

EVALUATION STRATEGY

**Evaluation Unit, Corporate Affairs & Initiatives Division
International Development Research Centre**

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I. INTRODUCTION

IDRC has placed increasing emphasis on its "vision of itself as a results-oriented research for development organization". The decentralization of program responsibilities and the shift to intersectoral programming reinforced by Agenda 21 will require new performance monitoring mechanisms. The accompanying need to document results demands an evaluation framework which is designed to measure specific achievements. Projects and programs are already being developed with a clearer articulation of objectives and "deliverables", permitting better measurement of their efficiency, effectiveness and impact. Such strengthened accountability offers opportunities to compare strategies, to document "what works" in development, and to continually refine policies and programs to maximize the impact of limited budgets. In this, IDRC, as a research organization, should demonstrate commitment to the use of evaluation as an operational research tool for learning and a guide for action.

In this context, the mandate of the Evaluation Unit is to design and implement an evaluation system in which Centre management, staff, and recipients participate, and which they utilize to meet their respective objectives. Accordingly, the evaluation strategy described in this document was developed in full consultation with IDRC program staff and management. A series of structured interviews and meetings were conducted to assess corporate evaluation needs. Key findings of this study underlined the need to strengthen the incentives for program staff to evaluate projects and programs and the need to ensure that evaluation information "makes a difference" in program design and policy. In response to this assessment, the Evaluation Unit program has positioned itself to meet the emerging demand for strengthened evaluation systems and for evaluation information targeted to assist performance-based decision-making.

II. STRATEGY

Evaluation measures performance relative to objectives. An effective evaluation system will increase knowledge and understanding of the Centre's business, improve management and accountability, and result in better programs. Moreover, a strengthened evaluation system will be of particular importance in documenting the performance of IDRC as an Agenda 21 organization.

The strategy put forward by the Evaluation Unit to implement such a system is premised upon several additional assumptions regarding the function of evaluation:

- As evidence of its commitment to research, IDRC should ensure that project and program activities are continually refined through evaluation or operational research to identify and profit from the "lessons learned";

- The evaluation process itself is a powerful research tool to improve management, (both scientific and operational) for ourselves and our developing country collaborators;
- Research capacity-building must incorporate capacity-building for evaluation, since it is fundamental to the selection of research priorities, credible design of research and good research management; and
- The most effective evaluation is that which is conducted with the participation of those responsible for the project or program under evaluation as well as its intended beneficiaries.

In keeping with the mandate of the Corporate Affairs and Initiatives Division, the Evaluation Unit places first priority on the development and coordination of the Centre's evaluation activities and systems, with special attention to those which cut across Divisional and Regional institutional boundaries. It conducts strategic evaluations which address program and policy issues to enhance the performance of the Centre as a whole. The responsibility for specific project and program evaluation within IDRC is largely decentralized, although the Evaluation Unit provides coordinating and technical support for these evaluation activities. It also assists the Centre in institutionalizing mechanisms for improved management through monitoring, evaluation and feedback.

Chief "clients" for Evaluation Unit services include the Board of Governors, management (including the Evaluation and Audit Committee and Senior Management Committee), Program staff, and IDRC's recipient institutions and investigators. Information dissemination activities will also benefit other development and research agencies and serve the information needs of the Canadian public. To complement the recently completed survey of the Centre's evaluation needs, the Evaluation Unit has initiated an assessment of the "state of the art" in evaluation in other international development and research agencies throughout the world. Through this process the Evaluation Unit has established contact and laid the foundation for future collaboration and information exchange with such key evaluation groups as the OECD's Expert Group on Aid Evaluation, USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation, CIDA, UNEP, UNDP, and others.

III. OBJECTIVES

To further the Centre's goal of "empowerment through knowledge", the Evaluation unit will pursue the following objectives:

- To develop and coordinate IDRC's evaluation activities and systems in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Centre;

- To strengthen the capacity for evaluation in order to improve the quality and management of research; and
- To conduct and support research to improve evaluation tools and methods in order to strengthen the use of evaluation for development research;
- To collect, analyze and disseminate evaluation information in order to promote its use for decision-making by the Centre, its recipient institutions and other agencies concerned with research for development.

IV. ACTIVITIES

The activities of the Evaluation Unit fall into four broad categories: 1) Evaluation Coordination, 2) Evaluation Capacity-Building, 3) Evaluation Tools and Methods, and 4) Evaluation Information Management and Dissemination.

1) Evaluation Coordination

Strategic Evaluations will be conducted to codify the lessons learned and contribute to corporate decision-making and policy development. Issues will be selected for these retrospective evaluations in consultation with program and management staff and recipients. The Evaluation Unit will work with Planning and Policy Group to obtain Senior Management Group endorsement of the proposed priority issues. Initial strategic evaluations will contribute to understanding the costs and benefits of research management strategies such as interdisciplinarity, creation of networks, capacity-building, and participatory research.

Program Evaluations will be coordinated by and receive technical assistance from the Evaluation Unit. Assistance will be provided to develop regional, divisional, and program evaluation strategies and plans. The Evaluation Unit will also assist Divisions and Regions upon request to prepare for or respond to the recommendations from both the Centre's Comprehensive Audit and Internal Audit's scheduled assessments of systems and activities for Program Effectiveness Measurement. Special attention will be focused on assisting programs in the development of strategies for evaluation of their performance in implementation of Agenda 21.

Project Evaluations generally remain the responsibility of the managing Region, Division or Program. However, financial support for evaluation of specific projects may be provided by the Evaluation Unit if the evaluation methodology is particularly innovative or if the project is selected for special assessment as part of a strategic

evaluation. Program staff may also receive technical assistance upon request from the Evaluation Unit during project development in order to select a strategy for evaluation of project activities and budget accordingly.

Strengthening Evaluation Systems will be undertaken to institutionalize mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and feedback within the Centre. The system will be developed to minimize administrative burden and promote prompt feedback and use of evaluation information. Activities such as incorporating an Evaluation text section and a discrete evaluation budget line item in the Automated Project Summary will be undertaken to provide opportunities and incentives for staff to contemplate evaluation activities during project development. Guidelines are also under development to provide a conceptual framework and checklist of issues to be addressed in project evaluation. Similarly, at the request of Program and Policy Group the Evaluation Unit will coordinate a PCR Working Group (consisting of representatives from program divisions, CAID's Research Utilization Program, Public Information Program, EDP, Library, and Internal Audit) to overhaul the Project Completion Report (PCR) system. A format and guidelines will be developed to improve the evaluation and management utility of PCRs, ensure their complementarity with the required technical and financial reports, and strengthen the feedback and use of these data by program staff and Centre management.

2) Evaluation Capacity Building

IDRC Staff Development will be undertaken to strengthen IDRC's use of evaluation as a tool for project and program management. Training materials will be developed to serve the Centre's needs for staff orientation and development, and to be adapted for recipient training. Periodic seminars will be organized to acquaint staff with "state-of-the-art" topics in evaluation and to facilitate the exchange of evaluation information. Upon request more specialized evaluation capacity building activities could be designed for Divisional Annual Staff Meetings. In addition, staff may receive Evaluation unit support (including replacement of the staff member during the period of absence from her/his region or division) for three to twelve-month "sabbaticals" to undertake special evaluation or in-house operational research activities which further Centre and Evaluation Unit objectives.

Recipient Training will be undertaken primarily in institutions funded by other program divisions. Evaluation training materials developed to support IDRC's needs for research evaluation will be distributed as needed to recipient institutions and investigators. Support for training sessions will be limited to the final development and testing of these training materials. Broader capacity-building efforts may, however, be undertaken through program assistance to institutionalize evaluation

capacity in key recipient institutions identified in collaboration with other IDRC programs.

3) Evaluation Tools and Methods

Evaluation Methodology Development will be supported through project activities designed to advance the "state of the art" in evaluation. Project support will be provided to develop and test innovative approaches to evaluation which respond to emerging program needs. Efforts to develop both qualitative and quantitative indicators for evaluation of research for development will also receive project support in order to strengthen corporate capability to track the development impact of IDRC-funded research. Research and technical assistance will include efforts to strengthen documentation of development impacts such as "empowerment", gender-specific development effects, and the cost-effectiveness of research investments.

Evaluation Research will be supported through projects designed to test the effectiveness and impact of evaluation and research management strategies. This "research on research" will generally be implemented as a component of existing projects funded by other programs. Projects funded solely by the Evaluation Unit will be undertaken only after extensive consultation within IDRC to assure that program activities serve corporate evaluation needs. Such operational research may be conducted "in-house" by IDRC staff or by developing country investigators who complete this research as a part of existing IDRC projects.

4) Evaluation Information Management and Dissemination

Evaluation Information System (EVIS, previously OPEIS) will be managed by the Evaluation Unit to ensure that data from evaluation reports are accessible to program and management staff. The development of this policy-oriented database is a unique initiative which will promote the use of evaluation results Centre-wide. In addition to contributing to corporate memory, EVIS will enable users to search for evaluation reports covering specific issues, conduct analyses and compare findings across a broad range of questions.

Project Completion Report (PCR) Summaries will be prepared by the Evaluation Unit from PCR data and circulated to concerned program staff and management. The revised PCR instrument will be designed to ensure that summary data can be used to inform program management and report IDRC's achievements to the Board of Governors and Canadian constituents. The PCR database will be available for

program monitoring and evaluation and for use as a sampling frame for strategic evaluation studies.

Evaluation Abstracts which provide a one-page synopsis of the main findings of each evaluation will continue to be produced and distributed to staff.

Publication of Key "Lessons Learned" will be undertaken to compile and present evaluation information in a format to promote its use for project and program design. Initial publications planned include summaries of "what works" in strategies for research networks, interdisciplinary research, Canadian partnerships for research, and research capacity-building.

Evaluation Resource Files will be maintained to assist clients in selecting among evaluation methodologies and identifying appropriate consultants for specific evaluation tasks.

V. EVALUATING EVALUATION

The Evaluation Unit should provide a model for program evaluation which may be replicated in other programs. Although the ideal indicator of the performance of evaluation should be a measure of its impact on program and policy decisions, such data are generally anecdotal. The selected indicators for routine monitoring are, therefore, primarily intermediate indicators of program outputs effectiveness. For each activity, the following matrix presents the indicators to be tracked in assessment of Evaluation Unit program achievements and effectiveness over the next three years.

INDICATORS FOR EVALUATION UNIT EFFECTIVENESS

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED OUTPUTS	EFFECTIVENESS INDICATORS	DATA SOURCES
Evaluation Coordination	Strategic Evaluations	3 to 5 "stripe" evaluations and publications which summarize key "lessons learned"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and source of requests for copies of publications Adjustment of strategies and policies due to evaluation findings Changes in design of projects and programs after publication of evaluation report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAID records Key informant interviews Survey of projects and programs designed after evaluation report
	Program Evaluations	technical assistance provided to 4 to 6 Divisions or Regions for the development of evaluation plans with objectively verifiable indicators of program effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of Divisions and Regions from which technical assistance requests are received for development of evaluation strategies or plans Proportion of IDRC program plans with indicators of program effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation Unit records Review of IDRC program documents
	Project Evaluations	2 to 4 innovative project evaluations co-funded with sponsoring divisions;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subsequent use of evaluation approaches after dissemination of the evaluation report to IDRC staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key informant interviews and review of subsequent evaluation reports
	Strengthening Evaluation Systems	Integrated systems for obtaining and managing evaluation information, such as through PCRs and technical reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of PCR summary data to inform decision-making Satisfaction of program staff with evaluation information system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key informant interviews Survey and qualitative research among program staff

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED OUTPUTS	EFFECTIVENESS INDICATORS	DATA SOURCES
Evaluation Capacity Building	IDRC Staff Development	2 to 3 evaluation seminars, evaluation training sessions and curriculum materials, 1 to 3 "sabbatical" research activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of program plans and projects with an evaluation component • Adjustment of strategies to reflect findings of "sabbatical" research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of program plans, PSs, and project budgets • Key informant interviews and document review
	Recipient Training	Evaluation training curriculum materials used in 8 to 12 recipient institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of these recipient institutions which have strengthened evaluation activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report by recipients and/or external evaluation report
Evaluation Tools & Methods	Evaluation Methodology Development	2 to 3 evaluation unit and 3 to 6 co- funded projects to develop evaluation methodologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsequent use of new or adapted evaluation methodologies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews and review of evaluation strategies and reports
	Evaluation Research	1 to 3 operational research projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of evaluation and research management strategies tested through operational research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews and review of project files

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED OUTPUTS	EFFECTIVENESS INDICATORS	DATA SOURCES
Evaluation Information Management and Dissemination	Evaluation Information System	Centre-wide access to and use of the EVIS system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of staff using EVIS system Changes in evaluation or program strategies resulting from EVIS data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation Unit records Key informant interviews and/or document review
	Project Completion Report (PCR) Summaries	A "core" set of indicators for PCRs which are used Centre-wide and entered into a computerized data base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of PCR data by management and program staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key informant interviews and review of PCR summary reports
	Evaluation Abstracts	Production and distribution of a one page evaluation abstract for every evaluation study completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness of evaluation activities and findings among staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key informant interviews
	Publication of Key "Lessons Learned"	3 to 6 publications summarizing evaluation findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in research strategies resulting from dissemination of evaluation findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key informant interviews and review of project and program documents
	Evaluation Resource Files	Resource lists for consultants and reference files on key evaluation methodologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequency (by month) of consultation of Evaluation Unit regarding potential consultants and/or evaluation methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation Unit records