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Memorandum / Note

TO / DESTINATAIRE	IDRC Board of Governors
DATE	October 23, 2015
FROM / EXPÉDITEUR	Naser Faruqui, Director, Technology and Innovation Stephen J. McGurk, Acting Vice President Programs and Partnerships
SUBJECT / OBJET	Management response to the external review of the Information and Networks program

Purpose: For discussion

This memo presents Management's response to the external review of the Information and Networks (I&N) program.

Management is satisfied with the conduct and findings of the external review and the results of the program. Review recommendations were incorporated into the proposed Networked Economies program. Along with the key learnings outlined below, three important lessons emerge from the review: the importance of long-term, persistent support for ideas and partners, the engagement and commitment of professional and competent staff, and making periodic, intentional changes in program strategy.

Outcomes

Management is pleased the review found that I&N program outcomes are valuable, highlighting three areas in particular. First, I&N is widely recognized as being at the forefront of the open development field. For example, the Open Data Barometer—an internationally recognized tool for benchmarking open data policies – is being used by civil society in Myanmar to seek greater transparency in government. Second, the focus on protecting human rights in cyberspace is timely and relevant. For instance, an I&N grantee played a central role in the design and passage of Brazil's Internet Bill of Rights. Finally, I&N-supported research on how the poor use ICTs led to significant policy impacts. These include mobile price cuts in Namibia—one operator dropped rates by 34%--and the formulation of South Africa's broadband policy. I&N research has also contributed to global agendas, for example through informing the report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on "The right to privacy in the digital age" (2014).

Research Quality
Management is satisfied that the reviewers find I&N-supported research is of high quality. The review highlighted important connections between research quality, persistence, and policy influence—noting that sustained research support enabled partners to move quickly when a window of opportunity opened. For example, long-term support to Research ICT Africa and LIRNEasia allowed them to produce timely policy briefs that helped prevent regressive taxes on mobiles in Africa and Asia and led to price reductions.

Implementation and strategy
Management is encouraged that the reviewers found I&N's choice of entry points to be visionary and that it implemented the program well. A key success factor was engaged staff who kept track of emerging issues and research areas in a dynamic field and adjusted program direction accordingly. Management notes the limitations in implementation highlighted by the reviewers and agrees that the program's core competency is enabling technological innovation rather than supporting the development of new innovations. The proposed Networked Economies program will test and adapt promising innovations and strengthen the enabling environment for innovation. Finally, Management acknowledges that the program fell short of its expectations in building capacity for interdisciplinary research. This is a long-term task which the program will emphasize in its next phase .

Issues for IDRC Governors and Senior Management
Management recognizes the need to improve synthesis and communication of lessons learned. This will be partly addressed by stronger program-level monitoring across the Centre. Management will reflect on how to better capture lessons from mechanisms such as learning fora and project completion reports, and communicate learning more effectively on the IDRC website and other channels. Management recognizes the value of improved understanding about how research networks can be more effective agents to change. The program will develop strategies to better harness their potential including establishing regional hubs and ensuring adequate resources for capacity building and synthesis of results.

Management concurs that openness, rights, and inclusion continue to be relevant themes in the information and networks field. These are all present in the proposed Networked Economies program. Management acknowledges the concerns about weak gender responsiveness and commits to developing a strategy to strengthen it. This includes analyzing incentives and obstacles, drawing on existing strengths across IDRC, and undertaking training for staff and grantees. It also means targeting gender in expected outcomes and indicators for the proposed program.

Finally, Management acknowledges the recommendation to review the Research Quality Framework—the tool that evaluators use to assess the quality of IDRC-supported research. This issue was raised in several external reviews and Management will revisit the framework.