EVALUATION OF IDRC’S STRATEGY TO SCALE RESEARCH RESULTS

An external evaluation will assess how, and how well, IDRC implemented its 2015 strategic objective to invest ‘in knowledge and innovation for large-scale positive change,’ and what it can learn for future work.

IDRC’S SCALING JOURNEY

The IDRC 2015-2020 Strategic Plan set a target of 20 initiatives that deliver solutions at scale. As of March 2019, 330 policy changes and 167 adopted innovations were recorded.

IDRC’s approach to, and understanding of, scaling has clearly evolved significantly over this time, integrating concepts of scale into its work in different ways and to varying degrees. And through its Scaling Science initiative, IDRC has developed a fresh and evidence-based understanding of what scaling means from a research for development perspective.

As the Centre enters a new 10-year strategic period, it remains committed to learning about scaling impact and sharing that learning with others. As part of this continued commitment, IDRC has commissioned an independent, external evaluation of its strategy to scale research results.

WHAT WILL THE EVALUATION TELL US?

The evaluation will ask summative questions about how – and how well – IDRC implemented its strategic objective to scale. How did it plan, implement, coordinate and learn about this work? What were the strengths and challenges? What outcomes did it achieve? How valuable and sustainable are those outcomes, and for whom?

It will also ask learning questions, identifying lessons and recommendations to inform and strengthen IDRC’s future work, and that of others in the sector working to scale research results. Learning will consider experiences and perspectives of our

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1 This is a summary of a 40-page evaluation inception report, detailing the evaluation’s scope, intended-users, approach, methodology and engagement plan. To read the full report and for more information, contact Rob McLean, manager of this evaluation.
global research community, IDRC staff, grantees and partners, and external organisations.

WHO IS THE EVALUATION FOR?

First and foremost, this evaluation is for IDRC. Senior management may use the learning to inform implementation of the 2020-2030 Strategic Plan, and strengthen efforts to scale impact.

For IDRC programs and projects that are designing, or have already designed, their strategies and processes to incorporate scale, evaluation lessons and recommendations will be a particularly valuable tool for further adjustment of strategies and processes, and to improve their monitoring and evaluation of scaling.

IDRC grantees will be engaged in the evaluation as informants to understand their perspectives of scaling; as subjects, as we look in detail at certain IDRC programs; and as users of the evaluation to inform their own scaling practice.

IDRC remains committed to sharing its learning with others seeking to make positive change. As such, we will share broadly with external audiences that we are undertaking this critical learning exercise on what is an increasingly important topic to development actors. Where appropriate, evaluation findings will be positioned as contributions to the emerging science of scaling.

FOUR EVALUATION COMPONENTS

This is a mixed method, multi-component evaluation, comprising:

1. **Organisational review**: a look inside IDRC, reviewing internal documents, analysing the Trackify database, and conducting interviews and an online survey with program staff.

2. **Case studies**: a deep dive into organisational cases of scaling issues in practice—such as program design, grant management, coordination with non-researchers or addressing gender equality—and programmatic cases of scaling and outcomes achieved, using Outcome Harvesting to assess IDRC’s contribution to key external outcomes.

3. **External benchmarking**: a look at what other organisations are doing with regard to scaling, to position IDRC’s efforts within this, through interviews and a survey of Scaling up Community of Practice members and other funders.

4. **Perceptions and experiences of IDRC grantees**: conduct a survey of IDRC grantees and focus groups with grantees participating in the IDRC ScalingXchange event, led by the Policy and Evaluation (POEV) team in March 2020.
CASE STUDIES

**Organisational cases** – the evaluation will look at two to three examples of internal changes as a result of the strategic objective, such as how IDRC integrated scaling into its grant-making systems, or its program design.

**Programmatic cases** – five to six examples of outcomes of efforts to scale and IDRC’s contribution. Programs will identify their best examples of scale, from these we will select cases that show positive outcomes, pathways to scale, justification, optimal scale, dynamic evaluation, coordination and the equally important decisions not to scale.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

**FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SCALING IMPACT**

An exploratory study looking across our breadth of programming – now available in IDRC’s *Scaling Impact* book – identified four guiding principles: **optimal scale, justification, coordination** and **dynamic evaluation** as enabling factors for scaling.

While the evaluation is not designed to evaluate the principles per se (as they did not exist when the strategic objective was set), they will be used in the evaluation as a framework for building understanding of IDRC’s efforts to scale.

By using the principles to guide evaluative inquiry, we hope to learn more deeply about the process and the results of scaling efforts, rather than the simpler but potentially dangerous pursuit of scaled impact by any means and the often over simplified indicators that typically frame “big impact” in development programs.

SENSE-MAKING AND ENGAGEMENT

We want the lessons and recommendations that emerge from the evaluation to be useful. And to do this, we believe that IDRC staff must be involved in sense-making and reflection.

The IDRC evaluation advisory group, comprising representatives from across the organisation (see box below) participated in an **inception workshop** and provided comments on the inception report.

The advisory group (see below for membership) will participate in a **sense-making webinar** to look at on emerging data and findings, will comment on the **draft final**
evaluation report and participate in a ‘from findings to recommendations’ workshop, to reflect on results, lessons and co-produce recommendations.

As the primary intended user, we hope to engage with IDRC senior management during the evaluation. We will produce summary documents – such as this one – at key moments in the evaluation, to be shared via the POEV team. Senior management members, in addition to those already in the advisory group, are also invited to join the sense-making webinar and recommendations workshop.

The diagram below presents the major points of engagement with IDRC before, during and after the evaluation.
THE EVALUATORS

The evaluation is being conducted by an expert external evaluation team led by On Think Tanks (OTT) in partnership with Southern Hemisphere. OTT is a partnership of experts working globally in the field of evidence informed policy. Southern Hemisphere is a leading evaluation practice in Southern Africa.

MORE INFORMATION

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IDRC EVALUATION ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS

For Evaluation, Strategy, Regions & Policy:
- Rob McLean, Policy and Evaluation
- Amy Etherington, Policy and Evaluation
- Maggie Gorman Velez, Policy and Evaluation
- Barbara Shenstone, Middle East and North Africa Regional Office

For Programs & Partnerships:
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- Navsharan Singh, Governance and Justice
- Emma Fieldhouse, Livestock Vaccine Initiative Fund
- Ann Weston, Foundations for Innovation
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- Greg Hallen, Food, Environment and Health