

# Safe and Inclusive Cities Final Evaluation

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** | JULY 2017

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# Executive Summary

Safe and Inclusive Cities (SAIC), initiated in 2012 with funding from both the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), is a five-year program whose primary objectives are:

- To document the links between urban violence, poverty, and inequalities in cities of the Global South; and
- To support high-quality policy- and practice-oriented research on effective strategies for responding to threats and challenges emerging from such linkages.

The SAIC Program provided financial and capacity-based support to 15 research teams who undertook research in 16 countries covering 40 cities in Latin America (LA), Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and South Asia (SA). Research projects covered a variety of thematic areas related to urban violence, poverty and inequalities, including (but not limited to) social cohesion, gender, institutions, urban infrastructure and public security.

The Program sought to disseminate SAIC-funded research at local, regional and international levels with a view to both generating a better understanding of the relationship between urban violence, poverty and inequalities and influencing policy-making, programming and practice. It also sought to enable the development of a network of skilled researchers in the Global South, notably in supporting their research, outreach and communications capacities.

This evaluation mainly serves an accountability purpose, validating the extent to which SAIC has achieved its objectives, while also providing learning for potential future programming on urban violence. In this regard, the evaluation's primary audience includes IDRC and DFID management, as well as staff responsible for implementing and overseeing the SAIC Program. Secondary users include grantees and their networks, other donors and the larger Research-for-Development (R4D) community.

The evaluation assesses the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the Program (including its overall value-for-money), as well as the quality of the research. Its scope includes all years of implementation (2012-2017). This is a program evaluation and therefore its scope covers program-level activities, outputs and outcomes, while also drawing on information from all 15 SAIC-funded projects.

## Methodology

The methodology adopted for this evaluation was utilization-focused and participatory. The Evaluation Team worked in close collaboration with IDRC and other stakeholders throughout the evaluation to validate findings and recommendations.

The evaluation was guided by an evaluation matrix structured to reflect the evaluation criteria, questions and sub-questions shared in the Terms of Reference (TORs) for this evaluation. IDRC's RQ+ framework was used to develop indicators for answering evaluation questions related to research quality.

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach to data collection, including an in-depth document review and semi-structured interviews. Data and insights drawn from the document review were triangulated against stakeholders' perspectives gathered through semi-structured interviews, supplemented by a plethora of informal discussions shared with a broad swath of participants at the closing conference in Nairobi. In total, 55 stakeholders were interviewed, including IDRC and DFID staff, principal investigators, researchers, and research users.

## Findings

### Relevance

Overall, the SAIC Program was found to be highly relevant to both DFID and IDRC, embodying and advancing their distinct and shared global, institutional and regional priorities. This past decade, the world's urban population has increased to more than half of the global population. Responding to the 2011 World Development Report, which identified urban violence in the Global South as a key area of global concern, the Program was designed to closely align with global priorities and discourses that situate such violence as a development issue.

Global South researchers involved with the Program recognize and value the significance of the Program and the support it provides. They appreciate the opportunity to pursue reasonably well-funded research on the violence-poverty-inequality nexus, allowing them to challenge Northern-based theoretical approaches while consolidating South-South research teams.

### Research Quality

The research project portfolio was of high quality overall, particularly in terms of research relevance and design, though slightly less so in terms of project implementation. Key to the high quality and merit of research has been the support provided by IDRC. Researchers' prior experience of having worked together was also noted as a key contributing factor. The most important factor negatively impacting research quality and merit has been the lack of good communicative/collaborative strategies among some research teams. Language barriers experienced by certain research teams, the limited capacity of some research institutions, as well as the unpredictable political and security contexts in which the research took place were also identified as key limiting factors.

Most SAIC projects were based on participatory methodologies, cognizant of the centrality of the research being conducted for and with communities. Research implementation processes

were marked by the involvement of multiple levels of stakeholders, from local community organizations to government Ministers. All projects were required to produce ethics and security protocols, which also resulted in innovative approaches to the research, with a stronger qualitative bent.

Nearly all SAIC projects have either integrated gender considerations into their research design or produced gender-specific/sensitive results. The portfolio of projects has been effective in depicting the complexity of both gender-based violence in urban contexts, and also the transformative role of women in their communities. Overall, the program created an insightful, innovative, and gendered discursive landscape.

All consulted research users share a favourable perception of the SAIC program of research. They feel that the leadership role played by researcher teams from the Global South was very valuable and they also highlight the importance of 'communities' as a focus of research rather than of 'individuals'. Further, from a policy-oriented and pragmatic perspective, the research is considered a valuable source of new data shedding light on key issues of urban violence.

As for the SAIC Baseline Study, the evaluation found that it was primarily a good literature review based on Northern theoretical approaches on violence, poverty and inequality, with a bias towards issues of criminal violence. While serving to orient research teams, it under-examined important Global South considerations and matters of inequality.

### Effectiveness

The Evaluation Team was mandated to assess the effectiveness of the SAIC Program in terms of innovation, knowledge production, outreach, dissemination and uptake, and in supporting a skilled network of researchers. Overall, the Program was found to have been highly effective on most counts, though less so in terms of outreach, dissemination and uptake.

One of SAIC's objectives was the development of innovative frameworks to advance knowledge

related to the violence-poverty-inequality nexus. In this sense, SAIC generated a strong, if diversely innovative portfolio of projects, notably on theoretical and methodological grounds, though less so with respect to the theory-policy/programming/practice interface. Relatively few methodologically effective opportunities were made available for encouraging multi-project innovations.

SAIC has surpassed its target for producing knowledge products on urban violence. Together, the 15 SAIC projects have produced 212 written outputs, ranging from peer-reviewed articles and book chapters to non-peer reviewed articles and policy briefs. The production of written outputs is unevenly distributed across the portfolio; peer-reviewed publications are concentrated within a few projects and the need for producing policy briefs has only been partially addressed. This last year, SAIC has effectively been synthesizing project results into Program-level knowledge products.

At Program level, SAIC effectively reached out to policy-makers, development agencies and some donors through important international conferences including, *inter alia*: the World Bank Fragility, Conflict and Violence Forum; Habitat III; the World Urban Forum 7; and the SAIC closing conference in Nairobi. The SAIC Program also organized four regional conferences in New Delhi, Santiago, Johannesburg and Dakar, which were attended by diverse regional research users. Funding provided through the SAIC Conference Participation Fund allowed grantees to present their research findings at many of these conferences. At project level, researchers variably reached out to policy-makers, NGOs and grassroots organizations. Researchers' ability to reach out to potential users depended on the political context, existing relationships with those users, and previous experience on policy and programming work.

At Program level, a diverse portfolio of knowledge products has been produced with the support of the SAIC Knowledge Translation Officer. Ranging from info-graphics and briefs to impact stories, the knowledge products are well positioned for use. At the project level, the quality of uptake strategies

developed in the proposals varied significantly among projects. Indeed, most projects continue to face challenges in translating research results into accessible findings and recommendations. Nonetheless, there is evidence of policy influence in some countries, as well as indications that SAIC has contributed to informing policy debates.

The Program's Communications Strategy, developed by an external communications firm in 2014, was successfully implemented by the SAIC Program. However, it was adopted somewhat late in the process, resulting in a missed opportunity for engaging potential users early on, developing their interest in and connecting to the research, and thereby maximizing the likelihood of uptake. Likewise, the budget for communications covered for expenses but not for a Knowledge Translation Officer whose work would prove central to implementation.

The Program Theory of Change (TOC) suggesting that dissemination will eventually lead to policy change is incomplete and unconvincing considering the time-bound nature of the Program. Indeed, continuous efforts and advocacy are required given the complexity and lengthiness of policy change. The TOC also fails to adequately consider the location of grassroots organizations, communities, CSOs and social movements as a necessary vehicle for influencing policy in countries, especially where the political context is unfavourable.

Finally, SAIC has contributed to the development of a skilled network of Global South researchers, with particularly beneficial effects on the building of national and regional communities of practice. However, networking opportunities were largely limited to Principle Investigators with little involvement of researchers.

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## Efficiency

The Evaluation Team was also mandated to broadly assess program efficiency from a number of different perspectives, which include: the use of human and financial resources; project efficiencies; the pursuit of cost reduction opportunities; the Call for Proposals; and overall Value-for-Money (VfM). The Evaluation Team was also asked to assess the

strengths and weaknesses of both management and governance arrangements.

The SAIC Program operated in a lean manner with administrative expenses hovering around 10%, which is below IDRC's current allowable limit of 11%. Further, operational expenses were kept below 9% of the overall program budget. However, the Program was short of human resources, and the staff members were overstretched. The Program has also suffered from a high 'key person dependency risk' for the duration of the Program.

All 15 SAIC projects were allocated nearly equal budgets, despite the diversity of project needs, capacities, scale and context. The research budget was considered generous by most project teams, while fragmented and somewhat inadequate for cross-regional projects, as those carry additional costs for managing multi-institutional teams, international travel and the translation of documents. Supplements were provided for 2 projects to cover for losses incurred on account of exchange rates, and one cross-regional project to cover additional research expenses.

The SAIC management team pursued various cost-reduction measures and opportunities, ensuring that Program resources were optimised. The Program was also strategic in taking advantage of exchange rate gains, hiring temporary staff, offering conference travel grants, and in other ways. Across the Program and projects, all stakeholders firmly believe that any reduction in resources provided to projects would likely have compromised the quality and depth of research practices and outputs.

Pursued through a resource intensive though appropriate one-step process, the Call for Proposals elicited a high number of quality submissions. The Call process was moderately successful in reaching its target audiences, with a higher than desirable proportion of successful applicants emanating from academic institutions. Finally, the Call process was a missed opportunity to initiate the process of building a community of researchers from the outset.

Overall, SAIC has provided high VfM, based on DFID's criteria framework as well as on matters of

equity. SAIC has been managed efficiently and economically, with administrative and operational costs maintained around or below 10% for each, with various opportunities pursued to reduce costs and maximize resource use.

When assessing the strengths and weaknesses of management arrangements, the evaluation examined processes for risk management and monitoring. Overall, the evaluation found that the risk-based approach of SAIC management was effective at pre-empting, mitigating and addressing the many management, financial, performance and security risks associated with this Program.

Most monitoring processes established for SAIC worked to the general satisfaction of stakeholders, notably enabling the adaptive management of the Program. The available management systems were, however, perceived as arduous by the IDRC staff and were in some ways inadequate. In the absence of a way to track staff time allocation, it was not possible for SAIC to effectively monitor its own staffing needs and demands. Nearly all project teams indicated that M&E obligations were similar to those of other comparable programs, also noting they would have appreciated more timely feedback on their reporting.

As for the Program's governance arrangements, SAIC is one among several programs that comprise a wider strategic partnership between DFID and IDRC. Program governance was properly defined from the outset, with DFID and IDRC roles and responsibilities clearly and appropriately allocated through a Memorandum of Understanding. Structuring the Program partnership with DFID as donor-partner and IDRC as donor-management-partner played to the strengths of each institution, while minimizing burdensome administrative complexities. With a productive, respectful, collegial and open relationship throughout, DFID and IDRC have pursued what has been poignantly described as a "problem-solving approach".

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Highly relevant to its key stakeholders, the SAIC Program has been remarkable in meeting and surpassing most of its program-level objectives. Governed appropriately, the Program has also been managed efficiently. At the time of writing, there was no indication that SAIC would be supported for a subsequent phase. Nonetheless, the Evaluation Team was asked to share insights, lessons learned and recommendations that could apply to other, similar Research-for-Development (R4D) programs. The following 11 recommendations and concluding thoughts provide high-level guidance for such program planning into the future.

- 1) Given the paucity of South-South R4D programs, IDRC, DFID and potentially other partners should envisage building further South-South (even South-South-North) based initiatives that are situated within globally-defined policy frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 2) The Call for Proposals should be envisaged as an outreach and engagement strategy, using a two-step process with concept notes and bringing together grantees to finalize their research agenda.
- 3) A Baseline Study should be developed and shared with potential program applicants as part of Calls for Proposals, as was done with the SAIC Program. The Baseline Study should preferably comprise a set of position papers that reflect such diversity, ensuring that Global South perspectives are appropriately included.
- 4) It is important for any R4D program to further clarify the definition of 'innovation'. Supported R4D research teams should be required to articulate the multiple dimensions of innovation pursued by their projects. IDRC, DFID and partners should also provide guidance and support to the most promising teams throughout the lifecycle of programs and projects towards this end.
- 5) Approaching research through a gender-sensitive lens should be a requirement for receiving such R4D support, given its centrality to urban violence, poverty and inequality issues. As required, workshops and training should be provided to R4D funding recipients.
- 6) Integrated program- and project-level Theories of Change should be developed to recognize multiple pathways to impact of such an R4D program, mindful of contextual and global considerations and priorities.
- 7) Stemming from a sound Theory of Change, greater clarity and strategic development should be developed regarding actual and potential pathways of influence of R4D programs like SAIC. A disproportionate focus on policy influence is in evidence, and equally focused development is warranted on influencing programming and practice.
- 8) Communications should be approached as a strategic and a necessary practice from the outset of an R4D program. Developing complementary program- and project-level communications strategies intent on engaging mainstream and social media, and budgeting for this at both levels, would more effectively advance R4D program priorities of amplifying the relevance and influence of R4D programs and projects.
- 9) Cognizant that R4D projects are contextually, methodologically and administratively unique, R4D programs should tailor their budgetary offerings to meet such distinctiveness.
- 10) The highly effective risk-based approach to program management should be pursued and further developed. Given that R4D programs are human resource intensive, management capacity should carefully be tailored to meet programmatic and institutional goals. In addition, appropriate management systems should be in place to support program management (e.g. staff management) as well as M&E appropriately.
- 11) The distribution of responsibilities, which sees DFID as donor-partner and IDRC as donor-management-partner is a good one, playing to the strengths of each institution, and should be maintained and built upon through such programs. Further, DFID and IDRC staff working on the program should formalize a structure for substantive exchange.