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CPC INITIATIVE EVALUATION REPORT

Prepared for the
International Development Research Centre

By the DECI-4 Project Team

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DECI-4

DESIGNING EVALUATION & COMMUNICATION FOR THE
CPC PROGRAM AND PROJECT IMPACT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IDRC's Networked Economies (NE) unit supported the improvement of governance of cyberspace in the global South over several decades. As part of NE, the Cyber Policy Centre (CPC) initiative sought to strengthen independent policy research institutions through core support to build institutional capacity and sustainability; mentorship and skills building to strengthen research and policy capacity; and global knowledge networking and policy uptake. The first phase began in 2017 and the second in late 2019-2020 for a total duration of four years. The five CPC projects funded included Research ICT Africa (RIA) in South Africa, the Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law (CIPIT) in Kenya, Derechos Digitales (DD) in Chile, Centro Latam Digital (CLD) in Mexico, and LIRNEAsia in Sri Lanka.

The NE team referred to the first phase of the CPC Initiative as a two-year pilot as the approach was new: it emphasized core funding to encourage capacity development and research in new topics related to cyber policy. The second phase coincided with a significant internal restructuring at IDRC that unfolded largely during the Covid-19 pandemic – this change brought uncertainty about the continuation of the Initiative. Finally in November 2020, IDRC's strategic restructuring led to all previous program initiatives, including NE, coming to a close, with NE's programming niche being mainly integrated into newly formed Education and Science, as well as Democratic and Inclusive Governance Divisions.

This final evaluation of the Initiative was started in September of 2020 and completed in July 2021. A utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) approach was used as a decision-making framework. UFE places emphasis on primary intended users (PIUs) as the owners of the evaluation design; in this instance the PIUs were the staff of IDRC's NE unit. The evaluation was designed and implemented by the DECI-4 project team in consultation with the PIUs. The evaluation design included the following purposes and evaluation uses (these guided the formulation of key evaluation questions):

PURPOSE 1: To understand and demonstrate the value of the cyber policy think tank approach

USES:

1. Supporting centres to **respond** to technology governance challenges and **effect policy regimes**
2. Building capacity of organizations to take on **new subject challenges** and **building core expertise** in order to respond to the changing digital technology and policy landscape
3. Supporting organizations to respond to the changing **funding landscape** for research and for think tanks

PURPOSE 2: To draw lessons from the CPC approach to inform other initiatives

USE:

4. **To draw lessons from the CP approach** that can inform other similar policy research funding initiatives (e.g., AI4D policy centres, and Centre-wide D4D work)

The data collection tools included: an interview guide for IDRC staff; an interview guide for CPC leaders; a focus group guide for CPC researchers, three language versions of the on-line questionnaire, and a documentation review. Interviews and focus groups with the five CPCs were conducted by DECI mentors during March and early April 2021. The CPC Initiative marked a stage in evolution for IDRC's NE unit as it moved away from supporting research networks and drew lessons from the Think Tank Initiative to support ICT4D research institutions. Throughout the CPC Initiative, the NE team piloted a hybrid that provided core funding while promoting the expansion of partners' research agendas.

This evaluation found that the CPCs were able to expand and elevate their research agendas, an indication of growing research maturity within the Centres. The new applied areas of multi-disciplinary research made the CPCs of potential interest to other IDRC programming (in areas of health, agriculture, education, governance, etc.) and to additional outside funders. The CPCs increasing capacity for a rapid response to policy windows of opportunity was an indication of their increased organizational effectiveness. The CPC Initiative favoured a focus on strengthening research organizations while also supporting the expansion of research agendas into new and emerging fields. The Initiative was successful in providing greater control over research in the global South. For example, RIA worked with the Southern Africa Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) - which included Parliamentarians – in power and opposition - to develop the Digital Economy model law, which included all the components suggested for the CP think tanks (cyber-security, data governance, economic innovation of data and infrastructure, etc.).

Within the current debate about decolonizing international aid, core funding remains a vehicle for shifting decision-making to research partners. This combination of core funding, encouragement to research new topics, and capacity building support appears to be unique and relevant to other programs at IDRC, such as the AI4D Policy Centres Program.

The basis of the CPCs' strengthened organizational effectiveness appears to have been the result of a combination of factors including: (a) long-term relationships, (b) demonstrated research capacities, and (c) flexible core funding combined with encouragement to explore new topics. The combination of (a) and (b) increased the level of trust and involvement of funders-partners.

The CPC goal of promoting global policy uptake was advanced, although the regional dimension of the initiative remains a work-in-progress; however, the tension between collaboration and competition within a region was unsurprising. A possible explanation for the limited collaboration among the Centres can be attributed to the significant differences

in organizational trajectories, combined with un-resolved tensions about their national Vs regional mandates.

While the CPC Initiative lacked a prescribed capacity building strategy to expand into new research topics, the CPCs found their own unique pathways to achieve this goal. A deliberate, externally devised plan for capacity development in new research topics was not imposed and would likely have faced resistance, especially when the NE strategy sought to strengthen research agendas that were owned and designed in the Global South. However, at times the lack of a roadmap led to unmet expectations in capacity development.

The proposal submission process included an organizational needs self-assessment. However, a systematic response to the identified capacity building needs was not apparent. It is unclear whether there would have been better outcomes had the capacity approach been more targeted to each of CPC's own needs. It could well be that it was the POs who were expected to take on this role of providing such support and encouragement. It was evident that the POs put in significant time during the design phase, and when the CPCs needed support to adapt to changing conditions. In addition, the DECI 'just-in time' mentoring process was tailored to each organization's context and included a readiness assessment at the beginning.

The gender training and mentoring (by Gender@Work), and the evaluation & communication mentoring (by DECI) approaches followed different strategies. The gender training was required by NE, while the DECI work was encouraged, but optional. The gender training was based on a workshop series format, while the DECI work followed a 'just-in-time' mentoring process. On the whole, both approaches yielded positive results. The gender work contributed both to internal organizational reflections and adjustments to norms, and to a more substantial integration of gender in research. There was also evidence of individual and organizational learning in evaluation and communication planning as a result of the DECI project.

In the ICT4D field, IDRC has been a major driver for building organizational research capacity in the global South. The continuity of the support that, until recently, survived cycles of internal changes at IDRC was one of the important contributing factors; the other was the flexibility of its core funding. The core funding provided to the CPCs was a crucial enabler and its benefits cannot be overstated. It provided the CPCs with continuity to develop organizational capacity and to extend reach. It facilitated the building of credible, relevant South-owned research and policy advocacy entities with national and regional linkages. Crucially, it equipped CPCs with the ability to access additional resources and to establish relationships with an array of funding bodies. It enabled CPCs to temporarily move away from being project focused to becoming 'go-to' research and advocacy centres within their countries and internationally.

Some of the CPCs have been supported by a variety of IDRC grants over significant periods of time. This funding continuity has had value, as the Centres have led and migrated with the quickly evolving field of ICT4D. Technological innovation has constantly outpaced regulation, making independent, rigorous research extremely relevant to policy makers, especially in the South. This evaluation has concluded that the Centres are also of service to IDRC, as they have demonstrated their capacity to deliver results. Without them, IDRC might be hard pressed to find partners to operationalize its mission, as is evident in some regions of the world where the CPC Initiative has had limited uptake. This point begs the question of what the most effective duration for funding would be when it comes to stimulating and enhancing applied research in the global South. While IDRC itself may experience internal funding restrictions, it would be helpful to more explicitly define a rationale for the length of engagement and funding and/or exit strategies where they are warranted.

The CPC Initiative, part of IDRC's Networked Economies Program, generated instructive lessons that have implications for future sustainable program development. It should be of relevance to NE's programming niche which is being primarily integrated into IDRC's Democratic and Inclusive Governance as well as the Education & Science program areas. The recommendations may also be useful for other IDRC Programs and potential co-funders.

The essence of the knowledge emerging from the CPC Initiative is summarized in Section 6. It demonstrates the importance of having a strategy which links three pillars which worked as a system to yield demonstrable results. The three key elements included: core-flexible funding; encouragement of new Southern-driven research topics and home-grown institutional capacity building.

There were enabling conditions as prerequisites to obtain the positive outcomes noted in the evaluation report. They were long-term relationships, demonstrated research capacity among the partners, and the flexible & core 'hybrid' funding provided.

Recommendation 1: Core – Flexible Funding

- It is recommended that future initiatives with similar objectives, emphasize the value of core, longer-term funding, with the flexibility for grantees to design and deliver their own priority research to policy initiatives. It should be noted that the three pillars require the conditions (red font in Figure 6.1) to be present.

It is therefore recommended that other initiatives and programs, such as the earlier NE Network approach, be understood strategically as a process of identification and vetting of potential longer-term partners that could 'graduate' into longer-term flexible funding support such as that provided by the CPC initiative.

Recommendation 2: Encourage New Research Topics

- It is recommended that programs encourage partners to take on new research topics via both South-South exchanges and also via North-South collaboration. This evaluation found examples of both: CIPIT & RIA as South-South and RIA with an Oxford scholar.

Building specific funding streams or events for partners to learn, build skills and knowledge of new frontiers would still encourage a South-based research agenda, but would benefit from North-South and South-South dialogue and exchange.

Recommendation 3: Encourage Knowledge Sharing

- It is recommended that future initiatives or programs explicitly develop knowledge sharing incentives to promote networking and knowledge sharing amongst grantees. These opportunities may include joint presentations at a conference panel or collaborating in a shared publication or training package.

Networking and knowledge sharing appears to work best when they respond to immediate, felt needs by the grantees; so engaging them in the design of a shared process will increase their sense of relevance and ownership.

Recommendation 4: Emphasize Institutional Capacity building

- It is recommended that future initiatives explicitly and strategically address capacity building as a process of co-design and co-creation, where partners are encouraged to develop their own strategies, document them, and reflect on their value. Included in this process a participatory (UFE) co-design of M&E capacity building should be introduced to monitor how, when and through what processes adaptive management takes place.

Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AI4D	Artificial Intelligence for Development Initiative- Africa
CES	Canadian Evaluation Society
CIDE	Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas
CIPIT	Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law, Kenya
CIS	Centre for Internet and Society, India
CLD	Centro Latam Digital, Mexico
Co-PI	Co-principal investigator
CPC	Cyber Policy Centre
DD	Derechos Digitales, Chile
D4D	Data for Development
DECI	Designing Evaluation and Communication for Impact
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
KEQ	key evaluation question
LIRNEAsia	Learning Initiatives on Reforms for Network Economies Asia, Sri Lanka
NE	Network Economies
PIU	Primary intended user (or primary evaluation user)
PO	Program Officer (IDRC)
RIA	Research ICT Africa, South Africa
RLESD	Revista Latinoamericana de Economía y Sociedad Digital
SI	Social innovation
TOC	Theory of Change
TTI	Think-Tank Initiative
UFE	Utilization-Focused Evaluation

1 BACKGROUND

The Networked Economies (NE) Theory of Change (ToC) as articulated in its 2016 implementation plan supported the improvement of governance of cyberspace in the global South. This direction was coherent with IDRC's strategy at the time of supporting digital development through research, field building, and policy influence.

The original aim of the Cyber Policy¹ Centre (CPC) initiative was to facilitate research on critical cyber policy issues in developing countries. The intent was to generate sound and evidenced-based policy ideas and enable policy leaders in the global South to respond to the rapidly changing digital environment (NE Program, 2016). In a 2018 brochure, the justification for the Initiative was summarized as follows:

“Complex cyber-related issues require integrated policies that incorporate expertise and approaches from overlapping areas - telecommunications and infrastructure, economics, technology, law, and other social sciences. Government leaders and policy makers need informed policy environments that can support the development of these integrated policies, which can ultimately support a plural and secure cyberspace.”
(NE Program, 2018: 1).

The CPC Initiative² sought to strengthen independent policy research institutions in developing countries through three pillars: 1) Core support to build institutional capacity and sustainability; 2) Mentorship and skills building to strengthen research and policy capacity; and 3) Global knowledge networking and policy uptake.

The selection of the centres followed an open competition in 2017 inviting centres from the global South with experience in digital rights, cyber security and innovation policy to apply. Out of 59 eligible submissions, three centres were chosen for a first, two-year pilot: Research ICT Africa (RIA) in South Africa, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) in Mexico, and Centre for Internet and Society (CIS) in India. Due to complications with Indian authorities, CIS was unable to receive the funds and was only able to participate in the knowledge networking activities. During the CPC Pilot phase, the Mexican CPC moved away from CIDE to become an independent not-for-profit known as Centro Latam Digital (CLD).

¹ “**Cyber policy** refers to the rules and laws that govern the use of digital technologies, including local and/or international enforced norms, formal laws, or even technological arrangements. The broad area related to governing information or knowledge societies and includes issues related to innovation (such as intellectual property, telecommunications, infrastructure), security (related to national security, crime, surveillance), and human rights (such as the right to privacy, free expression and speech) online.” (NE Program, 2018: 3)

² In this report we refer to the CPC “Initiative” to remain consistent with IDRC’s reference to “programs” only when external funding is available. However, at times quotes and statements from partners refer to the “CPC Program”; there are references to a “programmatic” evaluation; and some of the original language used in the evaluation design mentions “program” (see Annexes).

The three runners up were subsequently funded in a second stage of the Initiative that started in late 2019 and early 2020: the Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law (CIPIT) in Kenya, Derechos Digitales (DD) in Chile, and LIRNEAsia in Sri Lanka. Both RIA and CLD received additional funding during the second stage of the Initiative.

The Networked Economies team referred to the first phase of the CPC Initiative as a two-year pilot. The second phase that started in late 2019 - early 2020, was also two years in duration. The second phase coincided with a significant internal restructuring at IDRC that unfolded largely during the Covid-19 pandemic – this change brought uncertainty about the continuation of the Initiative. Finally, in early November 2020, the NE came to a close, as a result of the restructuring. Part of the NE team transferred to a program area within the ‘Education and Science Division’, others to a program area on ‘Democratic and Inclusive Governance’; and the program leader moved to the ‘Policy and Evaluation Division’. The CPC Initiative became part of the Governance division; with some overlap with the new Artificial Intelligence (AI) Program within the Education and Science Division that supports AI think-tanks in a manner comparable to the CPC Initiative.

As part of the second pillar (Mentorship and skills building to strengthen research and policy capacity), the Designing Evaluation and Communication for Impact (DECI) project was tasked with supporting the CPCs in evaluation and communication capacity building. DECI-3 supported the first batch of projects (CIDE/CLD and RIA) while DECI-4 broadened the support to also cover the new centres added as part of the second phase of the CPC Initiative (Derechos Digitales, CIPIT and LIRNEAsia). The mentoring with the CPC partners began prior to the design of this programmatic evaluation. This timing meant that each CPC partner had already advanced in the design of its own project evaluation plan (UFE) by the time IDRC began its own overall Programmatic Evaluation design. The parallel nature of these evaluations is unique and is further explored in Section 2 of this report.

2 EVALUATION DESIGN

Utilization-focused Evaluation was the evaluation decision-making framework used. The UFE approach places emphasis on primary intended users (PIUs) as the owners of the evaluation design. Throughout the steps of the evaluation, attention is paid to ensuring that both the evaluation findings and process are utilized. The evaluation was designed and implemented by the DECI-4 project team in consultation with the PIUs. DECI stands for Designing Evaluation and Communication for Impact, an IDRC capacity building and research project. In its fourth phase, the DECI project was dedicated exclusively to supporting the partners in the CPC Initiative.

Since early September 2020, the DECI-4 team began working with IDRC to design this utilization-focused evaluation of the CPC Initiative. The process began with a review of ‘readiness’, followed by the identification of a team of primary evaluation users (PIUs) drawn from among staff of the former Networked Economies (NE) Initiative. The PIU team included the following program officers: Ruhiya Seward and Fernando Perini (now part of Democratic

and Inclusive Governance – DIG); Matthew Smith, Phet Sayo, and Ben Petrazzini (part of Education and Science – ES). Laurent Elder withdrew as PIU from the group due to his transfer to the Policy and Evaluation area.

2.1 *Readiness review*

A first step in the process was to review readiness and pre-select primary intended users (PIUs) for the evaluation from among IDRC's Network Economies (NE) staff. A group call was completed on October 21st, with Ruhiya Seward, Matthew Smith, Phet Sayo, Ben Petrazzini, and Laurent Elder participating.

As a result of the group Skype, it became evident that a significant readiness issue was the impact of the IDRC's ongoing institutional restructuring. It led to the end of the NE unit as of November 2, 2020 with its staff assigned to other areas. Part of the team has gone to a 'Education and Science' program area, others to the 'Democratic and Inclusive Governance' program area. This situation left the CPC Initiative with an unclear organizational affiliation. From an evaluation readiness perspective, this uncertainty was a concern in terms of confirming specific PIUs for the evaluation, prior to their role in defining evaluation uses. In addition, one staff member was beginning his retirement (Ben Petrazzini) and soon another, (Laurent Elder) shifted to the 'Policy and Evaluation Division'. Subsequently, Fernando Perini was added as another PIU for the evaluation. At the time of the call, the odds were that the CPC Initiative would become part of the Governance division; yet its lessons were potentially also of relevance to the new Artificial Intelligence (AI) program within the Education and Science Division that will also be planning to support AI think-tanks in a manner comparable to the CPCs.

In practical terms, the institutional changes and the NE staff reallocation to other organizational units placed the PIUs in an awkward situation when it came to defining actual uses for the programmatic evaluation. Notwithstanding this uncertainty, subsequent to our call, the PIUs provided the DECI Team with draft evaluation uses and possible evaluation questions. Several iterations took place while the different uses and associated key evaluation questions (KEQs) were grouped and revised. The focus was on finding complementarity, simplicity, and coherence in the evaluation design. The design process placed much emphasis on ensuring that each KEQ was associated with an evaluation use. DECI experience underlines how important this step is in terms of exercising the decision-making role of PIUs in evaluation design.

By mid-December, the CPC Programmatic Evaluation uses and KEQs were confirmed by the PIUs (see Table 1). Since DECI-4 had also been mentoring the CPCs themselves, there were five parallel UFEs that had been developed separately by each partner. While these evaluation designs focused on topics of interest to each CPC, some overlap in evaluation uses was evident (the comparison between the CPC Initiative Evaluation design and that of the Centres was shared in the Second Interim Technical Report to IDRC, January 2021). In late December, the DECI team shared the evaluation designs that had been completed by the five CPCs with the PIUs. Subsequently, the CPCs were also made aware of the IDRC

evaluation design and those of the other CPC partners. This step was done to improve transparency and mutual understanding, with the commitment to also share the IDRC Programmatic Evaluation uses and KEQs with the CPCs for information. This exercise of working on evaluation planning with IDRC PIUs – and in parallel mentoring the CPC partners – is unique. The process revealed some similarities in purposes, as well as complementarities, with yet-to-be explored implications for future program development. This experimental evaluation design process highlights the importance of DECI's research component which is tracking the two parallel processes.

Subsequently, the DECI team was left with the task of proposing relevant data collection tools, and a work plan which fit the availability of resources. The IDRC PIUs were consulted again for comments and suggestions on the evolving plans. The DECI team planned to pay attention to the overlaps between the IDRC design and the CPCs' with a view to maximizing synergies in data collection – where data collection schedules aligned. For instance, the findings from one KEQ could provide relevant data for other KEQs.

2.2 *Evaluation uses, and key evaluation questions*

Based on a summary of steps sent to IDRC in late September (Annex 1), the DECI team began collecting and reviewing proposed evaluation uses from the PIUs and associated key evaluation questions (KEQs). This process included revised wording of KEQs proposed by the DECI team for clarity and conciseness. This step took several iterations between early November and mid-December, and concluded with two broad purposes and four evaluation uses:

Purpose 1: To understand and demonstrate the value of the cyber policy think tank approach

1. Supporting centres to **respond** to technology governance challenges and **effect policy regimes**
2. Building capacity of organizations to take on **new subject challenges** and **building core expertise** in order to respond to the changing digital technology and policy landscape
3. Supporting organizations to respond to the changing **funding landscape** for research and for think tanks

Purpose 2: To draw lessons from the CPC approach to inform other initiatives

4. **To draw lessons from the CP approach** that can inform other similar policy research funding initiatives (e.g. AI4D policy centres, and Centre-wide D4D work)

Table 1 (below) is the final version that summarizes the uses, key evaluation questions, evidence needed, and data collection tools³. Annex 2 includes a summary **work plan** for the implementation of all steps in the evaluation (data collection, analysis, validation, and reporting). The data collection instruments are outlined in Annex 3.

³ The numbering of the uses and KEQs has been updated since the Dec. 18 version last seen by the PIUs.

Table 1: IDRC – CPC Programmatic Evaluation – USES & KEQ's - (Version 5 Feb. 2021)

USE	Key Evaluation Questions	Evidence needed	Data collection tools
<i>To understand and demonstrate the value of the cyber policy think tank approach for:</i>			
1. Supporting centres to respond to technology governance challenges and effect policy regimes	<p>1.1 How and to what extent did the CPC approach help organizations respond to, and affect the needs of regional or state policy makers?</p> <p>1.2 To what extent and why do the centres see themselves as being more effective, deliberate, systematic in the context of the Initiative's approach?</p>	<p>1.1 Synthesis of the CPC approach <i>per se</i>. Examples of CPC responses (by country & regional); details on impact pathways</p> <p>1.2 CPC reflections on achievements that show changes in effectiveness, etc. and/or behaviour changes as part of the causal chain connecting to achievements.</p>	<p>1.1a. Review documentation: CPC Initiative, ToC, relevant reports</p> <p>1.1b. Semi-structured interviews w/ former IDRC-NE program staff</p> <p>1.2a. Review CPC technical reports</p> <p>1.2b. Semi-structured interviews w/CPC leadership</p> <p>1.2c. Interviews w/stakeholders and boundary partners (to be identified)</p>
2. Building capacity of organizations to take on new subject challenges and building core expertise in order to respond to the changing digital technology and policy landscape	<p>2.1 What works well and what doesn't work for building capacity and enabling organizations to drive their own research agendas?</p> <p>2.2 How, why and to what extent have the CPCs changed their approaches to research outputs due to the CPC Initiative?</p> <p>2.3 What kind of external support has been effective and how?</p> <p>2.4 How, why and to what extent have CPCs changed their approach to gender-equality and/or feminist research?</p>	<p>2.1 Examples from CPC showing changes in capacity and their contribution to research agendas; examples of changes in approaches</p> <p>2.2 Comparison of pre-CPC and current research outputs; link to CPC Initiative contribution</p> <p>2.3. List of events, supports & contribution analysis</p> <p>2.4 Example of feminist research; link to CPC Initiative contribution</p>	<p>2.1a. Review CPC technical reports</p> <p>2.1b. Semi-structured interviews w/CPC leadership</p> <p>2.1c. Findings from CPCs own evaluations</p> <p>2.2a. Written responses from CPCs with examples</p> <p>2.2b. Semi-structured interviews w/CPC researchers</p> <p>2.3a. Written responses from CPCs with examples [in table format]</p> <p>2.3b. Semi-structured interviews w/CPC researchers</p> <p>2.4a. Written responses from CPCs with examples</p> <p>2.4b. Semi-structured interviews w/CPC researchers</p>
3. Supporting organizations to respond to the changing funding landscape for research and for think tanks	<p>3.1 To what extent does the CPC approach help organizations to expand their funding base and thus become more sustainable?</p>	<p>3.1 Comparison of pre-CPC and current funding differentiation; accounts of leverage opportunities due to IDRC support and/or behaviour changes vis-à-vis expanding funding base.</p>	<p>3.1a. Semi-structured interviews w/CPC leadership</p> <p>3.1b. Interviews with other select donors (to be identified)</p> <p>3.1c. Interviews with IDRC staff (former IDRC-NE or other IDRC staff)</p>

USE	Key Evaluation Questions	Evidence needed	Data collection tools
<i>To draw lessons from the CPC approach to inform other initiatives</i>			
4. To draw lessons from the CP approach that can inform other similar policy research funding initiatives (e.g., AI4D policy centres, and Centre-wide D4D work)	<p>4.1 What lessons can we use from the CPC experience about how to support policy research organizations to better engage in policy development and to achieve policy wins?</p> <p>4.2 In what ways do these centers contribute value for IDRC in achieving its strategic goals?⁴</p>	<p>4.1. Emerging lessons and principles that may apply elsewhere</p> <p>4.2. Examples of CPC Initiative outcomes that align w/ IDRC strategy; review of original Vs current goals; mentions of CPC Initiative in IDRC internal evaluations</p>	<p>4.1a. Review documentation: CPC Initiative, ToC, relevant reports & contrast with other findings arising</p> <p>4.1b. Semi-structured interviews with IDRC staff (to be identified)</p> <p>4.2. Semi-structured interviews with IDRC staff (to be identified)</p>

³ “Most of the new IDRC strategy speaks to the very foundations of what the CPC approach intended. **Intermediate outcomes** include: enhancing southern voice and leadership with locally driven research agendas and knowledge from GS to inform debates about inclusive democratic governance and digital technologies; another is informing policy and practice; another is augmenting cultures of evidence. **Development outcome**: Citizens in contexts of democratic transition benefit from more accountable and transparent government and are better able to shape the policies and practices that affect their lives by exercising their democratic rights and freedoms.” (Ruhiya’s edit received Nov 26)

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Data collection*

Interviews and focus groups with the five CPCs were conducted by DECI mentors during March and early April. Mentors were assigned as interviewers with CPCs that they were not mentoring. The data collection tools included: an interview guide for IDRC staff; an interview guide for CPC leaders; a focus group guide for CPC researchers, and three versions of the on-line questionnaire (for decision-makers; civil society; private sector or research) which were available in English and French (See Annex 3). Interviews and focus groups were conducted in pairs, with a DECI interviewer and a note-taker. The interviewer and the note taker reviewed the notes together and produced a summary using a template for each CPC. The interviews and focus groups were 60-90 minutes in duration.

3.2 *Data analysis*

The following were the steps covered during data analysis:

- The lead evaluators (Ricardo Ramirez and Dal Brodhead) cleaned the data and consolidated it into one set of raw data for IDRC and another for the CPCs.
- The lead evaluators coded the raw data (coding based on the key evaluation questions) and outlined emerging themes.
- The consolidated raw data was reviewed and synthesized separately by two additional DECI team members (Charles Dhewa and Mariana López Fernández) who were not involved in data collection. The lead evaluators then interviewed them to extract and confirm the main findings/themes that they identified using the structure of the key evaluation questions.
- The lead evaluators reviewed the IDRC documentation analysis, mostly to populate the *Background section* of the report where the genesis and evolution of the CPC Initiative will be reported (see Annex 4 for a list of documents and Annex 6 for an annotated summary).
- The feedback from the on-line survey from third parties (Annex 5) was used to compare and validate the findings, and to document additional perspectives.
- The draft Findings section was reviewed by the full team.
- A full draft report was shared with the primary evaluation users prior to finalization.

3.3 *Scope & limitations*

The DECI team responsible for this Initiative evaluation was also the team mentoring the CPCs in evaluation and communication planning. This approach had advantages in terms of the DECI Team's familiarity with the Initiative, but our role in the initiative could conceivably have affected our objectivity. The Team sought to minimize bias through the following actions.

- **The coding of data was shaped by the KEQs and the uses**

The evaluation design enabled the primary evaluation users (PIUs) to decide on evaluation uses and the key evaluation questions (KEQs). The analysis of the data was shaped by the KEQs. The interpretation of the findings was likewise guided by the evaluation uses.

- **The evaluation of the CPC Initiative was not an evaluation of DECI**

The DECI Team continually reminded itself about this fact; and the use of mentors who were not familiar with the CPCs was an attempt to minimize the influence of the relationships that DECI has developed with each partner. As part of the design, two DECI members who have had reduced or no direct involvement in CPC mentoring were involved in order to have a more distant analysis.

While the DECI team had planned to take advantage of the overlaps between the CPC Initiative evaluation and the CPCs' own evaluation designs, this was mostly not possible. The CPC data collection efforts had only advanced in a substantive manner in one Centre and the DECI mentors had not yet had access to that evidence at the time of writing this report.

Institutional strengthening is a complex process, which means that the outcomes that were documented may not always be connected in a direct or linear manner to an initiative. The evaluators sought evidence indicating the Initiative may have contributed to the changes experienced by the Centres. This included the Centres' achievements in research and policy influence. However, there was little attention paid to demonstrating *attribution*, given the complex nature of the process.

The bulk of the evidence collected came from IDRC and CPC staff. While the evaluators requested names and contact information from the CPCs for third parties, a handful was received of which only six responded to the on-line survey.

The evaluation design did not include an evaluation use or key evaluation question that required a systematic review of subject matter competencies. The bulk of the evidence about new capacities gained in research, gender, evaluation and research communication, came from IDRC and CPC staff perspectives.

4 FINDINGS

This section is organized into four parts based on the evaluation uses. Within each part there are headings that signal trends in the findings. At the end of each, the reader will find emerging conclusions in bold font. Throughout this section, both within the text and in text boxes, quotes from CPCs respondents are included in italics.

4.1 *Supporting centres to respond to technology governance challenges and effect policy regimes*

Benefits of core funding

The original intent of the Initiative was to move research to the global South. Core support to cyber policy think tanks appears as the first input/activity in the CPC Initiative's Theory of Change. The benefits of core funding were stability, core capacity building, growth of subject matter, as well as increased ownership of research process and results, which contributed to staff continuity in some Centres. The core funding created a comfort zone that allowed the Centres time to work in new fields without having to seek more funds. Not having to always search for project funding gave the CPCs flexibility that in turn enabled them to focus on their strategic planning and organizational development. By defining their own research agendas, the Centres were better able to respond to policy windows of opportunity, and less dependent on funders' externally imposed agendas.

The CPC's core funding has allowed CIPIT to hire additional staff, including a research manager. This has given the organization more stability and has increased its agility for responding to research requests.

❖ **The benefits of core funding cannot be overstated.**

Expansion of the research agenda

The CPC Initiative purposefully encouraged an expansion into new digital topic areas in contrast to IDRC's earlier Think-Tank Initiative (TTI) that provided core funding without advocating for specific new research areas. The findings of this evaluation confirmed that all the CPCs reported a research agenda expansion into new areas including cyber-security, human rights, privacy and artificial intelligence. For some Centres, this change meant

"Health Data and COVID in Sri Lanka and Thailand": A comparative report on how national and local governments dealt with data during the pandemic (and privacy and health-related use).

[LIRNEASIA REPORT](#)

moving beyond their initial focus on *access*; however, the Covid-19 pandemic renewed attention on this topic. For other CPCs, the Initiative support meant a shift from an advocacy focus towards a more balanced approach by adding emphasis on research. Just as relevant, the CPCs reported research extended to other related fields including digital voting, free trade, health, remote sensing, and agriculture.

❖ **These new applied areas of multi-disciplinary research made the Centres of potential interest to other IDRC programming and other funders.**

Elevation of the research agenda

The CPC Initiative sought to encourage research that would address the interconnections and systemic nature of the ICT4D field. This emphasis meant attention needed to be paid, among other themes, to understanding the trade-offs between different policy objectives. This focus called for an elevation of research relative to the expansion of the research agenda *per se*. It called upon the CPCs to articulate research agendas as complex, interconnected systems and develop applied research to respond accordingly. However, the Initiative did not dictate how to achieve this elevation of research. At CIPIT, this challenge was addressed by hiring multidisciplinary staff from different backgrounds (lawyers, scientists, NGO specialists, technicians, etc.). For CLD, the CPC Initiative has cemented its convening power to bring together different stakeholders who previously would not work together.

❖ **The elevation of the research agenda was not an explicit goal in the Theory of Change, yet it unfolded - an indication of growing maturity of research among the CPCs.**

- CLD: A policy report on threats to privacy is in the making to address the overlap between anti-trust regulations (to challenge monopolistic behaviours by large corporations) with privacy protection. The research team brings together an anti-trust researcher in Argentina with a privacy researcher in Mexico.
- LIRNEAsia: “An AI Policy Guidelines for Sri Lanka”: policy white paper features the key AI policy needs, with a focus on balancing innovation and economic development with privacy and ethics.
- Derechos Digitales has had conversations with policy makers in charge of artificial intelligence (AI) policies on AI related to social security, health, employment and justice in Chile, Colombia, Brazil and Uruguay.
- “Now RIA’s research can bring understanding about the economic and social underpinning of digital economies, which is a very necessary condition for data justice.”

Responses & performance: Outputs

The CPC Initiative Theory of Change listed three types of outputs: strengthened research quality, increased policy engagement, and improved organizational performance. Central to strengthened research quality was responsiveness and relevance to the policy environment. It is noteworthy that CPCs began shaping their research products uniquely to fit different audiences (a notion encouraged by the DECI mentors). CIPIT’s research outputs subsequently included: podcasts, blogs, webinars, a handbook for SMEs to assess data protection policies/practices, etc. - as opposed to only academic papers prior to joining the CPC Initiative. Some of this material has been translated into Swahili. There were signs that communication thinking was becoming institutionalized as attention to different audiences, and efforts to ‘translate’ findings for different stakeholders became commonplace. Additional indicators of progress included CPCs being invited to join regional research consortia (see text box example for RIA with PRIDA); and

Research ICT Africa is a consortium partner of PRIDA (Policy & Regulatory Initiative for Digital Africa) in charge of ICT indicators and regulatory aspects related to ICT policy and regulation harmonisation in support of the African Union/European Commission.

[RIA-PRIDA WEBSITE](#)

numerous examples of CPC directors & researchers invited to present at panels, conferences, or appointed as advisors to research initiatives. Another indicator was success in obtaining new partnerships and funding *due to having counterpart funding* at hand in the form CPC core funding.

- ❖ **The evidence shows that the CPCs have become ‘go-to’ organizations both in- country, regionally, and internationally. Having quality outputs, an established record, in combination with flexible un-committed funding has made them stand out across the ICT4D ecosystem.**

Responses & performance: Outcomes

Seeking *attribution* for high-level outcomes, let alone impacts, is difficult in the evaluation of research to policy initiatives. This conclusion was noted in the final evaluation of the TTI: “Given the different dimensions of research quality and the diffuse processes of policy engagement and influencing, tracing the effects of the TTI contribution through to outcomes is difficult.” (NIRAS, 2019: 3). The emphasis on seeking examples of *contribution* (rather than attribution) was confirmed in our interviews with the staff of the former NE unit at IDRC. Nonetheless, the CPCs reported several higher-level outcomes worth noting. Some of the examples respond to the CPC Initiative ToC intermediate outcome category of “policy-makers use high quality research to formulate & implement policies”.

USAID funded a USD 25,000 new project that was only possible due to IDRC's CPC funding (USAID would only cover certain geographies). IDRC funds allowed LIRNEAsia to explore post conflict areas as well gender - nonbinary respondents and do a comprehensive study.

"Experiences and perceptions of privacy, security and freedom of expression online by marginalized groups in Sri Lanka"
[at the time of writing the report was in preparation]

LIRNEAsia was directly involved in preparing the Sri Lankan Data Protection Bill and the Sri Lankan Cybersecurity Act.

RIA worked with the Southern Africa Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) - which included Parliamentarians – in power and opposition - to develop the Digital Economy model law, which included all the components suggested for the CP think tanks (cyber-security, data governance, economic innovation of data and infrastructure, etc.).

CLD was invited by the Mexican Senate to comment on the contentious topic of ‘electronic voting’. CLD encouraged public debate and consultations on various recommendations; it also brought policy reports from Brazil, Peru and Colombia. As a result, the related law was scrapped.

“CIPIT is a very useful Centre to have in the ecosystem, evidence-based policy making is useful for the African landscape in emerging technologies.” [Third party feedback]

It is worth adding that the duration of the initiative was limited - what can be referred to as having ‘time-poverty’- with regards to achieving the Initiative’s Impact. In addition, long-term impact was not included as an evaluation use by the PIUs as part of this evaluation design.

- ❖ **While direct attribution is elusive, and the Initiative duration was short, there are several examples of high and intermediate outcomes that show promise in the CPC Initiative approach.**

Responses & performance: Networking & knowledge sharing

The CPC Initiative ToC mentioned “networking” as part of an input/activity box, however there was no explicit networking master plan as such. The main networking opportunities were organized in the form of gatherings that brought together the CPCs: Toronto (May 2018), Sri Lanka (January 2019), Ottawa (Spring 2020) and Berlin (November 2020). The Toronto session only included the CPCs selected in the first round of funding (CLD-CIDE, CIS and RIA), while in Sri Lanka the six Centres were able to meet. During the first gatherings, the extent of knowledge sharing was limited as the team members began to become familiar with each other. At the Berlin gathering, however, a new sense of shared mission emerged. Both IDRC and CPC representatives felt that the mood had changed, and it began to feel like a shared Initiative. However, more than one CPC lamented the lack of an effective cross-institutional collaboration among the CPCs. The underlying Theory of change for the Initiative assumed a 5–10-year time horizon to accomplish this time-consuming networking goal.

Contained in the feedback from third parties, there was mention of the CLD’s release of the journal *Revista Latinoamericana de Economía y Sociedad Digital (RLESD)*, the first Spanish language journal in the field. There was also mention of the continued administrative support for CPR Latam, the main academic conference on ICT policy and impact in the region. (The CPR conference series was pioneered in Asia and Africa by LIRNEAsia and RIA.)

The TTI evaluation concluded that grantees could be grouped into distinct organizational categories with regards to the types of change and consolidation that they experienced. Significant differences were also noted among the CPC partners. Both CIPIT and Derechos Digitales had an advocacy origin and used the CPC Initiative to enrich their research agenda. RIA, CLD and LIRNEAsia had previous shared projects (e.g., After Access) and their leaders knew each other well. CLD underwent a complete institutional overhaul when it became independent from its university host. It was also the case that the CPC project leaders added value with their reputations and their own established networks.

- ❖ **A possible explanation for the limited collaboration among the CPCs can be attributed to a lack of a plan to catalyze and facilitate CPC partnerships, expecting an organic connectedness which happened among a few for limited periods or purposes, significant differences in organizational trajectories, variations in research priorities, and un-resolved tensions about national Vs regional mandates.**

Effectiveness & responsiveness

Rapid responses to windows of opportunity to influence policy require a combination of a solid reputation, demonstrated experience in emerging topics, staff of high caliber and with time to shift attention on short notice, as well as resources to ‘play with’. CIPIT is equipped for rapid responses to government

consultations with a short turn-around time. Derechos Digitales associates attribute their flexibility with the opportunity to explore emerging themes and thereby being ready to respond when an issue becomes relevant to policy makers (such as AI). DD emphasizes how it has become common practice to start a relationship with policy makers at the beginning of their research. LIRNEAsia makes a

Feature in the Thai Inquirer:
“Transparency and clarity needed in government’s digital response to COVID” by Arthit Suriyawongkul (LIRNEAsia research fellow.)

“The project on the ethics and societal impact of AI is possibly the most innovative and cutting-edge project. There are also several projects related to COVID which I believe are producing fascinating results, including a project on remote learning and another on the gender violence in Central America.”

[Third party feedback]

concerted effort to appear in national (Sri Lanka) and other countries’ media to remind stakeholders that it is involved in immediately relevant research. In addition, its network of research fellows enables it to respond to windows of opportunity across the region.

❖ **The components of the CPC Initiative built on each other to provide synergies; not something that was evident in the Theory of Change. Having flexible funds, enhanced subject-matter expertise, and public presence and credibility has led to more recognition by funders. The evidence shows that the capacity for rapid response to policy windows is a feature of organizational effectiveness.**

Regional Vs national scope

The CPC Initiative had been designed with emphasis on selecting and building up a small number of high-caliber Centres with strong, reputable thought leaders (as opposed to allocating smaller grants to multiple ones) spread over Latin America, Asia and Africa. The Initiative sought to overcome the limitations of its former research network approach, with special attention paid to leaving a legacy behind of high caliber research organizations. Each of the CPCs had developed strong recognition within their countries of origin, and there were several examples of projects with regional scope and

- RIA reported achievements in the form of translation of outputs into French and Portuguese languages (RIA).
- CLD released the new RLESD journal with papers by recognized scholars from Latin America.
- RIA worked on the Principles of a Model Law with the Southern Africa Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADCC PF).
- DD’s work on AI includes Chile, Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay.
- LIRNEAsia reported on research in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore and India – to name a few.
- “The outputs from the GULA project which address the ethics and impacts of AI in the region are probably the most relevant and that to my mind had had the broadest policy impact.” *[Third party feedback]*.

relevance, such as GuIA⁵. The CPC's leaders brought significant national and regional reputations, which enhanced the Centres convening power. There were a significant number of instances when CPC leaders were invited to appear on panels and conferences, a clear indication of regional recognition.

While the CPC Initiative encouraged them to strengthen their regional relevance and impact, it neither developed nor imposed a specific strategy to pursue this aim⁶. While the extent of overlap between those CPCs within the same continent was not a focus of the evaluation, some competitive tensions were reported between Centres in the same region. It is important to note that some Centres continue to collaborate⁷, while they had at other times competed for funders' resources.

- ❖ **The regional nature of the CPC Initiative is work-in-progress; the tension between collaboration and competition is unsurprising considering the lack of a networking strategy in place.**

4.2 *Building capacity of organizations to take on new subject challenges and building core expertise in order to respond to the changing digital technology and policy landscape*

Capacity development: un-prescribed & emergent

The CPC Initiative was unique in providing core funding in combination with resources for capacity building in new research topics and in complementary themes (gender, evaluation, and research communication). *"The approach of the Cyber Policy Think Tanks Initiative⁸ is to provide institutional and/or networked core support and flexible funding, mentorship and skill building, and knowledge networking and policy uptake globally for broad-based cyber policy think tanks in the global South."* (CPC Proposal, 2016: 12) Capacity development to take on research in new subject areas is neither a simple nor a linear process. Among other reasons, CPCs were at different stages of evolution, with established expertise in different topic areas; and they experienced significant staff turnover, and demanding workloads.

An evaluation of I&N's earlier Networking Approach concluded that, while there were benefits (some policy impact could be traced, partners were exposed to trends and network events), methodological capacity building was opportunistic and irregular. There was also insufficient clarity at the hubs and perhaps at I&N about the goals and expectations. This absence affected both the level of research capacity building and the role of the networking process itself. (Morris Lipton Consulting, 2015)

⁵ GuIA was created to strengthen a space for researchers to address specific problems, ethics, principles, norms and policies around Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Latin America and the Caribbean.
<https://guia.ai/en/call-for-papers-guia-2021/>

⁶ The "regional coverage" was by necessity limited: Francophone Africa, Northern Africa, and the Caribbean being among the regions that were not included.

⁷ Some centres collaborated on joint proposals; and there was the precedent of the After Access project when RIA, LIRNEAsia, and CIDE/DIRSI worked together.

⁸ The original CPC Program used the term CPC Policy Think Tank Initiative, but the program was subsequently referred to as the CPC Program.

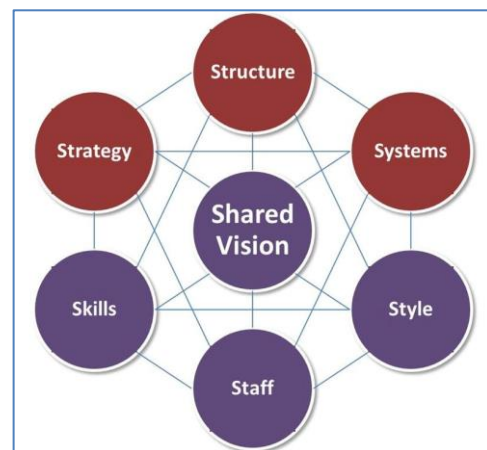
The CPC Initiative promoted capacity building in the following ways:

- Core funding to retain and attract new research staff
- Peer-to-peer learning at global events (Sri Lanka, 2019; Berlin, 2020)
- Presentations by subject matter experts at global events (Berlin, 2020)
- Gatherings alongside other major conferences (e.g. RightsCon)
- Encouragement to attend the Citizen Lab summer Institute
- Encouragement to connect with partners, such as Privacy International
- Gender training by Gender@Work (required)
- Evaluation and research communication mentoring by DECI (encouraged)
- Program officer (PO) support to encourage adaptive management.

The CPC capacity building approach was neither explicitly described, nor prescribed in its Initiative documents. This flexibility allowed the CPCs to bring in new expertise on their own terms (a global South perspective); however, it is unclear whether this was a deliberate NE strategy. Each CPC actively sought to bring in expertise in new and emerging areas. CLD convened regional workshops to map out their research themes and meet the researchers. Several CPCs experimented with different modalities to attract scholars and research fellows (something that was complicated by travel restrictions during the Covid-19 Pandemic). There were concerns voiced about the limited success of networking events where CPCs felt that their specific learning needs had not been sufficiently addressed and the opportunities not optimized.

Capacity development: organizational outcomes

The evidence collected confirmed changes in organizational strategy, style, staffing, internal systems, and skills. In addition, to some extent there was a shared vision among the CPCs. One way of framing these changes is through the 7S framework. The McKinsey 7S framework was developed in the 1970s as a model of organizational effectiveness. As the diagram suggests, all 7S are interrelated and organizational change requires attention to all components. It is being used here to illustrate the capacity development outcomes in both the ‘hard S’ (strategy, structure, systems) and the ‘soft S’ (skills, staff, style, shared vision).



McKinsey 7S framework

As mentioned in section 4.1 of this report, the CPCs enlarged their capacities into new subject matter areas (cyber-security, privacy, artificial intelligence). They began to explore interconnections and trade-offs across different policy objectives, and they expanded into other sectors (agriculture, health, remote sensing, electronic voting, etc.). These changes

“The DECI (mentoring), feminist and financial workshops, have given us the sense of diversity and different needs that an organization like ours needs. We are lawyers but now much better at an interdisciplinary approach.”
(Feedback from a CPC)

can be located at overlap between **strategy, skills** and **structure**; and they in turn affect shared vision. Several respondents in the CPCs mentioned how the DECI mentoring led to an increase in evaluative thinking. Becoming more alert to the evaluation uses and defining questions that matter directly linked to strategy.

Systems and **style** also changed: stakeholders – including policy makers and ‘boundary partners’ – are now routinely identified and engaged during the design of research projects. Communication and evaluation planning begins early on, as opposed to being relegated to the end of a research project cycle; “... [the mentoring] helped RIA think about influencing policy as research is done and to incorporate evaluative thinking in its work.” Several CPC reported becoming nimbler when it came to responding to windows of opportunity. Moreover, several CPCs reported how the gender training led to changes in internal policies and procedures. These examples point to changes in internal **systems** and **structure** which in turn affected **staff** and a **shared vision**. “Now the CPC staff can voice gender issues within...without fear.”

“The funding enabled us to have a core staff who could do ecosystem research to identify potential partners and issue areas, specialists /expert researchers on digital policy issues and know where the knowledge gaps are in the broader privacy, cybersecurity, and innovation.”
(Feedback from a CPC)

Core funding was an effective means of providing greater stability to attract and retain **staff**. Nevertheless, the CPCs faced staffing challenges:

- Identifying, attracting, and mobilizing expertise in emerging topics
 - Hiring as a means of expanding multi-disciplinary research
 - Hiring for senior and middle management positions
 - Retaining staff already onboard
 - Mobilizing research fellows especially across countries in each region, mentoring existing staff
 - More than one CPC observed how, even with the core funding, staff members were too stretched to maintain the momentum of the DECI mentoring process.
- ❖ **Organizations are complex entities; they have many moving parts and do not always respond to a stimulus in expected ways. It is unclear whether the CPC Initiative would have contributed to more improvements in organizational effectiveness had it had a more elaborate roadmap for organizational strengthening. A deliberate plan may have faced resistance, especially when the strategy sought to strengthen research agendas that were owned and designed in the Global South.**

Changes to gender equality and feminist research

As the result of internal reviews within IDRC, the NE group had been encouraged to introduce gender more substantially into its programming. As part of the CPC Initiative, the Gender @ Work group was contracted to provide capacity building to all grantees.

There were two different outcomes in gender equality and feminist research: internal changes within the organizations themselves, and a deeper integration of gender into their research. Internally, some of the CPC reported significant changes in how the organizations handle gender internally: *“...it has helped staff understand that gender is not a man/woman issue, but an issue of power and hierarchy.”*

“[This CPC] has always been kind of conscious of looking at different groups but we became more intentional after we went through these workshops – the whole culture was changed.”

Before, gender was not considered when doing research. Now it is difficult to do research without taking gender into consideration. For example, one of the focus group participants said: “when working in the AI in agriculture project we were not able to neglect the fact that there are disparities between female farmers and male farmers.”

“Before the CPC program, the gender issue was done at a more basic level, such a data disaggregation. The CPC program has allowed [this CPC] to draw in more feminist approaches and methods into its research.”

There was reference to staff voicing gender issues without fear. There was also mention of the challenges faced because of “the cultural heritage”. The internal changes are associated with the second outcome: the Gender at Work training led to a more intentional integration of gender into research designs.

The integration of gender was further enabled by the flexibility in the Initiative:

“We were doing a project on digital rights and online security. But with CPC funding we could extend the similar theme into a gender angle as well. We used extra CPC money to work in another geographical area (an extra province and sample) that focussed on non-binary genders and focus on transgender communities and get their ideas about digital security and digital rights. The main study was about marginalized communities but with the extra (CPC) funding we got a different angle through this research. The flexibility allowed the research to get this.”

- ❖ **While the Gender at Work training and mentoring was a required component of the CPC Initiative, which initially caused resistance, the evidence shows positive outcomes in the integration of gender into organizational cultures and research designs.**

Collaboration & networking: mixed outcomes

As already noted, to some extent the Initiative enabled stronger networking, and knowledge sharing among the CPCs. However, some CPCs commented that the network opportunity was not well utilized: *“The program could have explored how to have even more impact.”* Several CPCs lamented the lack of expert presentations at the gatherings. One suggestion was: *“...a first step to meaningful collaboration would be to identify where informal collaboration or affinity exists and then encourage it by willingness to fund collaborative projects -i.e., there has to be some kind of readiness.”*

In contrast, most CPCs reported promising collaborations with new partners such as:

- DD is collaborating with Global Partners Digital (AI at national level for Chile) and also with Internews, USA
- LIRNEAsia is working with the Asia Foundation on algorithms to detect fake news
- CLD is working with Central American NGOs on issues of gender violence
- RIA is working with the Microsoft Foundation on AI in agriculture and with CIS on biometric and digital identification, and also with the African Development Bank.

“The Cybersecurity Capacity Centre for Southern Africa (CCCCSA), which is now led by Enrico Calendo and focuses on cybersecurity research and capacity building. The CCCSA is a program run by a consortium made up by RIA, the University of Cape Town, the Global Cyber Security Capacity Centre, the University of Oxford and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. The CPC project highlighted the need for capacity building in this area - hence the CCCSA.”
(Feedback from a CPC)

❖ **Collaboration and networking are dynamic processes. Organizations cluster around emerging topics that may lead to short or long-term relationships. While the level of cross-CPC networking achieved was limited, the CPCs were successful confirming new partnerships –including with funders. They were also able to strengthen their national and regional convening and facilitation roles.**

4.3 *Supporting organizations to respond to the changing funding landscape for research and for think tanks*

Leverage and visibility to position the Centres

The CPC Initiative was meant to strengthen research organizations in the global South. The core funding was expected to provide leverage to attract other funders. In the CPC Initiative Theory of Change this goal was expressed as an outcome whereby the CPCs would be “...financially viable and sustainable with support from a diverse set of funders.” The plan

“I am now able to tap into a whole pot of money from a large range of donors funding projects in areas we previously could not have been to tap into.”
(Feedback from a CPC)

was also to support southern organizations to manage themselves, be the voice, become thought leaders and build capacity to deal with issues and funders. It aimed at a shift in the locus of expertise to the global South where there were few research organizations.

The CPC selection process was competitive to narrow down the focus on institutions with a strong track record which had regional and international recognition. The very fact of being selected by IDRC brought additional credibility and visibility. For example, it was indicated that the Initiative gave RIA visibility, partly because IDRC has promoted its work and partly because the grant allowed Centres such as RIA to broaden their regional reach. The increased visibility in turn enabled RIA to increase its funding base. In another case, CIPIT stated that it had been able to expand its funding base because of the CPC grant. Below are some of the funders accessed by the CPCs.

It (RIA) has emerged as THE go-to source of objective, credible expertise in East Africa and one of the best cyber-policy centres anywhere in the world."
[Third party feedback]

African Development Bank Asia Foundation B&M Gates Foundation Facebook Ford Foundation	GIZ (Germany) GSMA Hewlett Packard Foundation Interamerican Development Bank	Internews (USA) KAS (Germany) Microsoft Foundation SIDA (Sweden) Takadi Foundation (Japan)
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Leverage had additional manifestations. Having flexible funding allowed CPCs the space to explore cutting edge subject matter areas and to make available funds to use in counterpart with a funder or partner. For instance, LIRNEAsia obtained USAID funding to do research related to freedom of expression. They were able to access the \$25,000 and contributed the remaining funding from its CPC resources. *"Without CPC funding, we would not have done that; so, we had an IDRC-USAID co-branded output."* At DD, the flexible core funding enabled

"Now our funding approach is fundamentally different; we bring in the users of our research as partners. For example, in one of our proposals ... we work with the advertising companies, asking them to put in some pro bono time, and the government (exploring solutions and methods), so if one funder doesn't work out than we still have partners interested in the topic."
(Feedback from a CPC)

the organization to pause and consider what else it could do. With the gained capacity, the team was in a position to take on new topics. The funding gave them more 'calm and space' for making those decisions and enabled them to seek more resources. This opportunity was also augmented by the flexibility provided by the IDRC Program Officers in response to changing conditions.

At CLD, the funding enabled them to have core staff to do 'ecosystem research', to identify potential partners and issue areas, specialists/expert researchers on digital policy issues. This research, in turn, allowed the team to identify knowledge gaps in the broader privacy, cybersecurity, and innovation areas. CIPIT's director attributed the grant obtained from HP Foundation directly to being able to leverage the CPC grant, as well as the extra funding that CIPIT received from the Ford Foundation. *"We have credibility because of IDRC funding..."*

Now our funding approach is fundamentally different; we bring in the users of our research as partners.”

- ❖ **The CPC core funding was an enabler. The CPCs were successful in obtaining additional funding sources. Very few funders provide core funding⁹. Some of those interviewed wondered with core funding over, did it mean the end of an era – notwithstanding the evidence of its strategic advantages.**

4.4 *Drawing lessons from the CPC approach that can inform other similar policy research funding initiatives (e.g., AI4D policy centres, and Centre-wide D4D work)*

Strengths of the approach

The CPC Initiative marked a shift away from supporting research networks and moved towards promoting research organizations. The evaluation of the previous INASSA Initiative that had supported networks contributed to informing IDRC’s Networked Economies (NE) design of the CPC approach. The rationale for the change, as one voice put it, was an absence of research done from an African perspective, with an understanding of the African context. The IDRC NE team debated between funding many small players (the so-called spray and pray approach) vs. a few Centres that would be well funded. The latter option was chosen. In four out of the five cases, the Initiative supported organizations with established track records. In the case of CLD, it supported the establishment of a new entity as it became independent from its host university. The evidence gathered here confirms that the intermediate outcome – “CPCs able to foster inclusive policy environments that are responsive and have an inclusive focus” – was achieved.

The CPC program made RIA shift to building internal capacity in new domains and then turn back to other parties again to help them build their capacity.

The Initiative helped the CPCs broaden their scope of research and advocacy. It enabled the CPCs to build on their strengths and work on their policy area weaknesses. They are now better able to respond quickly to policy windows and mobilize expertise by teaming up with academic institutions and competent researchers in other countries. The CPCs are now working on more equal terms with organizations in other countries/regions and in a more systematic way.

The four CPC gatherings (Toronto, Ottawa, Sri Lanka and Berlin) contributed to the CPCs feeling part of a cohort of organizations, a community with the same bigger agenda. All the CPCs reported success attracting additional funding from various organizations, and several

⁹ The most prominent example is the Ford Foundation’s BUILD program that provides grantees **with five years** of general operating support, combined with targeted organizational strengthening support. [BUILD](#) aims to equip social justice organizations with the strategic clarity, people, knowledge, and resources they need to achieve impact and advance systems change over the course of years and decades.

attributed this achievement to the flexibility, as well as visibility and legitimacy accorded by the funding from IDRC.

The support provided by DECI and Gender at Work has created important spaces for reflection and has helped CIPIT staff know themselves better and shift their thinking. There is an appreciation for IDRC not just focusing on research outputs but also on other elements that are important for researchers.

Overall, the DECI and Gender supports for institution building, were perceived as important. The Gender training led to significant internal reflections within the CPCs and to organizational changes. These organizational supports were not without

challenges (see below), yet their delivery was more structured compared capacity building in the new research subject matter areas.

Weaknesses of the approach

The following weaknesses emerged from the data:

- Some IDRC staff commented that the methodological capacity building strategy was opportunistic and irregular
- Messaging from IDRC NE to the partners on expectations and capacity building strategies was not always successful
- There appeared to be no clear and explicit capacity building strategy
- Several CPCs felt that the networking and collaboration process was not optimized
- Some observed that they had not been able to incorporate gender into the projects without overwhelming staff
- More than one CPC mentioned that it was challenging to work with DECI on evaluation due to lack of time and experience
- For several of the CPCs that underwent a fundamental organizational overhaul, it had taken time to create an autonomous institution; it had been a slow process with few staff and constant turnover
- Staff turnover affected several of the CPCs, even though the CPC funding was intended to enhance employment stability.

❖ **The CPC Initiative favoured a focus on strengthening research organizations while also supporting the expansion of research agendas into new and emerging fields. The Initiative was successful in moving research control to the global South. This combination appears to be unique and is informing the AI4D Policy Centres Program.**

Institutional context of CPCs and stages of evolution

Several of the CPCs had a previous track record with IDRC and had established regional or international reputations. RIA, LIRNEAsia and CLD (under its previous DIRSI phase) had been long standing partners who had hosted research networks during earlier NE programming. Institutional development takes time; if the CPC Initiative is seen in this light, it constitutes a chapter in a longer trajectory [albeit not necessarily a planned one] implemented by IDRC of establishing research capacity in the global South;

In most cases, the CPC were or became independent from universities, (CIPIT being the exception), although several of them had prior connections with academia. The visible trend

to move CPCs away from university hosts stems from the limitations imposed by their academic rules, costs, and internal administration. However, common to both independent organizations and university-based units, the CPCs suffered from high staff turnover challenges. It was apparent that 2-year core funding was insufficient to provide the conditions to significantly change this situation.

The external evaluation of the TTI concluded that grantees could be grouped into four distinct categories with regards to the types of change and consolidation that they experienced: **transformational change; accelerated growth; consolidation of their position; and, keeping afloat**. In other words, the benefits varied depending on the nature and status of each institution. The CPC Initiative did not have an explicit strategy to differentiate among the CPC in terms of their stages of evolution, and there was no separate organizational needs assessment undertaken during the Initiative's design. There are indications that all of the CPCs went through some transformational change with regards to the expansion of their research agendas and their strategic changes in methodology and policy influence. As was to be expected, there were variations in the changes experienced depending on the context of each Centre. While all of them were successful in attracting other donors, IDRC remained their principal funder.

Before RIA focused on working with regulators of telecommunications, but now it also works with non-state actors because it realizes that influencing policy is no longer enough. Therefore, RIA now also engages civil society, cyberspace institutions, IGAPPE institute (Angola), universities, the military, etc.

While the CPC Project was announced as a 2-year pilot, its continuity was difficult to confirm due to internal changes within IDRC.

- ❖ **Institutional strengthening takes time, which makes short-term funding an insufficient strategy to yield policy impacts against which to assess success. In addition, sustaining the Centres in the long run would require co-funding from multiple sources and an exit plan for IDRC.**

Core funding: so clearly beneficial and so easily discounted

As already reported, core funding has had several advantages. The CPCs continuity has enabled the development of organizational systems & processes. All CPCs were able to leverage their resources, hire more staff and gain more stability. In one instance, LIRNEAsia focused one of its own evaluation uses on the topic of staff retention (one of the few overlaps with this programmatic evaluation). In some cases, CPCs developed a stronger regional reach. It provided an opportunity to consolidate regional and international credibility – based upon their continuity and improved research quality.

The added institutional stability/continuity translated into more agility as a core function, it also allowed them to overcome previous challenges, such as fragmented research. Finally, it allowed the CPCs to build up credibility in new subject areas. It also demonstrated the power and importance of an African, Asian or Latin American-driven research agenda. It enabled some expansion into new countries (e.g., Francophone and Lusophone).

Notwithstanding these merits, core funding as an approach appears to be losing traction among funders. This evaluation found one comparable example of core funding in the Ford Foundation's BUILD Program with significantly higher levels of funding committed for 5 years.

- ❖ **In the ICT4D field, IDRC has been a major driver for building organizational research capacity in the global South. The continuity of the support that (until recently) survived cycles of internal changes at IDRC was one of the important contributing factors; the other was the flexibility of its core funding.**

Leaving a legacy behind

The CPC approach, combining core funding with encouragement to take on new thematic research areas, plus organizational capacity building support, has achieved some of the intermediate outcomes laid out in the Initiative's ToC. As already outlined, these achievements cannot be attributed to the CPC Initiative on its own; but the continuity of IDRC accompaniment over a long period is an important contributor. The CPCs have been able to leverage their resources, hire more staff, and gain more stability and to position themselves with credibility. The evidence shows that they are in a strong position to achieve their agendas and the vision of the CPC Initiative. This collection of CPCs provides IDRC with a partnership with established organizations that can embody its mandate in the global South. Not only is this the case in the field of ICT4D, but it is also at the intersection with priority areas in agriculture, health, education, governance and climate change (e.g., AI applications affect all of these sectors).

What mattered most was the ability to obtain good results on the ground and these organizations delivered. They have become high performance organizations and the loss of core funding brings risks. Returning to project-specific funding by multiple partners and donors means the loss of CPC research autonomy and the possible reduction from a long-term forward-looking (Southern) strategy to a short term, responsive one. It can also be argued that competing for funding in order to survive could bring some benefits like creativity, which may be eroded for those receiving core funding. This is already the case as both African CPCs have been successful in competing for IDRC AI research funds.

- ❖ **The CPCs are helping IDRC because of their high-capacity thinkers; Project Officers can rely on them for excellent work; effective use of research money, and definite impact. Cyber policy is too complicated a field to simplify and fund on a short-term basis. The CPC partners and IDRC enjoy a relationship of mutual benefit and inter-dependence, a symbiotic partnership and legacy in the global South.**

5 CONCLUSIONS & LESSONS

The conclusions and lessons are divided into two parts, one focused on the evaluation findings and a second on its process. The material in this section builds on the lessons that have emerged from the preceding section. The intent here is to clarify and elaborate on that material succinctly.

5.1 *Conclusions on outcomes*

Expansion & elevation of the research agenda

- Although the elevation and expansion of the CPCs research agendas was not an explicit goal in the CPC Initiative's Theory of Change (ToC), yet it unfolded and was an indication of growing research maturity within the CPCs. Consequently, these new applied areas of multi-disciplinary research made the CPCs of potential interest to other IDRC programming and other funders.

Responses & performance: Outputs, outcomes, effectiveness

- The evidence shows that the CPCs have become 'go-to' organizations both in-country, regionally, and internationally. Having quality outputs, an established record, in combination with flexible un-committed funding has made them stand out across the ICT4D ecosystem.

As an example, the original ToC for RIA (that DECI helped them develop) explained their success based on four interrelated components: their credibility (augmented by the caliber of the executive director), their research, their networking, and their capacity building efforts).

- Performance is difficult to measure as direct attribution is seldom possible, but positive contributions were evident. Even though the CPC Initiative duration was short there were evident examples of high and intermediate outcomes that show the promise in the CPC Initiative approach.

Given that higher-level outcomes take time to attain, the CPCs demonstrated a capacity to create their own unique research agendas and moved into positions which enabled them to demonstrate their expertise and relevance when civil society, governments, and the private sector discovered the need for evidence-based policy making and programming in new ICT4D areas.

- The components of the CPC Initiative combined to provide synergies; this factor was not something that was evident in the Theory of Change. The CPCs capacity for a rapid response to policy windows was an indication of their increased organizational effectiveness. The basis of the CPCs strengthened organizational effectiveness appears to have been the result of a combination of factors including (a) long-term relationships, (b) demonstrated research capacities, and (c) flexible core funding combined with

encouragement to explore new topics. The combination of (a) and (b) increased the level of trust among funders-partners.

Regional versus national; networking, collaboration, knowledge sharing

- The regional dimension of the CPC Initiative was a work-in-progress; the tension between collaboration and competition within a region was unsurprising. The rationale for a regional focus was not made explicit within the ToC; but it may have been implicitly intended to widen the geographic coverage sought by IDRC, which speaks to the intended collaboration among organizations.

A possible explanation for the limited collaboration among the Centres can be attributed to the significant differences in organizational trajectories, combined with un-resolved tensions about their national Vs regional mandates.

- Collaboration and networking are dynamic processes. Organizations cluster around emerging topics that may lead to the creation of short or long-term relationships. While the level of cross CPC networking achieved was limited, the CPCs were successful in confirming new partnerships – most notably with funders. They were also able to strengthen their national and regional convening and facilitation roles.

The lack of a specific collaboration or network design strategy within the Initiative may have been a weakness, but it might have been unhelpful for NE to impose one. The research networks of earlier programs had been effective at field building, but they had achieved limited policy outcomes, let alone sustainability. Perhaps the focus should have been on stimulating research excellence to promote organic linkages only among Centres with shared interests. Such an approach could have allowed the CPCs to decide if/when/how to collaborate or not. Competition for resources will often complicate relationships and steer attention away from collaboration unless the funders require it.

Capacity development: organizational outcomes

- It is unclear whether the CPC Initiative would have contributed to more improvements in organizational effectiveness had it had a more elaborate capacity building roadmap. Organizations are complex entities; they have many moving parts and do not always respond to a stimulus in expected ways. A deliberate externally devised plan may have faced resistance, especially when the NE strategy sought to strengthen research agendas that were owned and designed in the Global South. However, at times the lack of a roadmap led to unmet expectations in capacity development. The positive response to specialized presentations during the Berlin gathering was mentioned as a valuable technical input that could have been introduced more explicitly and frequently from the start of the Initiative.

The proposal submission process included an organizational needs self-assessment. However, a systematic response to the identified capacity building needs was not apparent. It is unclear whether there would have been better outcomes had the capacity

approach been more targeted to each of CPC's own needs. The five CPC partners were at different stages of evolution and transformation. The question remains as to whether there would have been better outcomes had the capacity approach been more targeted to each CPC's own needs. It could well be that it was the POs who were expected to take on this role of providing such support and encouragement. In addition, the DECI 'just-in time' mentoring process was tailored to each organization's context and included a readiness assessment at the beginning.

Changes to gender equality and feminist research

- Gender at Work, a capacity-building initiative, was a required component of the CPC Initiative. While its imposition initially caused some resistance, the evidence shows positive outcomes in the integration of gender into organizational cultures and research designs. The integration of gender equality into internal organizational narratives created a safe space for staff to address concerns of power and hierarchy. It translated into having a gender lens in research where there is a wider acknowledgment that technology, innovation, privacy issues –to name a few- all have gender implications.

Benefits of core funding, leverage and visibility of the Centres

- In the digital governance field, IDRC has been a major driver for building organizational research capacity in the global South. The continuity of the support that (until recently) survived cycles of internal changes at IDRC was one of the important contributing factors; the other was the flexibility of its core funding.
- The core funding provided to the CPCs was a crucial enabler and its benefits cannot be overstated. It provided the CPCs with continuity to develop organizational capacity and to extend reach. It facilitated the building of credible, relevant South-owned research and policy advocacy entities with national and regional linkages. Crucially, it equipped CPCs with the ability to access additional resources and to establish relationships with an array of funding bodies. It enabled CPCs to temporarily move from away from being project focused to becoming go-to research and advocacy centres within their countries and internationally.

The NE core funding was unique - so few funders currently provide core funding.¹⁰ Notwithstanding the evidence of its strategic advantages, further comparative analysis on the benefits and risks of longer-term funding of the TTI, CPC, and other programs would be timely.

Strengths and weaknesses of the approach

- The CPC Initiative favoured a focus on strengthening research organizations while also supporting the expansion of research agendas into new and emerging fields. The

¹⁰ The most prominent example is the Ford Foundation's BUILD program that provides grantees **with five years** of general operating support, combined with targeted organizational strengthening support. [BUILD](#) aims to equip social justice organizations with the strategic clarity, people, knowledge, and resources they need to achieve impact and advance systems change over the course of years and decades.

Initiative was successful in moving research control to the global South. Within the current debate about decolonizing international aid, core funding remains a vehicle for shifting decision-making to research partners. This combination appears to be unique and relevant to and informing the AI4D Policy Centres Program. Going forward, there is scope for a critical assessment on the extent to which the disappearance of core funding will mean that Southern owned/defined research priorities will begin to give way to externally imposed (Northern) research agendas.

- The emphasis at the start of the CPCs was on a ‘pilot Initiative’. It is not clear whether this label was meant to emphasize its experimental nature, or whether this nametag was more a reflection of uncertainty with program funding and continuity inside IDRC. Perhaps it was an expression of an intention to encourage innovation during a period of constrained resource availability.

Institutional context of CPCs and stages of evolution

- Institutional strengthening takes time, which makes short-term funding an insufficient strategy to yield policy impacts against which to assess success. In addition, sustaining the Centres in the long run would require co-funding from multiple sources and an exit plan for IDRC.

It would appear that the NE group at IDRC made good use of its past familiarity with some of the Centres (namely RIA, LIRNEAsia and CLD-CIDE). For example, the team was able to acknowledge the need for CLD to take on a new organizational identity, which was a major investment in time and effort.

The ToC communicated the intentionality to invite other donors to support the CPCs. It is unclear whether this was a well-thought exit strategy, or a symptom of internal uncertainty about the future of the NE unit.

Leaving behind a legacy

- The CPCs are helping IDRC because of their high-capacity thinkers; Project Officers can rely on them for excellent work; effective use of research money, and definite impact. Cyber policy is too complicated a field to simplify and fund on a short-term basis. The CPC partners and IDRC enjoy a relationship of mutual benefit and inter-dependence, a symbiotic partnership and legacy in the global South. The CPCs are an asset to IDRC in enabling it to deliver its programs, as well as to have a presence and relevance in the South.

5.2 *Conclusions on process*

The CPC Initiative marked a stage in evolution for IDRC’s NE group as it moved away from supporting research networks and drew lessons from the TTI. Through the CPC Initiative, the NE team piloted a hybrid that provided core funding while promoting the expansion of partners’ research agendas. This combination was an innovation.

Ideally, an initiative with a commitment to institutional strengthening would have had a longer life span from its inception. While core funding was a major asset, the NE team was unable to commit to funding beyond two-year tranches, which meant that the flexible space for research that it bought the grantees had evident limitations. This result was partly remediated by the fact that IDRC has supported three of the five partners in the past, which provided some continuity.

The CPC Initiative was an innovation, with attributes comparable to those mentioned in the literature on social innovation (SI):

“Social innovation is a complex process of introducing new products, processes or programs that profoundly change the basic routines, resource and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system in which the innovation occurs. Such successful social innovations have durability and broad impact.”
(Westely & Antadze, 2010:2)¹¹

“...social innovation strategies often cross sectors, involve changing the dynamics, roles, and relationships between many players, and challenge conventional wisdom about the nature of the problem and its solutions”
(Preskill and Beer, 2012: 2–3).¹²

SI strategies are unique because of their emphasis on experimentation and on the integration of new ideas from diverse actors to tackle unprecedented, complex, intractable challenges (Mulgan, Tucker, Ali, & Sanders, 2007).¹³

The implications for evaluation of SI are multiple, including calls for longer than usual time horizons for observable outcomes to be measurable: i.e., a decade (Svensson *et al.*, 2018)¹⁴. These authors compare social innovations with conventional programs based on vision, focal point, assumptions, means and outcomes. For instance, for SI they argue that the focal point is a process emphasis, in contrast with an output emphasis in conventional initiatives.

Evaluating the CPC Initiative has required gaining an understanding about the nature of the experiment. The process had the following features:

¹¹ Westley, F., & Antadze, N. (2010). Making a difference: Strategies for scaling social innovation for greater impact. *Innovation Journal*, 15(2): 1–19.

¹² Preskill, H., & Beer, T. (2012). *Evaluating social innovation*. Washington, DC: FSG and the Centre for Evaluation Innovation.

¹³ Mulgan, G., Tucker, S., Rushanara, A., & Sanders, B. (2007). *Social innovation: What it is, why it matters and how it can be accelerated* (Working paper). Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship, Said Business School, Oxford University. Retrieved July 7 2021 from <http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Social-Innovation-what-it-is-why-it-matters-how-it-can-be-accelerated-March-2007.pdf>

¹⁴ Svensson, K.; Szijarto, B.; Milley, P. & Cousins, J.B. (2018). Evaluating social innovations: Implications for evaluation design. *American Journal of Evaluation* 39(4): 459-477.

- A conscious decision to engage with IDRC NE staff (as primary evaluation users) in designing the evaluation
- Acknowledging the existence of multiple perspectives amongst the NE team, with some dimensions that may not be easy to define given the evolution of the Initiative and the ongoing structural changes within IDRC
- The design of the evaluation was collaboratively negotiated between evaluators and the primary evaluation users
- Sharing the evaluation design with the five Initiative partners as a commitment to transparency
- Attention in the evaluation uses and key evaluation questions to process, iteration, ongoing change, and the many moving parts typical of complex adaptive systems
- An awareness that the early stages of the Initiative may have been more dynamic and less defined (e.g. lack of clarity about what success should look like), while later stages may have had more tangible outcomes to document
- Acknowledging the evaluators' partial embeddedness in the Initiative given their dual role as mentors for the partner Centres and evaluators.

5.3 *Lessons learned*

The three pillars of the CPC Initiative

The combination of core funding, encouragement to take on new research topics, and capacity building in gender, evaluation and communication worked well as a three-pronged strategy. Core funding opened a “space” where the Centres could pause, focus on acquiring skills and connections in new research topics, hire additional staff, bring about a temporary stability, and use unrestricted funds to partner with funders. Other programs at IDRC (e.g. AI4D policy centres, D4D centres) may want to build on these achievements.

Capacity building strategy

While the Initiative lacked a prescribed capacity building strategy to expand into new research topics, the CPCs found their own unique pathways to achieve this goal. This process included: convening and meeting with researchers in each region to explore the state of the art in each topic area, hiring staff from other fields of expertise, engaging with new partners as research collaborators, launching a new journal and hosting conferences, and participating in leading edge panels where new applied research topics were explored. Whether by design or by accident this approach to capacity building is consistent with recent calls to move away from an expert-recipient model onto one of capacity sharing, co-design and co-creation:

"Capacity development has moved from being a simple transfer of knowledge to an adaptive process of looking at challenges from multiple perspectives and developing co-designed solutions that not only strengthen the use of evidence

but also transform the environments where change happens.”
(Hayler, 2021)¹⁵

Both the gender training (by Gender@Work), and the evaluation & communication mentoring (by DECI) approaches followed different strategies. The gender work training was required by NE, while the DECI work was encouraged, but optional. The gender training was based on a workshop series format, while the DECI work followed a ‘just-in-time’ mentoring process. On the whole both approaches yielded positive results. The gender work contributed both to internal organizational reflections and adjustments to norms, and to a more substantial integration of gender in research. There was also evidence of individual and organizational learning in evaluation and communication planning. Oddly enough, one of the challenges expressed by the CPCs with regards to this training was the limited time that staff had to keep up with the DECI mentors. This experience shows that the CPC Initiative intent of freeing up staff time for skill building had mixed results; possibly due to the pressures to find more funding that were only reduced temporarily by the availability of flexible core funds.

Capacity building outcomes

The CPCs were able to expand into new areas of research in cyber-policy related topics. In addition, they elevated their research to encompass complex, real-world trade-offs that policy-makers face, especially as technology outpaces regulation. By venturing in to new applied fields of research, the Centres positioned themselves as go-to resources to address emerging challenges (such as the implications of AI on privacy across different sectors). Having IDRC funding contributed to legitimizing and making the CPCs prominent in the ICT4D ecosystem.

An important contribution of the CPC Initiative and specifically its core funding approach was its focus on strengthening institutional capacity. The resultant continuity within the CPC organizations (while limited in duration because of short-term funding), was nevertheless essential. As noted elsewhere, it takes time to build organizations to enable them to amass and keep skilled personnel while deepening their research capacity, as well as their outreach to potential advocacy partners and funders. The NE approach enabled their partner organizations to build credibility, advocate more effectively and collaborate with other like-minded players.

Diversified funding

While this evaluation confirmed how all CPCs increased the number and variety of funding partners, this success needs to be taken with a grain of salt. Most funders do not provide core funding, but instead predetermine research topics of interest to their own portfolios. In addition, they each bring their own reporting and evaluation requirements. Comparing the workloads and research agenda pressures between flexible core funding from IDRC Vs. multiple grants from various donors would be worth exploring further. Not all the funders

¹⁵ Hayler, E. (2021). Moving beyond “the norm” for capacity development. INASP Blog.
<http://blog.inasp.info/beyond-the-norm-capacity-development/> (accessed 13 July 2021)

have a commitment to move the research agenda to the global South, and the CPCs will continue to play a balancing act between what they deem as relevant, and what their funders impose on them.

Thinking beyond short-term cycles

Some of the CPCs have been supported by a variety of IDRC grants over significant periods of time (15 years or more). In most if not all cases, they have had to compete for these grants, some of which were judged by panels of independent experts. This continuity has had value, as the Centres have led and migrated with the quickly evolving field of ICT4D. Technological innovation has constantly outpaced regulation, making independent, rigorous research especially relevant to policy makers. This evaluation has concluded that the Centres are of service to IDRC, as they have demonstrated their capacity to deliver results. Without them, IDRC would be hard pressed to find partners to operationalize its mission, as is evident in some regions of the world where the CPC Initiative has had limited uptake. This point begs the question of what the most effective duration for funding would be when it comes to stimulating and enhancing applied research in the global South. While IDRC itself will find internal funding restrictions, it would be to everyone's advantage to more explicitly define a rational for length of funding and/or exit strategies where they are warranted.

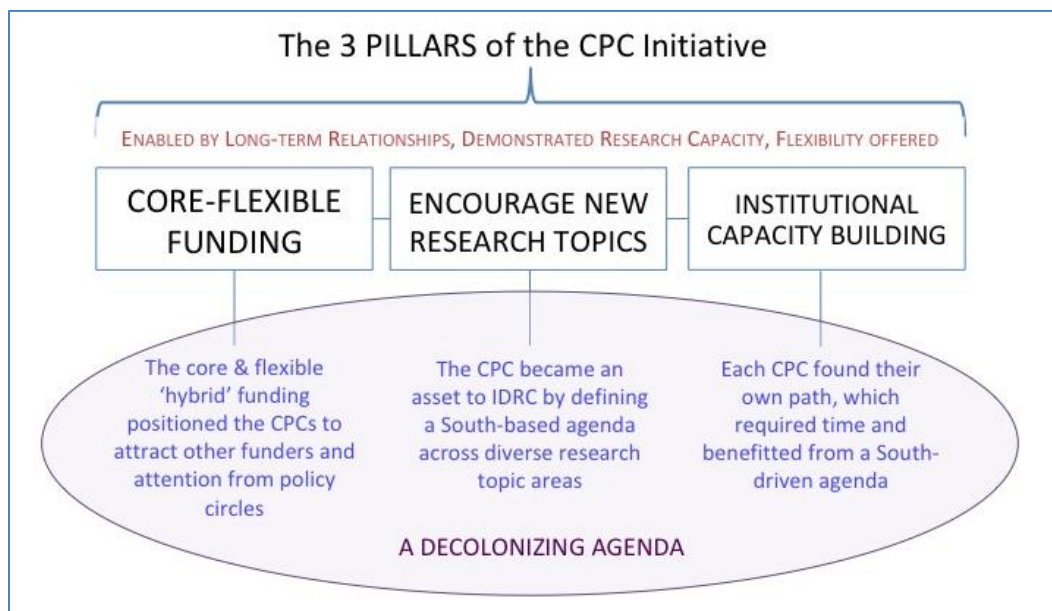
6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The CPC Initiative, part of IDRC's Networked Economies Program, generated instructive lessons that have implications for future sustainable program development. It should be of relevance to NE's programming niche which is being primarily integrated into IDRC's Democratic and Inclusive Governance as well as the Education & Science program areas. The recommendations may also be useful for other IDRC Programs and potential co-funders.

The essence of the knowledge emerging from the CPC Initiative is summarized below in Figure 6.1. It demonstrates the importance of having a strategy which links three pillars which worked as a system to yield demonstrable results. The three key elements included: core-flexible funding; encouragement of new Southern-driven research topics and home-grown institutional capacity building.

There were enabling conditions as prerequisites to obtain the positive outcomes noted in the evaluation report. They were long-term relationships, demonstrated research capacity among the partners, and the flexible & core 'hybrid' funding provided. The notes in blue font in Figure 6.1 summarize the key outcomes; when taken together they constitute a decolonizing agenda where the global South drives and owns the definition of the research and their strategies to influence policy in their region.

Figure 6.1 The three pillars of the CPC Initiative which the recommendations build on



Recommendation 1: Core – Flexible Funding

- It is recommended that future initiatives with similar objectives, emphasize the value of core, longer-term funding, with the flexibility for grantees to design and deliver their own priority research to policy initiatives. It should be noted that the three pillars require the conditions (red font in Figure 6.1) to be present.

It is therefore recommended that other initiatives and programs, such as the earlier NE Network approach, be understood strategically as a process of identification and vetting of potential longer-term partners that could 'graduate' into longer-term flexible funding support such as that provided by the CPC initiative.

Recommendation 2: Encourage New Research Topics

- It is recommended that programs encourage partners to take on new research topics via both South-South exchanges and also via North-South collaboration. This evaluation found examples of both: CIPIT & RIA as South-South and RIA with an Oxford scholar. Building specific funding streams or events for partners to learn, build skills and knowledge of new frontiers would still encourage a South-based research agenda, but would benefit from North-South and South-South dialogue and exchange.

Recommendation 3: Encourage Knowledge Sharing

- It is recommended that future initiatives or programs explicitly develop knowledge sharing incentives to promote networking and knowledge sharing amongst grantees. These opportunities may include joint presentations at a conference panel or collaborating in a shared publication or training package.

Networking and knowledge sharing appears to work best when they respond to immediate, felt needs by the grantees; so engaging them in the design of a shared process will increase their sense of relevance and ownership.

Recommendation 4: Emphasize Institutional Capacity building

- It is recommended that future initiatives explicitly and strategically address capacity building as a process of co-design and co-creation, where partners are encouraged to develop their own strategies, document them, and reflect on their value. Included in this process a participatory (UFE) co-design of M&E capacity building should be introduced to monitor how, when and through what processes adaptive management takes place.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Steps outlining the CPC Programmatic Evaluation

September 29, 2020

Background

The following points are taken from a Skype conversation held by Ricardo and Dal with Ruhiya Seward on September 23rd. It focused on the action steps needed to move the CPC Initiative level evaluation phase of DECI-4 forward with the IDRC/NE team while continuing its mentoring support to CPC projects.

Context

The five CPCs are making progress despite various challenges and it is expected that the five CPC projects will shortly have draft evaluation plans & communication strategies which will inform the design of the CPC programmatic evaluation.

IDRC is undergoing significant reorganization with the creation of five main program thrusts and the hiring of four (of five) new Directors and the shift of the staff from current roles. The situation currently complicates/affects IDRC's own readiness to participate in the evaluation design and implementation. Nevertheless, there is interest in the evaluation findings.

Initiative-level evaluation – key points

- Defining the primary users among the NE staff is complicated by their evolving organizational responsibilities
- The project's definitions of what constitutes success and its indicators will be relevant
- The DECI-3 IDRC Initiative completion report did not show many specific outcomes
- The focus will be on evaluation and less so on communication

IDRC Evaluation Preparatory Steps – for Ruhiya (with DECI support)

Week of October 5th

- Organize Skype meeting with Laurent (and possibly Phet) to brief them on the process
- Discuss the choice of the PRIMARY USERS as active designers of the evaluation (e.g. Laurent, Ruhiya, Phet, Ben, others)
- Identify tentative USES of the evaluation and strategic audience(s) of the evaluation

Week of October 12th

- Obtain IDRC decisions/commitments on evaluation designation of PRIMARY USERS
- Set up a Skype call with the PRIMARY USERS to explore possible USES

Weeks of October 19 & 26

- Initial planning and Skype discussions with IDRC PRIMARY USERS team on USES and KEQs

Evaluation Timetable - proposed

October 2020	IDRC readiness discussions (USERS, USES, KEQs etc.)
November 2020	Development & finalization of evaluation design (e.g. KEQ's) Review by IDRC of CPC evaluation plans Review by DECI team and by CPCs of IDRC evaluation plan.
December 2020	Finalization of CPC Programmatic Evaluation Plan, and work plan
Jan-June 2021	Data collection based on KEQs & CPC completion dates (*)
July-Oct	Data analysis and reporting

(*) CPC Project Dates

LIRNEAsia - June 2019 start - ends in June 2021

CIPIT - July 2019 start - ends July 2021

RIA - Awaiting confirmation.

DD - Started Sep 2019 (a shift from an original start up in June) and will end Sep 2021

CLD - July 2020-June 2022

Annex 2. Work Plan

February 5th, 2021

DECI Team – Summary Presentation

Based upon prior DECI experience, the interview teams will be composed of two mentors who will interview CPC projects that they have not mentored previously.

Matching – team members to projects

	IDRC	RIA	CIPIT	DD	CLD	LIRNEASIA
Ricardo / Dal	X					
Joaquin / Sonal*		X				
Sonal* / Joaquin			X			
Wendy* / Jules				X		
Sonal / Jules*					X	
Jules* / Wendy						X

(One interviewer lead; one note-taker per project)

(* Lead Interviewer)

1. Summary of steps

The work plan follows a series of sequential implementation steps.

1.1 Preparation [\[February\]](#)

- Approval of the CPC Programmatic Evaluation Design by IDRC
- Final allocation of team members to tasks & orientation
- Finalization of interview guides
- Collection and review of relevant documentation
- Notice to CPCs about data collection plans and dates, and confirmation of CPC interviewees
- Collection of “other” interviewees from IDRC and CPC partners
- Contacting & scheduling interviews

1.2 Documentation review [\[March-April\]](#)

- Documents will be reviewed with attention to the evidence needed for each KEQ
- Programmatic documents will be a priority for Ricardo and Dal, and some may be of interest to the interview teams
- CPC documentation will be a priority for the interview teams assigned to each CPC
- A document summary will help summarize the relevant evidence

1.3 Data collection: Interviews, Focus Groups, Questionnaire [\[March-early April\]](#)

- Data collection with CPCs will be conducted by DECI mentors (assigned to CPCs that they don't normally mentor)
- There are two interview guides (for IDRC; for CPC leads), one focus group guide for CPC researchers, and three versions of the questionnaire (decision-makers; civil society; private sector or research)

- Interviews and focus groups will be conducted in pairs, with an interviewer and a note-taker
- The interviewer and the note taker review the notes together and produce a summary using a template (single cover page with notes attached)
- Each interview and each focus group to take 1 hour; the note-taker fills in the summary template immediately after; and the interviewer verifies the summary; these are reviewed by the regular CPC project mentors
- Questionnaires are sent, analyzed and synthesized by the same teams

1.4 Synthesis of findings *[late April- May]*

- The templates will be grouped by type of interview (eg all CPC leads together)
- DECI team members who are not mentors (Charles, Vira if available) plus Mariana (who co-mentors CLD and DD), will synthesize the findings from the templates into emerging themes or trends, also looking for outliers and unexpected outcomes
- Ricardo and Dal will produce a **draft findings section** based on the emerging themes or trends, the document summaries, and a review of the interview templates as needed.

1.5 Collaborative analysis & reporting *[May-June]*

- Analysis & validation of the draft findings will be discussed with the DECI team, to result in a draft report
- Review of the **draft report** with the primary users
- Revisions and finalization *(July 1)*

Evaluation Timetable - proposed

October 2020	IDRC readiness discussions (USERS, USES, KEQs etc.)
November 2020	Development & finalization of evaluation design (e.g. KEQ's) Review by IDRC of CPC evaluation plans Review by DECI team and by CPCs of IDRC evaluation plan.
December 2020	Finalization of CPC Programmatic Evaluation Plan, and work plan
Jan-June 2021	Data collection based on KEQs & CPC completion dates (*)
July-Oct	Data analysis and reporting

(*) CPC Project Dates

LIRNEAsia - June 2019 start - ends in June 2021

CIPIT - July 2019 start - ends July 2021

RIA - End of 2021

DD - Started Sep 2019 (a shift from an original start up in June) and will end Sep 2021

CLD - July 2020-June 2022

Annex 3. Data collection tools

3.1 Interviews with IDRC staff

KEQ 1.1: How and to what extent did the CPC approach help organizations respond to, and affect the needs of **regional or state policy makers**?

1. How do you describe the “CPC approach” – for instance, when explaining it to colleagues in other units at IDRC?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the “CPC approach” – especially the difference between national Vs regional policy making?
3. What are the most notable examples of CPC responses to regional or state policy makers?
4. What is the actual impact trajectory behind the “CPC approach”? To what extent did it differ from the original ToC?

KEQ 2.4: How, why and to what extent have CPCs changed their approach to **gender-equality and/or feminist research**?

5. Can you mention 2-3 examples of research with a gender / feminist approach?
6. How is this approach different relative to the start of the CPC Program?
7. What were the enabling factors or barriers to integrate a gender / feminist approach?
8. What supports are still needed and how will you address them?

KEQ 3.1 To what extent does the CPC approach help organizations to **expand their funding base** and thus become more sustainable?

9. Can you mention 2-3 examples of *ways in which the CPC approach has enabled* the partner organizations to expand their funding base?
10. What examples are there of CPCs with a *more sustainable* funding base?
11. To what do you attribute this achievement?
12. What examples by other funders are you aware of that provide a more sustainable funding base?

KEQ 4.1 What **lessons can we use from the CPC experience about how to support policy research organizations** to better engage in policy development and to achieve policy wins?

13. Can you mention 2-3 examples of *ways in which the CPC approach has enabled* the partner organizations to better engage in policy development?
14. What are the lessons or principles that emerge from these examples?
15. What other programs at IDRC are comparable to the CPC program and how do their approaches compare?
16. What is the current thinking at IDRC about the process and time needed to achieve policy wins?

KEQ 4.2 In what ways do these centers contribute value for IDRC in **achieving its strategic goals**?

17. What are the intermediate outcomes of the CPC Program to date?
18. To what extent did the program adapt its original goals, and why?
19. In what ways do the CPC partners help IDRC achieve its goals?
20. Do you have any other thoughts going forward? (looking for mention of continuity, etc.)

3.2 Interviews with CPC leadership

KEQ 1.1: How and to what extent did the CPC approach help your organization respond to, and affect the needs of **regional or state policy makers**?

1. How do you describe the “CPC approach” – for instance, when explaining it to colleagues in other organizations?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the “CPC approach” – especially the difference between national Vs regional policy making?
3. What are the most notable examples of responses by your CPC to regional or state policy makers?
4. What is the actual impact trajectory behind the “CPC approach”? To what extent did it differ from the original ToC/design?

KEQ 1.2: To what extent and why do the centres **see themselves as being more effective, deliberate, systematic** in the context of the program approach?

5. What changes have you experienced that affect this organization’s effectiveness?
6. What examples can you share the show more deliberate and/or systemic approaches in your work?

KEQ 2.1: What **works well and what doesn’t** work for **building capacity** and **enabling** organizations to drive their own research agendas?

7. What examples can you share of changes in capacity within the CPC?
8. Can you explain if / how the changes have contributed to the research agenda?
9. What is different in the research agenda now compared to the start of the CPC Program?
10. What were the enabling factors and the barriers for changes in capacity?

KEQ 3.1: To what extent does the CPC approach help organizations to **expand their funding base** and thus become more sustainable?

11. Can you mention 2-3 examples of *ways in which the CPC approach has enabled* your organizations to expand your funding base?
12. What examples are there of this CPC achieving a *more sustainable* funding base?
13. To what do you attribute this achievement?
14. What examples by other funders are you aware of that provide a more sustainable funding base?

3.3 Focus group with CPC Researchers

KEQ 2.2: How, why and to what extent have the CPCs **changed their approaches to research outputs** due to the CPC program?

1. What examples can you share of research outputs?
2. How would you compare today's research outputs to those produced by your organization prior to joining the CPC Program?
3. What are the most salient changes in the approach to research outputs?
4. What were the enabling factors or barriers behind those changes?

KEQ 2.3: What kind of **external support** has been effective and how?

5. What examples can you share of external support received during the CPC Program? Think of events or other means of support.
6. To what extent were those external supports effective?
7. What were the enabling factors or barriers behind those supports?
8. What supports are still needed and how will you address them?

KEQ 2.4: How, why and to what extent have CPCs changed their approach to **gender-equality and/or feminist research**?

9. Can you mention 2-3 examples of research with a gender / feminist approach?
10. How is this approach different relative to the start of the CPC Program?
11. What were the enabling factors or barriers to integrate a gender / feminist approach?
12. What supports are still needed and how will you address them?

3.4 On-line questionnaire with third parties

KEQ 1.1: How and to what extent did the CPC approach help the CPC in your region to respond to, and affect the needs of **regional or state policy makers**?

1. What is your relationship to the CPC in your region?
2. What are the most notable examples of responses by this CPC to regional or state policy makers?
3. What are the research outputs that have been most relevant to you?
4. In what ways has this CPC changed over the last couple of years?

QUESTIONNAIRE WITH THIRD PARTIES (CIVIL SOCIETY, PRIVATE SECTOR, RESEARCH)

KEQ 2.1: How and to what extent did the CPC approach help the CPC in your region to respond to, and affect the needs of **regional or state policy makers**? [variation for civil society, private sector, research]

1. What is your relationship to the CPC in your region?
2. What are the most notable examples of responses by this CPC to regional or national organizations? [civil society, private, research]
3. What are the research outputs that have been most relevant to you?
4. In what ways has this CPC changed over the last couple of years?

QUESTIONNAIRE WITH THIRD PARTIES (FUNDERS)

KEQ 3.1: To what extent does the CPC approach help organizations to **expand their funding base** and thus become more sustainable?

1. To what extent are you familiar with the CPC Program by IDRC?
2. Can you mention 2-3 examples of *ways in which the CPC approach has enabled* the CPCs that you are familiar with to expand their funding base?
3. What examples are there of CPCs achieving a *more sustainable* funding base?
4. To what do you attribute this achievement?
5. What examples by your / other funders are you aware of that provide a more sustainable funding base?

Annex 4. Documents reviewed

Awad, B. & Acevedo, M. (2020). *RQ+ College of Reviewers Discussion Paper: Networked Economies*. Prepared by the Networked Economies External Panel for IDRC.

Christoplos, I.; Pain, A.; Kluyskens, J. & Fruhling, P. (2019). *External evaluation of the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) Phase Two, 2014-2019. Executive Summary*. Prepared by NIRAS for IDRC.

IDRC. (2015). *Findings brief- External Program Review: Information & Networks Program*. Policy and Evaluation, IDRC.

IDRC. (2018). *Cyberpolicy Centres: Improving the governance of cyberspace in the global South: Brief*.

Information & Networks Program. (2015). *Final Prospectus Report*. Report prepared by IDRC's Information and Networks Program (2011-2016), as part of the program's external evaluation.

Kallick, J.; Acevedo, M.; Breard, P. & McNamara, P. (2018). *Evaluation of the Information and Networks in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (INASSA) Program. Final report*. Prepared by Kallick Russell Consulting for IDRC & UKAid.

Morris Lipson Consulting. (2015). *Evaluation of the Networking Approach of IDRC's Information and Networks Program*. Prepared for IDRC.

Networked Economies. (2016). *Improving Cyber Policy in the Global South: Establishing and Strengthening Cybe Policy Think Tanks*. Proposal from NE @ IDRC-CRDI.

Paré, D.J.; Acevedo, M.; García-Murillo, M.A. with Garton, K. (2015). *External Review Final Report*. Prepared by the Information and Networks (I&N) Program Review Panel.

CPCs

LIRNEAsia. (2020). *CyberPolicy@LIRNEasia: Enhancing organizational capacity to influence digital policies in emerging Asia. First Interim Technical Report (May 2019-April 2020)*.

LIRNEAsia. (2020). *Cyber Policy Media Annex: Media Outputs*.

Annex 5. Third party feedback

Respondent profiles

Country	CPC referred	Relationship
Argentina	CLD	Affiliate researcher, partner and collaborator
USA	CLD	Affiliated researcher
Canada	CIPIT	Research partner
Kenya	CIPIT	Works as a data scientist supporting various research around AI application
Sri Lanka	LIRNEAsia	Has worked on projects intermittently over the last 10 years
Kenya	CIPIT	Private sector knowledge partner: They have delivered content at our trainings for African lawyers on Data Protection, the Africa Law Tech Festival Academy and the Startup Law drafting for Kenya

What is the most useful role that the CPC has played in your area?

- Dissemination of research and generating community awareness around digital policy issues with the journal *Revista Latinoamericana de Economía y Sociedad Digital* (RLESD).
- CLD has played numerous leadership roles in the region. To begin with, it is leading cutting edge research projects in the areas of AI ethics, privacy, ICTs and Covid, to name a few. It has also convened high-level meetings on these topics, and continues to be the administrative support for CPR Latam, the main academic conference on ICT policy and impact in the region. It has also recently launched (in collaboration with other institutions) the *Revista Latinoamericana de Economía y Sociedad Digital*, the first Spanish language journal in the field.
- On-the-ground research experience, policy impact, and partnership building.
- Creating awareness on AI applications as well as bringing a multidisciplinary team together to influence policy.
- Has sourced funding for research, organized think tank meetings.
- Research and connection with Academia.

What are the most notable examples of research by the CPC that addressed regional or national cyber-policy debates?

- The work around cyber security governance contemplating institutional factors and political economy issues; privacy and human rights research (e.g. work surrounding Corona-app deployment in the region); AI and development with GuIA project¹⁶.
- The project on the ethics and societal impact of AI is possibly the most innovative and cutting edge project. There are also several projects related to COVID which I believe are producing fascinating results, including a project on remote learning and another on the gender violence in Central America.
- Online intellectual property enforcement, privacy and data governance, digital innovation.
- Strengthening Cyber Policy Research Centres in the Global South.
- Digital big data analysis.
- The paper on Credit lending in Kenya and the 2017 Kenyan elections.

¹⁶ GuIA was created to strengthen a space for researchers to address specific problems, ethics, principles, norms and policies around Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Latin America and the Caribbean.
<https://guia.ai/en/call-for-papers-guia-2021/>

What are the research outputs that have been most relevant to you?

- The articles from the journal RLESD.
- The outputs from the GuIA project which address the ethics and impacts of AI in the region are probably the most relevant and that to my mind had had the broadest policy impact.
- Blog posts and working papers.
- Bias in Facial Recognition. Finding an optimal trainset composition to minimize racial and gender bias.
- Work on Mobile Caller Data Record analysis for travel detail.
- Credit Lending Apps.

In what ways has this CPC changed over the last couple of years?

- CLD has managed to consolidate an identity with an increasing workflow surrounding digital technologies for development in the Latin American context.
- My understanding is that CLD has pivoted from a center within a university to a stand-alone model which will give the center more flexibility and autonomy in the future.
- It has emerged as THE go-to source of objective, credible expertise in East Africa and one of the best cyber-policy centres anywhere in the world.
- Increased partnerships and visibility in policy and research.
- Become more institutionalized.
- More relevant lately and has filled the research gap while also convening discussions to share their research outputs virtually.

Other feedback or comments

- CLD is a center that is uniquely positioned in the region to materialize the relationship - sometimes conflicting, sometimes more harmonious - between human development and digital technologies.
- Does good work and is a reputed among the local industry.
- CIPIT is a very useful Centre to have in the ecosystem, evidence based policy making is useful for the African landscape in emerging technologies.

Annex 6. Annotated summary of IDRC documentation

This annex summarizes some of the documentation that provides some background on the CPC Program, especially from the early Information & Networks (I&N) program, which preceded the more recent Networked Economies program (NE) that ended in November 2020.

Origins & context: the I&N research networks approach

A great deal of the CPC Initiative design built on the experience gained during the I&N Program 2011-2016 that focused on supporting research networks:

***“Research networks as a principal vehicle for programming:** I&N uses research networks as the principal means of achieving its intended outcomes and distributing funding. Most networks deploy a ‘hub and spoke’ model for funding and support. ‘Hubs’ receive grants from I&N and identify appropriate southern partners (sub-grantees) in the global South who are (or are interested in) conducting research and programming related to the hubs’ (and I&N’s) core issues.”* I&N Prospectus, 2015: 8)

The I&N Program was ambitious. Between 2011 and 2015 it included 106 projects with a total value of CA\$78.6 million. The external program review was positive: “Overall, the external review panel considers the **outcomes emanating from the I&N program to date to be highly relevant and valuable.**” (Paré et al., 2015) The external review confirmed that thanks to the program IDRC was widely recognized to be at the forefront of the Open Development field. That it had expanded the field of digital rights, and that the research produced was of high quality and innovative. Most notable, the program “...was visionary and responded to demands from the global South.” (Paré et al., 2015: 3)

An evaluation of I&N’s earlier Networking Approach (Morris Lipton Consulting, 2015) concluded that, while there were benefits (some policy impact could be traced, partners were exposed to trends and network events), methodological capacity building was opportunistic and irregular, and there was insufficient clarity at the hubs and perhaps at I&N about the goals and expectations. This affected both the level of research capacitation and the role of the networking process itself.

“The main conclusion arising out of our findings is that the network modality’s goals and benchmarks need to be more clearly defined before the progress and effectiveness of the model can be assessed. This requires robust internal discussion and planning by the I&N team, including interaction with the hubs, and even partners to decide at least the following:...” (Morris Lipton Consulting, 2015: iii).

Table A6.1 compares the Morris Lipton Consulting report recommendations with the CPC Program approach:

Table A6.1.

Recommendations in the Morris Lipton Consulting report, 2015 (p.iii)	Relevance to the CPC Initiative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> whether the broad parameters of “policy influence” inferred from our Ottawa meetings in fact are the ones that will underpin I&N’s approach going forward 	<p>A reference to policy influence stated the following:</p> <p><i>“The aim of the Cyber Policy Think Tanks initiative is to facilitate research on critical cyber policy issues in developing countries that can generate sound and evidenced-based policy ideas, and enable policy leaders in the global South to respond to the rapidly changing digital environment.”</i> (CPC Proposal, 2016: 1)</p> <p><i>“Policy responsiveness” means monitoring policy environments and generating data and analysis locally that is responding to realities on the ground. It means recognizing policy windows, paying attention to the frontier of the issues, and sustaining engagement with policy processes.”</i> (CPC Proposal, 2016: 11)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the degree of research capacitation I&N is seeking, particularly for partners that are advocates first and (new) researchers second, and what additional resources it will need to provide in grants to hubs (or partners) to achieve that level of capacitation 	<p>No evidence of a differentiated strategy to support CPCs that had an advocacy background differently to those with a research background; the CPC Initiative provided them all with opportunities to access to capacity building from Citizen Lab and Privacy Intl. on a demand basis. Instead, the emphasis was on flexibility.</p> <p>Rather than a definition of degrees of capacitation, the CPC Initiative emphasized an independent research agenda:</p> <p><i>“Institutions able to draw in and sustain resources that allow the research agenda to move beyond project-to-project and international ‘donor trend’ funding to an agenda that is locally grown and driven with world-quality expertise.”</i> [SEP] (CPC Proposal, 2016: 12)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assuming that a mix of advocates and researchers is desired, what the rough proportion of the one to the other should be, and what roles these differently skilled groups should play in the networks 	<p>The CPC Initiative approach sought the following combination:</p> <p><i>“The approach of the Cyber Policy Think Tanks initiative is to provide institutional and/or networked core support and flexible funding, mentorship and skill building, and knowledge networking and policy uptake globally for broad-based cyber policy think tanks in the global South.”</i> (CPC Proposal, 2016: 12)</p>

Recommendations in the Morris Lipton Consulting report, 2015 (p.iii)	Relevance to the CPC Initiative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the degree to which it is committed to creating robust <i>networks</i>, in particular with an aim of maximizing lateral effects; and if more such effects are desired, what additional mechanisms need to be provided for in grants to the hubs, or to other parties, to achieve them 	The CPC Initiative abandoned the network focus and shifted to institutional strengthening, while still offering network-like events (e.g. Berlin meeting in November, 2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> whether the regranting function should be separated from the substantive support function, with the hubs retaining only the latter; and if such a separation is sought, whether the regranting function should be retained in house at I&N, or outsourced to regional regranters or even to substantive field actors that are willing and able to take on that function 	The CPC Initiative maintained regranting control. The original 2-year pilot was extended for a second 2-year project for two of the CPCs (RIA and CLD).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> whether the network creation/sustenance function should be retained at the hubs, or whether it should be outsourced (e.g., to regional actors, or to sub-issue experts). 	n/a

The INASSA Program

The Information and Networks in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (INASSA) program received funding from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) starting in 2013. It was implemented during the Information and Networks ((&N) program, and continued under successor Networked Economies (NE) program, backing 17 projects in total that supported networks; think-tanks or individual organizations; and service projects, which provided specific capacity building support. This combination of projects forecasted the shift away from supporting research networks towards a new focus on supporting institutions that came about under the CPC Program. The external evaluation of INASSA (Kallick Russell Consulting, 2018) was on the whole very positive. Among other things, it compared the network and think tank modalities.

“INASSA research networks were generally more effective for field-building, whereas think-tanks (LIRNEasia and RIA) proved more effective for policy influence. Both modalities showed similar results on research quality and for research capacity development. Yet, when examining more in depth the potential characteristics attributable in principle to a given modality, it was found that the type of modality was in itself seldom determinant of their operational behavior. For instance, think-tanks might show superior knowledge

management behavior than networks, while network researchers might have limited interactions in some projects. Also, neither research networks nor think-tanks followed a standard, modality-specific structural or process pattern. Moreover, the third modality, the so-called ‘service-projects’ showed to be a source of valuable support for many projects.” (Kallick Russell Consulting, 2018: ix)

Table A6.2 provides a summary of the implementation modality characteristics (Kallick Russell Consulting, 2018: 36)

Table A6.2: implementation modality characteristics

IMPLEMENTATION MODALITY CHARACTERISTICS		
Role in project outcomes	Networks	Think-tanks
Contributions	Field-building Capacity development Knowledge sharing Collaboration Process as part of the outcomes Flexibility/modularity Openness (consistency with)	Policy uptake Research quality (“hard” research) Work over longer periods Branding recognition Identity (sense of belonging) Thematic diversity (response to demands)
Constraints	Management complexity Inefficiency Sustainability challenges Fragmentation (small actions) Cultural/language barriers	Set institutional agendas Turnover (in Global South) Structural inflexibility (structural)

It would appear that the INASSA combination of project modalities had advantages, especially where both field building and policy impact were priorities for IDRC. However, the CPC original proposal dropped the emphasis on field building, and focused attention on policy uptake. This process coincided with IDRC’s implementation of the Think-Tank Initiative (TTI), at the time IDRC’s largest program that supported just under 50 organizations for a decade.

The CPC Initiative compared with IDRC’s Think-Tank Initiative (TTI)

“The greatest effects from the overall TTI intervention came from the core grant, for its instrumental value, its flexibility and how it created an enabling space to put strategies into action. Grantees have used their core grants in different ways in response to their strategic interests and there is little evidence to suggest that it has created a culture of dependence on core funding.” (Niras, 2019: 1)

The Niras report concluded that grantees could be grouped into four distinct categories with regards to the types of change and consolidation that they experienced: transformational change; accelerated growth; consolidation of their position; and, keeping afloat. In other words, the benefits varied depending on the nature and status of each institution.

“Apart from core funding, TTI’s greatest contributions relate to the accompaniment role provided by the Regional Program Officers (RPOs). The stimulation of demand and subsequent tailoring of capacity development interventions and efforts to ensure synergies and coherence across the different support modalities depended on this guidance. The continued accompaniment role of a trusted and capable external resource person has provided some of the greatest dividends to strengthening think tanks.” (Niras, 2019: 2)

The emphasis on tailoring is worth noting; and yet the next quote suggest that there are challenges when it comes to responding to different needs:

“Despite concerted efforts to respond to grantee demands and needs, it is difficult to discern clear outcomes. It is questionable whether a global initiative with an extremely heterogeneous range of grantees, such as TTI, can be sufficiently tailored to so diverse needs.” (Niras, 2019: 2)

A further finding of interest is the difficulty in confirming even the level of contribution to outcomes (let alone attribution):

“Given the different dimensions of research quality and the diffuse processes of policy engagement and influencing, tracing the effects of the TTI contribution through to outcomes is difficult.” (Niras, 2019: 3)

Finally, with regards to the program duration is noted:

“A first overarching lesson from TTI is that, for a transformational change to occur, ten years has proven to be an appropriate timeframe. The values of core funding have been about being able to think (and act) in an intentional manner based on the grantees’ own strategies.” (Niras, 2019: 5)