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THE EVALUATION PROCESS IN A DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

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Evaluation is an area where no one has a very satisfactory approach with perhaps as many agencies devoting too many resources to this aspect of management as agencies devoting too little. It may be useful to give some impressions of what experiences elsewhere have been on evaluation.

Evaluation is still a relatively new area of study and most of the pertinent literature is less than 20 years old. Interest in evaluation seems to have gone in waves since the 1950s with concern about effectiveness leading to an increase in evaluation only to have it decline when there has been disillusionment with its limitations. Part of this disillusionment has been due to: i) unrealistic expectations of what evaluations can provide; and ii) in larger part, to the careless and unprofessional manner in which some evaluations were conducted.

Generally, evaluations are seen as having three purposes: i) accountability; ii) corporate memory; and iii) improving decision-making. Most of the emphasis has been placed on accountability, particularly by governments.

The Canadian government has been in the forefront of governments in promoting evaluation for accountability. A good part of this was due to the influence and resources the government has given the Office of the Auditor General. When the OAG was carrying out the comprehensive audit of IDRC, it pushed hard for IDRC to increase its evaluations and to develop some

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automatic selection system to ensure some accountability. IDRC resisted this, saying that it could not see the payoff from what Sir Geoffrey Wilson called "fishing expeditions" in trying to find deficiencies. Recently the federal government has instituted a new policy of "Increased Ministerial Authority and Accountability (IMAA)". This has meant that evaluations are now more focussed on responding to managers' decision-making needs than on comprehensive assessment. Since this is just the approach that IDRC has been trying to take it gives us some sense of satisfaction.

The experience acquired by donor agencies is interesting as they have probably been as active in this area as any other class of organizations. Several years ago, the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD identified approximately 9,000 evaluations carried out by DAC agencies. At a conservative estimate, these agencies have spent at least \$500 million US. That represents a lot of evaluation reports! In agencies such as CIDA and the IDB where evaluations are done for almost every project, "corporate memory" is also an important reason for carrying out these studies. Increasingly these agencies are beginning to analyze the evaluations with a view to identifying "lessons learned" and to making recommendations to improve project management.

A number of donor agencies use the logical framework approach developed by USAID for project design. It is also used by agencies such as GATE, ACIAR and CIDA, among others.

On the other hand, the World Bank -- which has the most extensive process of establishing research objectives, estimating payoff and monitoring of performance -- no longer tries to prepare estimate rates of return to research in the two sectors of agriculture and education where they support research.

One reason that the number of evaluations is so high is that the consensus on development strategies has broken down and development agencies are not sure of the effects of their interventions. Turning to evaluations helps to assure themselves of their programs' effectiveness. However, as evaluations often only address partial elements and focus on **outputs** and not on the **impact** of programs, some evaluations may be performing a disservice. An emerging interest in the evaluation of "development effects" reflects concerns about this latter point.

1. EVALUATION IN RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS

The 1986 workshop on evaluation of national agricultural research sponsored by IDRC confirmed that, in many research organizations, there is an enormous amount of resources used on frequent monitoring or reporting on research activities. The result is too much paper with little analytical content. Also, since practically no synthesis of such information takes place, little information flows up through the research organization to senior management. There would also certainly be a much higher payoff from shifting more resources towards ex-ante assessment and to ex-post analysis.

2. EVALUATION IN IDRC

Evaluation activities in IDRC form an integral part of the Centre-wide planning and evaluation system. The following schematic diagram (Figure 1) demonstrates that evaluation information is intended to be used as a management tool and that it represents only one kind of information required by the Centre

for planning and management purposes. It is not a separate stand-alone activity that should be judged in isolation.

The primary value (usefulness) of evaluation information in this framework is to tell us how to do something better. It is usually of little help in telling us what not to do or what other areas to pursue. This latter information will be derived from the other kinds of planning information note in Box A (Planning Information). This better market information will help the Centre make better choices between programs or sectors.

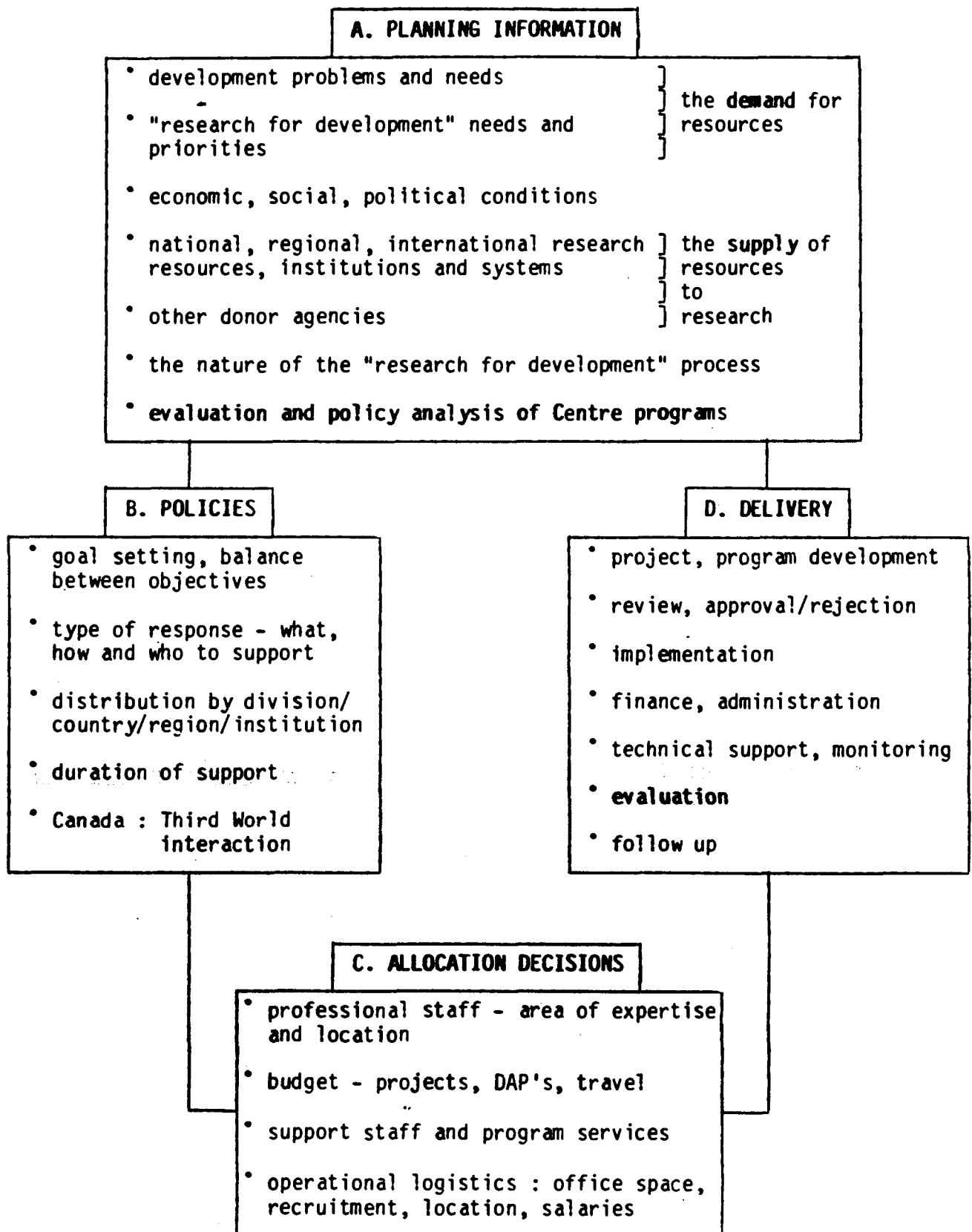
There are three components to the Centre system:

- i) Project Completion Reports (PCRs);
- ii) Selective in-depth evaluation studies (project, program, stripe); and
- iii) In-depth division reviews (IDDRs).

Two of these, the IDDRs and PCRs which are compulsory, are at the most macro and most micro level. The requirement for selective studies varies but is usually at the discretion of the division, senior management or The Board of Governors.

The link between the components is information provided by the Division as part of the IDDR process. The Divisions are expected to develop an evaluation plan that systematically addresses major issues over the four-year cycle leading up to the preparation of a divisional strategy paper for the IDDR. This can make the IDDR process much more meaningful while allowing divisions sufficient time to address issues of most concern to the Board, to Centre or to division management.

FIGURE 1



3. LINKS TO THE PLANNING

The process of systematic assessment of issues and the longer term planning which the Centre is introducing is expected to cut down the amount of short-term assessment needed. We are now moving towards the evaluation of more stripe/policy issues and away from project evaluations. The review of the planning system being carried out in 1989 will explicitly incorporate the idea of focussing evaluations on policy issues of concern to the Centre at both division and senior management levels.

4. OPERATING PRINCIPLES

OPE, as the central focus for evaluation in IDRC is guided in its work by the following operating principles. These are intended to ensure that the evaluations carried out reflect the needs of the managers who wish to use the information for decision-making.

A. User Needs

We have not attempted to develop any rigid criteria for selecting what should be evaluated because we believe it is more effective to concentrate on what managers want and to carry out evaluations to answer questions we have, rather than hope evaluations will identify problems and suggest refinement.

B. Resources

The level of resources set aside for evaluation is very modest in IDRC relative to other agencies. It might be useful for IDRC to assess what level of resources should be provided.

C. Build Indigenous Evaluation Capacity.

Here I would like to refer to an evaluation workshop supported by OPE in Singapore in July 1986.

The position taken by the 15 national research managers who attended the 1986 workshop that they should be developing their own evaluation capacity as managers is one which would surely get a lot of support. Nevertheless, it is still a novel thought for other donor agencies. At a meeting of the evaluation heads of the OECD countries recently, the World Bank representative thought that involving national evaluation in donor evaluations was a useful idea which might be considered some 10 years down the road. This is an area where IDRC is forging a different approach now and we have had very positive results from so doing in the evaluations we have conducted to date.

D. Perspective

It is important to emphasize that evaluations must reflect an organizations overall philosophy and its cultural context. This is especially important as the idea of evaluation is an area of considerable sensitivity.

5. USE OF EVALUATION INFORMATION

One of the most noticeable weaknesses in evaluation has been the limited utilization of the results. Evaluations may be used to make a specific decision in the situation being evaluated; however, there is little evidence that they have contributed on an ongoing basis to decision-making. Hence, we have a gap between evaluation and policy and resource allocation.

Other organizations have recently become concerned about

this and there has been a recent series of publications on lessons learned in which agencies have reviewed their evaluations to see what generalizations can be made. Given the somewhat limited number of evaluations which IDRC has produced, compared to agencies such as CIDA or ADB, it would be difficult to make many generalizations. This, however, is something we are beginning to do more of, but in the context of specific policy studies. For instance, a recent study of sub-Saharan Africa included a review of lessons learned from evaluations as part of its preparatory work.

6. OPEIS

To facilitate ongoing input into decision-making, the Office of Planning and Evaluation has developed a computerized corporate memory called OPEIS. OPEIS represents an attempt to develop corporate memory in one key area -- evaluations.

Even though the Centre has few evaluations, it became evident that no one knew precisely what some of the earlier reports contained. This is a common problem with evaluations--each one might be useful in itself but they don't build corporate memory.

Other agencies have tried to do a review of evaluations and to publish a lessons learned or a summary of common conclusions. This is a very labour-intensive approach and quickly becomes dated. It is also static and allows for no future analysis. OPEIS is designed to allow for analysis of new material as well as older material.

Four OECD countries have computerized their evaluation information but generally they have simply prepared an abstract

of the conclusions and put this on computer. They can then search key words, find out which evaluations have assessed a particular sector, e.g. training, and then go to the evaluations to obtain further information. This is a very time-consuming exercise.

OPEIS is a very simple database, but is perhaps a superior package than other systems used by donor agencies. Basically, what OPE did was to try to develop a set of questions which cover all the issues one may try to assess in any evaluation. We then reviewed each evaluation report and tried to provide a short summary of the conclusions of the report on each issue that was addressed.

The basic framework of OPEIS can be seen from the matrix in Figure 2. Each report/study becomes a vertical file with all conclusions sorted according to the list of 40 possible generic issues.

There is also information on the projects assessed -- PINS-type information and an assessment of the evaluation study.

The horizontal axis allows one to ask for a printout of all conclusions relating to any one question such as training or achievement of technical objectives. There is also provision for a statement of lessons learned if we wish to add some summary assessment where we feel the findings are reasonably conclusive. We can also provide a statement of Centre policy if one exists.

Some responses are given in a "yes" and "no" format. They were organized this way to accommodate a mixed set of conclusions. So far, no format allows for greater possibility of measuring correlation between questions in terms of trying to

Figure 2

MATRIX OF OPEIS

	EVALUATION REPORT X1	X2	X3	LESSONS LEARNED	CENTRE POLICY
1. PINS TYPE INFORMATION	x	x	x	x	x
2. EVALUATION REPORT ASSESSMENT	x	x	x	x	x
3. EVALUATION REPORT QUESTIONS:					
- PLANNING	x	x	x	x	x
- OPERATIONS	x	x	x	x	x
- RESULTS	x	x	x	x	x
- POLICY	x	x	x	x	x
- FUTURE	x	x	x	x	x
- OTHER ISSUES	x	x	x	x	x

measure the importance of say user involvement in defining the research on achievement of technical objectives or utilization.

OPEIS has one unique feature: **it is not closed.** We could add other questions at a later date if new key issues are identified.

As valuable and comprehensive as this system potentially is, we have recognized a few weaknesses:

- i) short summaries may be too pithy or inaccurate; and
- ii) completion of the questionnaire is time-consuming (2/3 day to fill in).

On the other hand, we have noted the following advantages of this system:

- i) quick access using Phoenix;
- ii) results/statements obtained quickly;
- iii) easy to expand;
- iv) has potential for quantitative analysis.

Only 64 evaluations have been inputted at the moment and it requires some cleaning up of questions and responses before we can consider expanding it. However, the system is useful and once it has been cleaned up, a number of divisional evaluations will be added. ■