to strengthen research quality** and a deeper consideration of ethical issues.¹⁰

Highlighting Existing Best Practices for Research Quality in SAIC

- In Latin America, grantees have developed internal and external peer-review mechanisms to look at emerging research findings *academically*, but also to **create deliberate spaces for identifying key internal challenges as a research team seeking to produce high-quality, policy-relevant research**. (KII, PG2)
- African grantees noted the importance of **working with a diversely skilled research team** to take advantage of different skillsets for triangulating knowledge and producing high-quality, relevant research. (KII, PG3)
- In South Asia, SAIC grantees sought to **develop a deep understanding of unfamiliar local contexts through outreach and forums with key, local stakeholders**. This helped to identify gaps in the existing research framework and develop integral buy-in from the project's inception. (KII, PG1)
- Some Latin American grantees highlighted the importance of **frequent, reflexive dialogue with IDRC program officers who understand the local context and speak the same language**, to ensure they were on track to meet their objectives and produce high-quality, program-relevant research. (KII, PG2)

Peer review as a mechanism of learning and accountability at multiple levels

As mentioned in previous sections, **IDRC staff highlighted that external peer review during the application and revision process is an important tool to influence research quality at the outset**, and most grantees felt that this process contributed positively towards the development of their projects.

Throughout the research process, conventional peer review mechanisms seem to be important, particularly for research partners at universities that make up about 2/3 of the project grantee cohort. Indeed, peer review is an embedded part of most academic institutions and is often necessary for purposes of accountability

¹⁰See 'In-depth Learning Case 1' in Annex 3 for more information

to funders and fellow researchers (KII, PG2 and 9). In addition, many grantees found conventional peer review mechanisms to be of value due to their association with credible research results and increased capacity to influence local policymaking (KII, PG1).

However, the focus on *academic* peer review as a standard to assess research quality of projects does not necessarily leave space for reviewing applied and engaged research generated within the program and may structurally disadvantage some of the project grantee cohort in the assessment of achieved research quality. To support these projects further, measures to assess research quality in non-academic research projects could be developed and more clearly communicated with project grantees. Such forms of peer review could, for instance, incorporate the existing knowledge of local researchers, people within policy positions and/or local NGO practitioners involved in violence or poverty-reduction programming.

Alternative peer review mechanisms do exist within the program and IDRC should continue to recognise and nurture these processes. Three grantees have independently established alternative forms of peer review that appear to be working well (LC, Team 7 and 9). Existing mechanisms include cross-context peer study groups as well as interdisciplinary seminars to discuss emergent findings from the research process. Initiating and harnessing these spaces for dialogue and reflective practice facilitates multidimensional learning and triangulation within the research process. Project grantees engaging in these conversations outline that these spaces have strengthened their potential to produce highly relevant and rigorous research results (LC Team 7 and 9).

In addition to these emerging, independent review processes, there seems to be a substantial level of peer review in those research projects where different partners from different countries or cities are involved. These processes are seen to be contributing to the strengthening of research quality within trans-contextual projects.

Interviews with project grantees during and after the mid-term workshop found that opportunities for peer exchange are desirable and are perceived to enhance research quality within projects. In addition, they also allow for feedback and exchange around arising challenges both within the field at a conceptual level, including comments on research methods, conceptual framings, ethical challenges and analytical lenses (KII, PG1, 2, 3 and 9). Webinars were valued by project grantees in multiple regions as important platforms for engagement on issues and ideas emerging within the research process (KII, PG2 and 3). However, participants outlined that engagement between grantees was limited outside of these windows, suggesting that peer relationships for learning and development were not capitalised upon as fully as they might have been. (KII, PG 1, 2 and 3). While many project grantees have indicated their interest in contributing towards peer review mechanisms with other project teams, the capacity of grantees to commit more time to the project varies according to individual commitments within home institutions (KII, PG2 and 9). Similarly, further engagement in cross-project collaboration may also be limited by the availability of financial resources of research projects. Hence, the introduction of the SAIC Conference Participation Fund can be seen as a supporting step.¹¹

Project grantees and IDRC program staff highlighted that the Inception and Midterm Workshops were useful contributions towards achieving research excellence. However, these events might have been more effective if they had each been held earlier in the program cycle (KII, PG 1, 2 and 3). Capacity building sessions at the MTW around participatory research and gender analysis were outlined as interesting and informative by grantees. However, insight from these seminars was received too late in the research cycle to be meaningfully incorporated into research designs. Where engagement on these issues has happened at the outset (for instance, when catalysed by program officers), the successes and challenges have been better monitored over the project cycle (KII, IDRC 3).

¹¹ More detail about potential benefits of the new Conference Participation Fund can be found in Section 3

2.2.2 Recommendations and Opportunities for Strengthening Research Quality

Recommendations based on Assessment of Research Quality Mechanisms within the SAIC Program

Leverage support from program officers in the data analysis phase of the program, particularly in regards to analysing and interpreting data captured using participatory approaches.

- This is particularly important among research teams who may be relatively unfamiliar with participatory research approaches and in situations where the projects have to deal with ‘invisible’ populations and where participants are hesitant to discuss sensitive issues.

For the final assessment of research quality achieved by project grantees IDRC should develop a strategy that takes into account differential outcomes between academic and more applied research.

- This is important for addressing the current bias towards academic peer review as a standard to measure research quality. Moreover, IDRC is well placed to lead on this agenda within the donor community and to leverage the Centre’s institutional expertise, experience and commitment to applied research to do so.

In any programs that build on SAIC, IDRC should provide clear communication to project grantees on the intention and purpose of peer review and support mechanisms through the form of a ‘peer review strategy’ for research excellence.

- Feedback from grantees on this strategy, and revisions according to their priorities will ensure a useful approach. A balance needs to be achieved between bottom-up and organic forms of peer review, and external and more formal processes. Peer groups were suggested by a number of grantees as an effective way for exchanges and review between and across projects.

Opportunities for Learning and Reflection about how to Improve Research Quality within the SAIC Program:

IDRC could evolve the definition of research quality within SAIC even further by grounding the definition in the experiences of grantees working in different contexts (such as adverse political environment, etc).

- This reflection should be done together with project grantees to expand the aspects of research quality that they meet.

Consider identifying groups of project grantees that could provide peer review of research outputs for key elements of research quality and rigor.

- This could be part of an initial process of identifying networking strengths, and could be useful for ensuring the quality of research outputs.

Develop regionally-based mechanisms for peer review that support knowledge exchange and learning.

- Time zones and language groups should be considered to support cross-country peer review and knowledge-exchange mechanisms. Mechanisms should be inclusive of early career as well as experienced researchers to support capacity development. Given the value placed on these mechanisms by grantees, IDRC should ensure that these activities are well resourced within the institutional SAIC program budget, and carefully structured to maximise their effectiveness.

2.3. Research Uptake

Evaluation question	Ranking	Explanation
Thematic Question: To what extent have SAIC projects and the program put in place strategies and practices to position research for use by target audiences, such as influencing government policy or modifying practice by implementing agencies?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a well-articulated communication strategy at the program level, including a ‘situational analysis’ of program-level audiences. At the grantee level, no consistent evidence beyond the proposal stage of analysis of audiences (context analysis, etc.) was identified. • Some grantees have very strong communication skills while others are less well-positioned. • As the evaluators could not find evidence of documented communication strategies in the research projects examined, it is difficult to assess the practices in question. To support upcoming activities, IDRC may wish to explore mechanisms to improve and provide support for translating findings from grantees into different policy and practice spaces. See Learning Case: Research Uptake.
What are some examples of good practice?		<i>See examples highlighted under 2.3.1</i>
How could positioning for use be enhanced?		<i>See Recommendations under 2.3.2</i>

2.3.1 Key Findings for Research Uptake

External stakeholders, IDRC staff, and most grantees are generally optimistic about the prospects for SAIC research to influence policy and practice. Interviews with external stakeholders showed a high level of expectation that the program will produce relevant and important research (KII, KS1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

The evaluation finds that significant efforts have been made by IDRC staff to position the program globally and at regional and local levels where possible (KII, IDRC 6, 8, 10; MTW, IDRC4). Key informant interviews with grantees point to the importance of the IDRC program coordinator and program officers in this regard.

At the regional level there has been success with engagement between project grantees, their partners and regional stakeholders, particularly in Latin America (KII, IDRC 1). Similar dialogue and influencing opportunities are planned within other regions globally. In terms of strategies for enhancing research influence, an IDRC program officer and project grantees spoke of **the importance of relationship and alliance building throughout the research process to ensure uptake and influence.**

Emerging Good Practices for Research Uptake in SAIC

- IDRC has recognised the importance of developing capacity across the program for research uptake by offering a **Conference Participation Fund** to support travel for research dissemination.
- Some SAIC grantees in Africa are **engaging non-traditional influencers** (such as city police) as key knowledge holders in the data collection process, yielding the potential for research uptake and influence beyond formal policy-making spheres.
- In West Africa, **advisory groups of key stakeholders have been established** to contribute to research quality and to draw insights from emergent project findings, rather than waiting until project completion.
- In South Asia, researchers have pointed to the importance of **positioning research in the public domain** for ease of uptake by actors who do not have access to academic journal articles.
- In Africa, SAIC teams are **engaging directly with government decision-makers to understand shared aspirations for learning and action**, alongside opening up opportunities for thinking differently about policy objectives.

Program Capacity to Influence Research Uptake

Despite emerging initiatives and ongoing best practices, the Evaluation Team was not able to find strong instances of documented strategies for positioning research for uptake in all projects. The document review found that while program-level communications strategies are detailed and well considered, there is limited evidence to show how the strategies of individual projects connect with program-level strategies. In addition, it is difficult to determine to what extent project grantees have developed and followed through on their own communication strategies. While there was space in the call for proposals for grantees to outline a plan for research uptake, it is not clear to what extent each project has successfully developed this initial plan into a usable communications strategy, including a comprehensive stakeholder or context analysis that will enable strong positioning of the research for uptake.

In a similar vein, it seems that there is a disconnect between the noted indicators of the Logframe and the practical skill base of research teams. In the Call for Proposals document, 10% of the proposal's value was assigned to "capacity for research uptake." Since the success of the SAIC program as a whole relies heavily on projects' abilities to proactively pursue these opportunities, IDRC may want to reassess what level of resources should be earmarked for strengthening research uptake capacities.

Indeed, there appears to be some tension between the objective of the research program to generate 'applied and policy-relevant research', and the selection of grantees, of which more than two-thirds are from traditional academic universities. While some grantees do have strong track records of policy and practice-relevant research, others have significantly less experience in this regard. One IDRC staff member articulated that this issue is not unique to SAIC:

'At IDRC, we are asking researchers to do everything... to do all of this rigorous research, to get things published, to do all of their own dissemination, form partnerships... but their strength is in research. We want to change this model. We need to match the thought leaders with the influencers.' (MTW, IDRC 2)

At least one grantee confirmed that positioning research for influence and executing a communications strategy was an area of weakness in which capacity training and support from IDRC would be most helpful (KII, PG8).

Understanding Where and How Policy Change Happens

In the view of the evaluators, "policy" within research uptake refers to legal frameworks at all levels of government; and, the policies and practices of relevant government departments and agencies, bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies, applicable NGOs, organised social movements and any other relevant community-based organisations. In addition, we consider the mindsets and practices of people living in the cities studied by SAIC as part of the context that could be considered for policy change.

IDRC already operates with a broad definition of policy. Through this broader understanding of 'policy change,' IDRC could encourage a flexible, context-specific but strategic approach to research uptake that recognises a broad understanding of policy and practice. 'Policy' appears to be conceptualised differently by different grantees within the SAIC program. **Some grantees have very sophisticated and highly contextualised approaches to research uptake**, including integrating it into their research agenda (MTW PG14, 15, 16). However, during interviews and interactions at the MTW, most grantees tended to characterise 'policymakers' as national government representatives, and occasionally as local government representatives (KII, PG8; MTW, Policy Influence discussion). In contrast, IDRC's communication strategy for the program identifies a larger and more nuanced group of change makers that should be targeted for influence. **Some grantees are using a nuanced and broad definition of policy, while other grantees may need additional support to be able to do this well.**

Another important issue for the program to consider are the linkages and feedback loops between local and global levels of policy influence. Particular research teams work at different levels and have different priorities in terms of their approaches to influencing (MTW, PG12; LC, Team 9; KII, PG4). Some are well positioned to influence local municipal policy, while others are focusing on regional or global spaces (Observations from discussions at MTW). **It is a strength of the program that project grantees are positioning themselves across a range of policy levels and in relation to different domains of influence.** Indeed, it is important for IDRC to encourage a diverse array of opportunities for research uptake and policy influence. It is clear that IDRC does not expect all grantees to contribute to all facets of the program equally, and is sympathetic to contexts where direct policy influence is difficult. IDRC could look for opportunities to theorise and encourage alternative approaches to traditional forms of policy influence.

Towards the Development of Context-Specific Uptake Strategies

Observations at the MTW, KIIs with project grantees, and feedback from the online survey emphasise that engagement strategies need to be embedded in a deep understanding of local, socio-political realities. Otherwise, outreach strategies may risk becoming overly instrumental and irrelevant, especially in highly volatile and politicised contexts. **Project grantees highlighted that a deep, contextual analysis at the outset of the program, could assess where policy audiences are, and are not, open to influence** (KII, PG4; LC, Team9).

This evaluation also reveals that **researchers themselves have an important role in navigating complex political environments in order to achieve influence - including in contexts where progressive engagement with the state is almost impossible.** These complexities are highly contingent on the specific context and can generate risks to the researcher, to research participants, and potentially to policy-makers and practitioners (see section 2.4.1 on ethics). In one context, a local research team saw themselves as less powerful than international organisations in influencing domestic policy (MTW, PG14, 15). Elsewhere, projects were advised by government officials to suppress research results due to the political implications of the issue being raised (MTW, PG16). Another team reported that relationship building with the local government was difficult since SAIC researchers are seen as being at the forefront of social movements (MTW, PG22).¹²

Maximising the impact of SAIC research knowledge

Results from the evaluation's online survey indicated that **although many relevant stakeholders were aware of the SAIC program, they were generally not aware of any research or resources that had been disseminated by the program to date.**¹³ This is partly because of the stage of the research, as most grantees have not widely disseminated research results. Still, findings from this evaluation have highlighted a lack of attention among some grantees for positioning research in relation to policy and practice debates.

Key-informant interviews with external stakeholders, evidence from focus group discussions with project grantees, and current literature on best practice support the conclusion that **successful uptake of SAIC research relies on its relevance and accessibility for target audiences. Oftentimes, research is presented in a format that is too academic, too long and not translated into specific recommendations that are relevant for particular audiences** (KII, KS4, IDRC 5; MTW IDRC2).

In particular, the evaluation has highlighted a need to support formal mechanisms for making research accessible and usable to decision-makers (Online Survey; KII, KS3). Such views point to the need for more interactive approaches to communication and processes of 'translation' and 'bridging' for this to occur. 'Translation,' in this context, refers to languages, forms of knowledge, and the format of presentation of knowledge. Results from the evaluation's online survey indicated that 'policy briefs' would be the most desirable format to present results from the SAIC program, ahead of 'academic journals' and other formats.

¹² Other examples of this dilemma were given during the learning case discussion in Annex 3.

¹³ See Annex 5 for more results from the online survey.

Furthermore, interviews with external stakeholders pointed to the importance of translating findings from SAIC into formats that can be broadly accessible to city residents where research is conducted. **Some SAIC project grantees have approached this form of dissemination through participatory activities within the research process, and have suggested that the involvement of community groups is contributing to overall research influence while upholding ethical standards for research (KII, PG4; LC, Team 9).** Currently, IDRC's communication strategy document does not account for 'local communities' within the list of targeted audiences for research uptake. While acknowledging that the most effective dissemination of knowledge at this level would come from local research teams, there is an opportunity for **IDRC to play a more active role in supporting grantees to develop feedback strategies for communicating research findings and implications to those communities most affected by any potential outcomes of the research.**

2.3.2 Recommendations and Opportunities for Strengthening Research Uptake

Recommendations for Improving Research Uptake within the SAIC Program:

Develop tools for bridging between researchers and diverse stakeholders at project and program levels.

- This could be done in different ways depending on the grantee, context, and level of influence. At the program level, specific input could be channelled via communication 'mediators.' Formal, facilitated forums can also be organised to bring different languages/types of knowledge into dialogue. This should also include a consideration of how the research can be made more accessible to people in different audience groups.

Develop incentives and support processes to enable research teams to project their influence for achieving program objectives.

- There are incentives for many researchers to publish academically, but less attention has been given to how to position the research for influence and what kinds of outputs and resources this requires.

Focus on positioning research in the public domain, in addition to an emphasis on academic journals.

- If the intention of the program is to influence policymakers, research must be translated and disseminated in a way that is easily accessible to strategic change makers.

IDRC could encourage future project grantees to build research uptake strategies into research designs from the outset, to facilitate strategies tailored to local contexts.

- IDRC could provide additional guidance to help this happen. This should include a comprehensive analysis of potential conflicts/risks with regards to research uptake for researchers, participants and/or partners as well as a critical review of chosen research methodologies and ethical protocols in regards to implications for research uptake. This would be engaged and adapted throughout the research process, and research and policy engagement seen as iterative.

Opportunities for Learning about how to Improve Research Uptake:

Develop metrics to assess influence that are *learning oriented*, take into account the *position of the researcher/team*, distinguish between different *types of influence in the short and longer term*, and recognise the *non-linear nature of policy change*.

- For the remaining years of the program, IDRC should engage grantees in understanding their approach to influence. This must involve going beyond numbers, towards understanding the qualitative implications of choices made by researchers about how to position their research.

IDRC / DFID could revisit the type of institutions selected for the program and consider increasing the number of institutions that are directly involved in policy-making or service delivery.

- Consider greater weighting of this ability in the assessment of proposals, which currently only accounts for 10% of a proposal's value.
- Encourage research partnerships between diverse institutions (e.g. academic institutions partnering with institutions involved in policy-making/service delivery at different levels of intervention)

Once proposals have been approved, IDRC could work with grantees to develop a *comprehensive context analysis of their respective policy environments*, to inform a project uptake strategy. Importantly, in analysing the context, researchers need to ask themselves:

- Why is the research significant?
- What is the potential for impact?
- What processes will be engaged within the research in order to achieve that impact? And
- How might this change over the life cycle of the project?

Capacity building efforts within research projects (training of field workers or students, communication capacity for senior academics, etc.) could be recognised as an important dimension of research uptake.

2.4. Ethical Practice

Evaluation question	Ranking	Explanation
Thematic Question: How successfully are SAIC grantees applying acceptable research ethics and security practice in the implementation of their research projects?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAIC grantees show a meaningful commitment to ethical practice in research supported by ethics and security protocols, institutional policies and reflective practice throughout the research cycle. While some space was created for a discussion of ethics during the MTW, IDRC could continue to offer opportunities to discuss and overcome ethical challenges within the research process both within projects and across contexts to share strategies and perspectives. Further support is needed to encourage grantees to go beyond ethical practice as a procedural issue, towards substantive, open engagement with ethics as a set of principles. These are established from the outset of research, and engaged reflexively throughout in a way that supports the raising of difficult issues.
What are some samples of best practice? What should be avoided?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See examples of best practice highlighted in 2.4.1 See Recommendations in section 2.4.2 See Learning Case on Ethical Practice
How should the particular needs of vulnerable groups be taken into consideration by SAIC projects or the program?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAIC grantees recognise the significance of researching the issues that affect the most marginalised with a view to impacting the violence in their lives. There are ethical considerations in how to communicate research findings that make visible marginalised groups, which can potentially increase levels of risk. For most grantees, the extent to which vulnerable groups are positioned as agents of change within the research process is unclear. Researchers need to treat informed consent as an ongoing negotiation with marginalised groups whose contexts may change and their involvement in the research may cause them harm. At present, informed consent tends to be a procedural issue that occurs on initial interaction with participants.
How can ethical research practice in SAIC be strengthened?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See Recommendations in section 2.4.2 See Learning Case on Ethical Practice

2.4.1. Key Findings for Ethical Practice

Approaches to ethical practice vary widely across the program. Some grantees have engaged substantially in reflection, analysis and articulation of ethical practice within their own research and/or within their own institutions. This has led to the creation of new ethics protocols and procedures in some institutions.

The role of IDRC in supporting ethical practice

The IDRC has established important tools to assess and mitigate risks by requiring all project teams to create and submit Security and Ethics protocols. IDRC uses guidelines produced by the Tri-Council Policy Statement on research ethics in Canada, which provide comprehensive guidance on a diverse set of ethical issues, but are not related to the role of violence in research specifically. In general, the format for research grantees' ethical protocols tended to be aligned with the requirements and existing practices of the research teams' respective institutions, which range from those using the medical model of research with human subjects to social science specific review boards in academic institutions to no institutional capacity for ethical review (KII, PG 17, 18, 18; KII IDRC 1; and MTW, IDRC 9).

Where grantees were not able to access an institutional review board (IRB), IDRC ethical practice review and protocols played a critical role in mitigating risk. In one example, an IDRC program officer supported grantees to both establish a relevant social science research ethics committee for the project and develop strong ethical protocols to be reviewed (KII, PG 18 and 19; KII, IDRC 1; MTW, PG 9). This protocol was then used as an accountability tool for ethical practice between researchers within the institution. However, the relevance of

IRBs was questioned where ethical judgements may be made by review boards without a deep understanding of the complexities of the research approach and context (KII, IDRC 5; MTW 29 and 30).

The position and role of donors was discussed in relation to ethical practice at the MTW, specifically in relation to data management and conditions of informed consent (KII, KS1; MTW OSD). IDRC highlighted the importance of donors and governments dialoguing on these issues to raise consciousness of ethical practice and protection of privacy and anonymity; there is a need for an enhanced sense of responsibility if donors are to fund work in these settings (MTW OSD). Researchers themselves have a role as gatekeeper in the ethics of this donor relationship, and have to be accountable (MTW, Advisor 1). Another important aspect is the risk posed to donors supporting SAIC. IDRC has proactively sought legal counsel regarding the reputational risk to the institution based on each project, but the evaluation is not positioned to assess the effectiveness of this process (KII, IDRC 2).

Highlighting Existing Best Practices for Ethics in SAIC

- **Dialogue with national and local actors to assess risks to both participants and researchers.** One project grantee highlighted the importance of being situation-sensitive when moving between different localities. For example, due to the role of city councils in political persecution, field sites had to be changed completely due to a negative response from the government. In the face of this negative reaction, the *research team assessed risks to participants as well as the risk of blocking policy-influencing opportunities* with this key government actor (LC, Team 8).
- **Choose research methodologies not only for their data-collecting potential, but also for their ethical value.** Some SAIC grantees have made a methodological choice based on ethical as well data-generation criteria. In longitudinal research, the notion of maintaining relationships over time with transient and marginalised communities in unstable environments poses challenges to the ethics of the research process, as it would entail recording a certain level of personal information that may put respondents at risk (KII, PG 6 and 7). Similarly, there are ethical considerations in participatory research relating to the control of information generated, and in quantitative research around informed consent.
- **Consider the importance of culturally-contextualised and gender-sensitive relationship building throughout the research process. This allows for more ethical arrangements with gatekeepers, sensitivity to local issues, and more accurate analysis accounting for contextual factors.** In one project, differentiated strategies were proposed for referring people living with trauma and other symptoms of violence to access the project grantee organisation's support services and claim entitlements from government providers (MTW, PG2; and LC, Team 9).
- **Consider the risks involved in research communication.** As one project grantee explained, risks may emerge through the research process and new ethical issues may be brought to light. Further negotiation around the communication of research and how this will impact the people involved is important for maintaining a high standard of ethical practice (MTW, PG15).

Mechanisms for ethical practice

Seeking Informed Consent:

Most research teams reported in their ethics protocols that they would follow a system of informed consent. **The majority of ethics protocols included the informed written consent forms that they would use, while in some instances oral consent was proposed.** Further clarity of the process behind this decision-making could be articulated in the protocols. Other project grantees emphasised the importance of indigenous and local languages in the consent process. **A review of the ethical protocols shows that many do not take account of**

on-going consent seeking. This is an issue in participatory and in some qualitative forms of research, where research should be treated as an on-going negotiation—particularly as research results become available and the communication of these results can raise new forms of risk.¹⁴

Data Protection:

While most of the ethics protocols suggest that collected information will be kept ‘confidential,’ the majority fail to mention what mechanisms will be in place to ensure that this happens. Follow up and further reflection among grantees may help to mainstream effective data-protection tools, particularly in repressive contexts where risk of violent backlash is high.

Training of Field Staff:

Building the capacity of community researchers, early career researchers and overall research teams in regards to ethical practice was identified as important by a number of grantees (KII, PGs 5, 6 and 7). Thinking about principles of harm and consent is more challenging when applied to practical situations but training enables knowledge of important elements, which have to be considered where researchers are faced with some sort of research difficulty or barrier. There was some discussion about this topic during the MTW.

Transparency in Ethical Practice:

Project grantees and IDRC program staff spoke of the lack of ethical issues being communicated from the grassroots level through the project grantee institutions, and outwardly to IDRC program officers (KII, IDRC 1; KII, PG 18, 19). This may be because of the grounded and iterative approach organisations have taken to ethical practice whereby local teams resolve emerging challenges as they develop and so these are not communicated further. However, it may also be due to a tendency towards pleasing the donor, and/or overlooking ethical issues in favour of meeting research goals and timelines. **There is an opportunity for IDRC to encourage grantees and researchers at the community level to raise ethical issues and navigate them collectively, with other SAIC teams, and to encourage openness about ethical challenges in the research process. Creating a space for researchers to reflect on how they are being impacted by these issues themselves is another important component of an ethical research process** (MTW, OSD). Where this has happened in individual research teams in the form of ‘study’ or ‘reflection’ groups, there has been a significant contribution towards successfully navigating these complex issues (LC, Team 9).

Treating Ethical Practice as an Evolving Process:

Ethical practice should be composed of flexible principles that are not rigidly established at the beginning, but evolve with the research. **A number of SAIC grantees spoke of IDRC’s flexibility on the design of the ethics protocol as necessary for research on violence and in violent contexts** (KII, PG 6 and 7; LC, Team 3). The allowances that IDRC was able to make within ethical protocols to ensure that they are contextually relevant and not simply satisfying donor needs were of significant value to project grantees. For IDRC, spaces of engagement – such as funders’ networks – can support knowledge sharing on this issue.

Safeguarding marginalised and vulnerable groups in research

There is an opportunity within SAIC to enhance the consideration of the needs of vulnerable groups in research on urban violence. **The specificities of working with vulnerable groups has come up as a challenge in several research projects and discussions with projects grantees have revealed a high level of awareness for such issues, providing an important platform to build from.** Research findings in a context of urban violence can be used by others in negative ways, to marginalise, exclude or repress. Furthermore, when research processes imply some positive change for vulnerable and marginalised groups but deliver nothing beyond the data collection process, the result can be disempowering for those involved (LC, Team 9; KII, PG 5). There is a particular risk for research with victims of violence when researchers are neither equipped nor supported to

¹⁴ See Annex 3, Learning Case on Ethical Practice for more information.

deal with traumatic, inter-personal effects of violence which are common in these cases (MTW, PG1, 2). During a breakout session on gender at the MTW, a researcher recounted her emotional response to a respondent's personal story of violence (MTW, PG 15). Anonymity for research participants and researchers cannot always be ensured, leading to risk of (re)victimisation, exposure and/or backlash. The power to ensure the confidentiality of research participants can be challenged by the interests of donors, or state/security systems whose authority may be questioned by research findings (MTW, Advisor 1). Given the complexity and power dynamics of these challenges for vulnerable groups, they are discussed and implications explored in the Learning Case on Ethical Practice.

2.4.2. Recommendations and Opportunities for Strengthening Ethical Practice

Recommendations based on the assessment of Ethical Practice within SAIC:

Develop protocols for follow-up reporting around ethical practice in different stages of research.

- IDRC's current template for Interim Technical Reports does not include dedicated space for reflection about ethical practice and this could be explicitly sought.

Program officers could dialogue with research teams on the ethics of research communication.

- They should work to ensure that ethical practice is encouraged during the analysis, writing, and dissemination of final research products. IDRC should also consider this within communications outputs being developed at the regional and global level. This is important for vulnerable groups whose positions have not yet been raised significantly in discussions of ethical practice.

Continue to make ethical guidelines and protocols that are specific to particular projects and contexts.

- IDRC may wish to consider developing a flexible ethics and security template, particularly for those institutions that do not have existing protocols in place. This could be a valuable capacity-building opportunity, in which grantees that have created new ethics protocols or institutional mechanisms could share their experience with other grantees interested in a similar step.

Opportunities to support reflection and learning on Ethical Practice within SAIC and future programs

Support grantees to go beyond ethical practice as a procedural issue.

- There is space for substantive engagement with ethics as a set of principles established from the outset of research, and engaged critically and reflexively throughout the research process.

Encourage reflection and peer-exchange on ethics at a network/program level.

- Going forward, IDRC could strive to develop a culture of openness around ethical discussions, in order to create a safe space for research teams to express ethical dilemmas that have arisen during their projects. This could result in valuable learning opportunities for other SAIC grantees experiencing similar issues.

Encourage grantees to manage expectations of the impact of research results.

- This issue was raised specifically in relation to research on programmatic interventions, which deserves special attention from an ethical perspective. In general, IDRC staff and SAIC grantees emphasised the importance of feeding back to the people involved in the research as a means of contributing to social change (MTW observations, ethical protocols). However, the extent to

which this process is empowering for the communities involved is predominantly emphasised in projects with a participatory and action-oriented research focus.

Raise awareness among other funders about the ethical complexities of research in violent contexts.

- There is an opportunity for IDRC to be a leader in pressing for sound ethics in research on urban violence by sharing best practices and learning arising from the program.

Generate a set of ethical principles on researching violence that all grantees and IDRC could support.

- These would not be exhaustive, but indicative at the level of the program as a whole, and signal an intention by the program to give ethical practice its collective attention. This process would help make explicit areas of agreement and disagreement with relation to ethical principles. A collaborative approach to generating these principles from the outset of the program could allow for meaningful peer learning and debate about appropriate practices in various contexts.

Build on the knowledge and practices captured in this evaluation and develop learning cases to inform future work and capacity of grantees (and researchers more widely).

- The ethics of researching violent contexts is of critical concern for social science researchers.

Develop more robust and rigorous ethical practice across the future programs by disseminating data on:

- Consent-seeking in different contexts based on research methods/participant
- Differentiating types of risks for different groups such as senior and junior researchers, research respondents and participants, SAIC donors, host institutions, etc.
- Guidelines for storing sensitive information safely, to minimise risk

2.5 Gender Analysis

Evaluation Question	Ranking	Explanation
Thematic Question: How successful have the SAIC program and project grantees been in integrating meaningful gender analysis into the design, implementation and communication of research?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IDRC’s positioning of gender analysis as integral to research excellence on urban violence, and mechanisms of accountability for SAIC grantees on this issue have been embedded throughout the program. • Three studies with a core gender-focus are effectively and innovatively integrating gender into research. • Knowledge on approaches to and practices of gender analysis is not shared and captured within SAIC and further support is needed to translate knowledge from IDRC and gender research projects to the wider cohort • Capacity building on gender analysis needs to be integrated from the outset of the project. • Project grantees asserted the importance of ensuring gendered dynamics are explored through qualitative research, which draws out the specificities of men’s and women’s gendered experience. Some of the projects have implemented such an approach.
To what extent does gender differentiated analysis at the project and program level include men and masculinities?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues of urban violence in relation to gender identity and masculinities are explored in specific projects, notably those showing leadership on gender analysis. • Urban violence and constructions of male identity are explored in many projects but not necessarily analysed in relation to gender, or named explicitly. • Analysis of gender identity could be extended, within future programs, to explore issues of sexual orientation and violence as a form of social control. • In communicating findings, grantees need clarity on how to articulate findings from gender analysis, including those on masculinity and gender identity. Further analysis of issues in relation to masculinity is possible across a large proportion of the cohort, this can be supported by those leading in this field.
How can gender analysis in SAIC be strengthened?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Recommendations under 2.5.2 • See Learning case: Gender Analysis

2.5.1 Key Findings for Gender Analysis

IDRC’s role in gender analysis

The analysis of gender within the SAIC program is positioned by IDRC as integral in exploring the links between urban violence, poverty and inequality, and this commitment is reflected in program and project-level discourse and practice in multiple and interconnected ways. As one IDRC program officer outlined:

‘We have a very strong interest and we see also the very deep need in all of the regions to work against gender violence and all different forms of gender violence against women, especially sexual violence... it has been a very conscious decision, to make this as important as it is, it should go beyond this disaggregation of data. It should be like really trying to contribute to the empowerment of women and girls.... Also to contribute to the thinking of new masculinities.’

(KII, IDRC 5)

The theory of change frames this position in that gender analysis should be an aim for all projects, as Output 1 highlights: ‘New high quality knowledge or analytical tools on the relationship between urban violence, poverty, and gender and other inequalities are generated and communicated to key stake-holders’. This is mirrored in one of four key objectives of the program.

At the program level gender equality is effectively conceptualised, with IDRC program staff articulating a socially-constructed and relational position that acknowledges different social hierarchies and experiences of men and women within the intersections of social class, age, race (MTW, IDRC 1 and 5).

There is strong capacity on gender within the IDRC team, as historically, some program officers were involved in IDRC's program on women's rights and citizenship, among other gender-focused initiatives (KII, IDRC 1 and 5). **Program officers therefore have an in-depth knowledge of and commitment to gender analysis in research, and so draw from this in supporting the approach in the program** (KII, IDRC 3). Core components of gender analysis expressed by different program officers were that: gender must be considered throughout the research process, methodologies include the use of sex-disaggregated data and qualitative data to supplement this, definition of target groups should not treat men, women and children as homogenous groups (KII, IDRC 1, 3 and 5). IDRC program officers express that gender-based analysis in research challenges the assumption that men and women have the same needs and priorities or that policies and programs affect people in the same way (MTW, IDRC 1 and 5).

However, our review of IDRC documentation and discussion with program officers highlights that this **knowledge on gender, or approaches to gender analysis within the project grantee body is not captured and shared in a way that could be made accessible to researchers across the SAIC cohort**. This would be valuable as the diversity of approaches to gender analysis within the program could usefully connect to the different positions and approaches of SAIC grantees. Based on the observations of the Evaluation Team and perspectives of IDRC staff limited space for sharing and exchange between program officers is specifically carved out to discuss the approach to, and challenges/opportunities in, gender analysis and emergent issues (such as gender-based violence, and constructions of gender identity) that each is facing (KII, IDRC 3).

IDRC has made good efforts to meaningfully integrate gender analysis into research cycles. The intention for strong gender analysis was a specific requirement in the call for proposals and was a criterion for assessment. Proposals were assessed on their relevance to determining the impacts of violence on: women and girls' victimisation; agency and empowerment; as well as the disaggregation of data by sex. In terms of proposal review, although there was strong expertise within the IDRC review team this knowledge was limited in the group of external peer reviewers, with a particular gap in the field of men and masculinities (review of documentation on call for proposals and KII, IDRC 3). The call for proposals also highlighted gender-sensitivity as an important marker for capacity building within the projects. An IDRC program officer outlined that although gender analysis is established as 'intent' in the call for proposals, this was not a strong criterion and the input from project grantees was not detailed (KII, IDRC 3). Program officers have therefore played an important role in ensuring that this could be concretised within fieldwork (KII, IDRC 1 and 3; MTW, PG3 and 4).

Tools have been established within SAIC to hold program grantees to account on gender analysis. A number of projects have directly responded to programmatic priorities for strengthening gender analysis and relate this to the support that has been given by program officers as well as the continued emphasis on gender in exploring urban violence coming from SAIC centrally (LC, Team 9; MTW, PG7, 8 and 9). **Continued efforts by program officers to bring gender analysis into projects throughout the research cycle has been an effective way to ensure gender analysis in research projects** and some groups have been able to strengthen their gender analysis even if this has been later in the program (MTW, PG3 and 4; KII, IDRC 1 and 3), thus meeting capacity-building objectives. The contribution here enabled researchers to go beyond quantitative analysis to an in-depth exploration of power dynamics and how men and women benefit differently in relation to crime.

In program monitoring, how the project is 'advancing understanding of gender dynamics in relation to urban violence' is **emphasised in the interim technical reporting process, which opens up the space for engagement on this issue by project grantees**. In practice, however, many of the projects did not follow the interim technical reporting templates, and many failed to discuss how a gendered approach has been integrated into

their projects. Learning loops between program grantees and IDRC can also provide an opportunity for bottom-up learning on gender-analysis which can inform the way that the issue is approached with the wider grantee cohort in a way that is sensitive to both those that are supportive and sceptical of gender analysis.

Deepening Gender Analysis: Opportunities to Learn from SAIC

Methodologically there is a minimum commitment to collecting sex disaggregated data in studies, allowing for gender differences and inequalities to be identified and addressed (review of proposal documentation; KII, IDRC 1). There is a diversity of approaches and interest in gender analysis within the cohort, and the commitment to gender disaggregated data provides a good milestone for all projects, as well as an important contribution to this new body of evidence on the relationship between urban violence, poverty, and gender. Exploring men's and women's experiences with violence through qualitative methods has been emphasised as critical for increasing understanding about the context in which violence takes place, and identifying responses to violence and gaps in service provision (MTW, PG15 20, 21, 22, 23 and MTW, Advisor 1). **Some project grantees asserted the importance of ensuring gendered dynamics are explored through qualitative research which draws out the specificities of men's and women's gendered experience,** sociocultural and historical influences, and enables learning on the construction of masculinity and femininity and expressions of power, control and forms of violence (MTW gender analysis questionnaires, and MTW, PG20, 21).

Issues of urban violence in relation to gender identity and masculinities are explored in specific projects, notably those projects that take gender analysis as their starting point. The way in which urban violence relies on multiple constructions of male identity is explored in many of the projects, but is not necessarily analysed in relation to gender, or named explicitly (Review of documentation and observations at MTW). Moving forward, further support to projects to engage in the discussion of these issues within programmatic learning and with external policy and practice stakeholders is important for strengthening future engagement on these issues within the project grantee cohort, as well as contributing to the wider field.

During the MTW, project grantees opened up a discussion on constructions of gender identities, marginalisation and how people with non-normative gender identities experience urban violence. How the voices of particular groups are privileged in gender analysis and how marginality is considered were also discussed. There is scope for this conversation to be expanded and engagement on the complex issues of intersecting inequalities – sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, gender – and cycles of violence to be explored in relation to urban contexts.

A review of interim reports and observations at the MTW revealed that there is significant variance within the SAIC research project cohort in how and whether gender analysis is meaningfully applied in practice. As one grantee notes, where other entry points are foregrounded in research and/or where project grantees have less experience of gender analysis, there is a risk that personal assumptions about gender norms and identity reinforce gender binaries and stereotypes (KII, PG 8). In some projects there may also be a risk of reinforcing dynamics of exclusion and power inequalities at the local level, for example where research teams were gender blind in their choosing their team members or research approach (KII, IDRC 3, and MTW gender based analysis questionnaires). Projects within the cohort that are specifically focused on gender have highlighted that in their gender analysis they take a self-reflexive approach to critically assess their own gendered position within the research (MTW, PG14). This is an example of where principles and approaches of gender analysis could be shared across the SAIC projects to support continuous reflection and learning which is an aspiration of many grantees (observations at MTW session on gender). Intersections between gender inequality and inequality based on age, class, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and (dis)ability need to be further recognised and incorporated into gendered strategies and approaches in order to ensure deep and meaningful gender analysis.

Project grantee ownership of the gender agenda

The level to which ownership of the gender agenda across SAIC grantees could be achieved may need further

reflection. In an IDRC consultative survey, project grantees highlighted that gender analysis was a priority area for the MTW. This shows positive engagement; however, it is unclear whether this is an internalised commitment to/ownership of the gender agenda, or whether they feel it is an important assessment criterion for IDRC and so are engaging in a more instrumental way.

Peer learning between project grantees is identified as an important mechanism through which knowledge on gender analysis can be shared, project approaches strengthened and collaborations for research communication established. There are projects that have been purposefully selected because of their strong gender focus and IDRC program officers explained in interviews that it was envisaged that peer learning on gender analysis could support the process of exchange between participants. This approach is supported by feedback from project grantees that discussions on gender analysis were strengthened by international diversity – of background and experiences – at the MTW. **Project grantees expressed a demand for more meaningful sharing of ideas and exchange between those with deeper understanding of gender analysis with those with less experience** (MTW gender based analysis questionnaires). Although space was provided within webinars for this, it is the one-to-one and face-to-face exchanges that proved particularly valuable and these were limited in number (due to resource constraints) and found to be too late in the process (KII, PG1; MTW gender based analysis session observations). More exchange between project grantees at an early stage would help to critically engage with how and why gender analysis is important in addressing violence, strengthening project approaches and opportunities for collaboration (MTW, PG 21, MTW gender-based analysis questionnaires).

Conversations with SAIC grantees and observations at the MTW highlighted that grantees less confident and familiar with gender analysis lack clarity on how to effectively present gender analysis in research communication. Gender analysis in research is linked to differential outcomes for men, women, boys and girls and the communication of research for policy influence and research impact can directly affect these outcomes. **The extent to which IDRC staff and SAIC peers are working with and across projects on ensuring that gender analysis is reflected in research findings is an important area for the remaining period of the research projects.** This will help mitigate against project findings being communicated as gender-blind which is a risk if grantees have not taken ownership of gender analysis within their projects. Project grantees leading gender-focused projects have outlined the importance of considering gender in translating findings into different policy audiences, which complements IDRC's vision for the SAIC program and are developing ideas for writing cross-context briefing papers highlighting gender issues in their research (MTW, gender small group).

2.5.2 Recommendations and Opportunities for Strengthening Gender Analysis

Recommendations based on the assessment of Gender Analysis within SAIC

Program officers should encourage accountability in meeting commitments outlined in project proposal documents through on-going monitoring of gender analysis.

- In particular, in the remaining years of the initiative, accountability on gender-analysis is integral in the communication of research findings if the process is to have been meaningful. Tools such as interim reports could be reviewed in their effectiveness to help in these processes.

Invest more time in ensuring gender analysis is made concrete in research design from project inception.

- Although this was the case for some projects, a number were not able to adapt their approach when they had more support later in the program cycle, for example at the MTW.

Develop a strategy at the program level to support how connections between gender and violence are communicated as research findings and policy recommendations.

- This should support project grantees in their own presentations of findings and articulate how learning across the program on key gender dimensions from structural to interpersonal levels can make significant contributions in understanding and addressing urban violence.

Opportunities to support reflection and learning on Gender Analysis within SAIC and future programs

Reflect on whether learning on gender approaches from the projects is being effectively used.

- There are limited learning loops between projects and the SAIC program. There is an opportunity to consider how these lessons can contribute to knowledge sharing across SAIC as well as influencing IDRC's organisational thinking and policies on gender.

Cultivate substantive discussions on the process of gender analysis and the integral nature of gender in research on violence at every level of the program.

- I.e.: between program officers, learning across project grantees, and also between grantee and program officers. This is important for capacity building opportunities and to provide space to systematise and share knowledge.

Provide leadership and capacity building to incorporate analysis of the roles of men and masculinities in enabling equality and addressing violence.

- Supporting projects to engage in discussions for programmatic learning and with external policy and practice stakeholders is an opportunity for strengthening future engagement on these issues among grantees, as well as contributing to the wider field. In the longer term, IDRC should consider how to strengthen gender expertise on men and masculinities within SAIC and the CFP review team.

Reflect on the extent to which projects go beyond collecting sex disaggregated data towards ensuring that gender dynamics are meaningfully explored through qualitative research.

- Where relevant and appropriate, findings and methods should seek to draw out the detailed specificities of men and women's gendered experience which will help to ensure the integrity of a gendered approach for research on urban violence.

Challenge gender binaries in order to strengthen IDRC's position on gender analysis as cutting edge.

- This should include dissection of gendered stereotypes in different contexts and engaging in intersectional and relational interpretations.

3. Cross-Cutting Programmatic Issues

This section of the report moves beyond evaluation for assessment and accountability, towards iterative and emergent learning that seeks to identify opportunities to further articulate, strengthen and build upon the current work and strategies of the SAIC program. The Evaluation Team recommends that IDRC reflect upon the three emerging areas presented below, and consider the presented recommendations for including these themes in the current and any follow-on programs. In particular, these three topics highlight the need for IDRC to reflect on the nature of their role in facilitating the SAIC program and the implications of this role for overall program effectiveness. These issues, and corresponding questions for reflection include:

1. **IDRC's Role in defining and building a global research network**
 - a. What does network-building look like within the network and how might it be reconceptualised to more effectively contribute to program effectiveness?
 - b. What role should IDRC play in driving a network-building process?
 - c. How should network building and performance be measured?

2. **Developing strategies for peer-centred capacity development in SAIC**
 - a. How can IDRC support a research network that supports the capacity building of members through peer learning?
 - b. What skills already exist among grantees that can be leveraged for peer learning?
 - c. What forums are most suitable for capacity building activities? What resources are required for their success?
 - d. How can capacity building efforts move beyond SAIC grantees, towards benefitting junior and community researchers at the project level?¹⁵

3. **Facilitating cross-program learning and knowledge synthesis**
 - a. What channels are in place for translating knowledge from the project to program level, and synthesising results for wider policy influence?
 - b. How can these channels be strengthened for more effective positioning and influence?

1) IDRC's Role in Defining and Building a Global Research Network

Network building has been enshrined in the SAIC program's conceptual documentation and IDRC staff are enthusiastic about the establishment of the SAIC program as a "multi-disciplinary urban violence research network that supports knowledge exchange among researchers and research partners." (see Output 3 of the program logframe, KIIs, MTW).

To some extent, IDRC has been successful in building a cohesive, South-South network through engaging project grantees through diverse activities - including global and regional workshops, webinars on pertinent themes, as well as regular newsletters. **A strength of the SAIC program appears to be the success of network building among research teams at some regional and local levels.** Given the tendency towards shared, regional languages and familiar contexts, regional networking offers an important, cost-effective opportunity to build collaborative, knowledge-sharing processes among research teams. The Latin American teams, for instance, were identified as having strong connections that have supported collective opportunities for policy engagement (KII, IDRC 5).

While local- and regional-level networking is developing well in some cases, it is less clear how the program is expanding collaboration upwards, towards conducive, global collaboration between regionally-divided teams.

¹⁵ This is what is measured by Output Indicator 3.2 in the SAIC logframe, and is an example of how this wider focus on peer learning emerged within the evaluation. This section is an attempt to crystallise the lessons from across the evaluation.

Establishing meaningful connections is particularly difficult across different language groups, as well as among projects that are already cross-regional in their design (KII, IDRC 2). While it may be straightforward and valuable for individual projects to collaborate with other individual projects, this becomes considerably more complex for teams already working cross-contextually.

While IDRC has done well in foregrounding the construction of the network and knowledge sharing into the objectives of the SAIC network as a whole, IDRC was unable to communicate this with prospective project grantees because of the unanticipated increase in the size of the program. Some grantees only became aware of IDRC's intention to build a network at the inception workshop (KII, PG 2). Because of the originally intended smaller size, the network dimension was not highlighted in the CFP document, and projects were not invited to express their interest in being a part of a global initiative. One IDRC staff member mentioned that the *intentionality of the SAIC network* is something that the program must strive to articulate more clearly:

'I think we could have communicated better on the outside when we launched the offer of proposals that our expectation is that you also actively participate in the network, in the creation of the network ... that it wasn't just their project in isolation. That could maybe have created also more openness in terms of the RBM [results based management]. Look, we expect you to feed into programmatic level results.' (KII, IDRC 2).

As with any network initiative, there will always be individuals who are more and less engaged in driving the goals of a network forward. **The difficulty with establishing a research network built on a strong sense of trust and shared interest is particularly pronounced when it is a funding body driving the process of network building.** There are many power relations relevant to effective network building. IDRC staff acknowledge project teams as leading experts at the local level, while seeing their own roles as more relevant towards supporting the regional and international levels of policy engagement (KII, IDRC 1). Network building takes place at a much more meta-level, and tends to be strongest when driven by members of the network themselves.¹⁶

This leads to the consideration of IDRC's role in facilitating a network-building process within the SAIC program. There are different views in the SAIC program among grantees and IDRC staff about the nature of IDRC's role. **It may be useful to consider how the position of network mediator fits into this role.** Is it possible for IDRC to create a cohesive, Southern-led network grounded in trust, given the funder-grantee dynamic? A 2006 report suggested, "IDRC is heavily involved in many networks and there is nearly unanimous satisfaction with IDRC support," and further that "networks are very successful in achieving the goals set out by IDRC."¹⁷ However, this report focused on IDRC-supported networks that had their *own respective coordinators* apart from IDRC staff; with IDRC's role focused on capacity development and support for research design and policy influence. In the case of SAIC, IDRC currently takes on the role of primary network coordinator, as well as a range of other functions.

The theme of uneven power relations was further articulated by grantees during the MTW. One of the breakout groups sought to bring together interested SAIC members in the design of a new South-South collaborative research network. When a member of the Evaluation Team questioned what the difference of this new network would be from the current SAIC program, the response was:

¹⁶ For an excellent resource on developing international research networks see Brown, D & Gaventa, J (2008). Constructing transnational research networks: Observations and reflections from the case of the Citizenship DRC. *IDS Working Paper*. 302

¹⁷ IDRC, 2006. Survey of Coordinators and Members of IDRC-supported Networks (1995- 2005). Retrieved from <http://id-bnc.idrc.ca/dspace/handle/10625/35655>

'From our experience with SAIC, we're entering this project while the research protocol was designed for us. Since the beginning, we didn't have much power, possibilities to decide... we are using the module that was produced for us. Of course, we are adapting. But it could be more inclusive and participative if we are involved in designing the research program from the beginning.' (MTW, PG21)

2) Peer Centred Capacity Development in SAIC

This evaluation finds that the lack of focus on capacity building within the current SAIC objectives and theory of change might indicate a missed opportunity for members of the SAIC network; and one that has potential implications for the program's ability to influence policy change.

In discussions and feedback with IDRC staff, 'capacity building' arose as an area of tension within the program, given the varied responsibilities encapsulated in IDRC's role. For example, at least one program officer stressed his/her discomfort in being referred to as a 'mentor' for grantees, since IDRC views funded research teams as high-calibre professionals within their respective fields and that capacity-building activities offered by IDRC would seem overly paternalistic.

The Evaluation Team confirms that it is important for IDRC to be sensitive to these tensions as a funder, but also recognises that there may be **a role for IDRC to play in facilitating a supply- and demand-based approach to peer-led capacity development**. This includes identifying and positioning the existing skillsets of grantees towards opportunities for peer learning and development. For instance, researchers who are more skilled in communications, gender analysis or participatory methodologies could be offered support for sharing resources or lessons to others in the network who may be interested in learning more about these opportunities.

At the project level, the capacity building of junior and community researchers appears to be a strength of the SAIC program, in some cases. The majority of research teams were found to be working with junior/community researchers to some degree and, during the MTW, there was some interest in a breakout-group discussion on ways of training and guiding less-experienced researchers. This is an area that could be addressed through a supply and demand approach, facilitated by IDRC.

In situations where the political context does not allow for immediate intervention on a policy level, strengthening the capacity of individuals to become agents of change in their communities or in future roles as activists, practitioners or policymakers appears to be an important strategy. Hence, **some project grantees believe that type and level of capacity building that is achieved should be another important aspect of measuring research uptake and overall programmatic success** (KII, PG3). More exchange and guidelines that ensure and enable emancipatory and empowering qualities in capacity building approaches may be needed to ensure IDRC's contributions towards building research capacity in a new generation of researchers.

3) Facilitating Cross-Program Learning and Knowledge Synthesis

This report reveals some areas for possible improvement in the positioning of capacity and network-building as strategies for measuring programmatic success (see Annex 2). SAIC has in place some plans for synthesis and **structured opportunities for grantees to feedback research findings within the project cycle. This sort of overall program learning should be further strengthened**. If one objective of SAIC is to generate new theories and strategies to reduce urban violence, then cross-comparative work needs to be meaningfully strategised and supported, not only undertaken at the end of the program. As a starting point, more work could be done to understand where innovative theoretical work is already happening within the network, what enables it, and how it can be taken to scale with more than one grantee.

There is an opportunity to strengthen intellectual leadership within the program in a way that will support cross-program learning. This is an area that currently faces limitations given the structurally driven time constraints experienced by the SAIC program team. There is an opportunity for IDRC to encourage dialogue with lead researchers to deepen substantive discussions around theoretical and conceptual frameworks as well as research methods at a regional and cross-regional level. The implications of not developing a coherent strategy for programmatic learning could have worrying implications for achieving program objectives, as the inability to draw out key lessons from the program could result in less opportunities for policy influence and uptake, particularly at regional and global levels. The development of a book series and programmatic policy briefings are an important opportunity for capturing program-level knowledge, however without the space for the sharing of emerging findings throughout the analysis and writing process there is a risk that the projects are not able to learn from each other and amplify new knowledge.

Opportunities for Reflection on Cross-Cutting Issues:

Strengthen resources for cross-project collaboration and peer learning.

- Resources are being leveraged by IDRC in the final phase of the program to support communications activities. At the MTW, **IDRC announced a Conference Participation Fund to facilitate grantees to disseminate their research through attending conferences, etc. This is an important step in the right direction**, and IDRC should expand the scope of this fund to allow opportunities for face-to-face collaboration among grantees.

Be intentional about building a multi-layered network, from the program's inception.

- Research teams should be aware of the idea that being a member of a global network comes with a certain set of expectations, which go beyond traditional (often autonomous) ways of doing research. IDRC's efforts should go beyond offering spaces for research collaboration and capacity building, toward facilitating opportunities for grantees to drive the goals and structures of the network.

Network-building could be a more fully-established indicator of program success.

- To better understand network interactions, IDRC should redesign monitoring procedures towards collecting reflective comments from SAIC grantees that can be fed into the strengthening of network activities and energy. This could include proactive collection of feedback during network events as well as through internal reporting processes, such as interim report templates.

Develop strategies for strengthening intellectual leadership among grantees.

- Stronger intellectual leadership of the program would contribute towards shaping existing and future conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Going forward, IDRC and DFID might consider establishing an external advisory panel composed of leading, international experts in the field of urban violence. This would allow for the exchange of neutral, intellectual guidance around research processes, with individuals not affiliated with a funding agenda. Consider electing thematic leaders among project grantees, who would facilitate reflection and discussion on select themes. This may support intellectual leadership among grantees, for example of the books and final communications projects.

Design a strategy for targeted, demand- and supply-driven capacity building activities within SAIC

- To create a deeper understanding of capacity building benefits of programs that build on SAIC, IDRC should reflect with grantees about different approaches, achievements and challenges currently applied in projects. These findings may feed into a capacity building strategy of future programs.

To allow for program-level learning and synthesis, create a space where project grantees can share emerging findings.

- It is important that this learning and analysis is not left until the end of the SAIC program cycle, and that research frameworks grow and are tested/challenged throughout.
- Grantees should also reflect on how these findings speak to one another and how they may feed into a Theory of Change for urban violence in the various social, economic and political settings.

IDRC should continue to be conscious of language differences among grantees and design appropriate strategies to allow for cross-project engagement and knowledge synthesis.

- Encouraging regional knowledge synthesis that could be compiled and fed up to the program level for further analysis may be a resource-efficient option.

Facilitate a process that involves project grantees in analysing research results of *all* projects.

- This would allow space to shape theoretical and conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches that may guide future research on these issues.

Develop feedback loops for how emergent findings from SAIC should be fed back to others in the GSJ team and to other projects funded by IDRC and DFID.

- Specifically, reflection should focus on how findings are influencing organisational thinking and practice. There are limited learning loops between projects and the program level at present.