IDRC's Approach to Evaluation

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> **IDRC's approach to evaluation mirrors the Centre's approach to development research programming. The Centre recognizes that evaluation makes an essential contribution to learning and acquiring knowledge about effective approaches to research for development.**
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> **This highlight presents an overview of evaluation at IDRC by summarizing the different aspects of the Centre's approach to evaluation, its methodological underpinnings, and the results reporting system. Further information about evaluation at IDRC can be found on the Centre's website (www.idrc.ca/evaluation).**

An Introduction to IDRC:

Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) supports the generation and application of new knowledge to provide practical, long-term solutions to the social, economic, and environmental problems facing developing countries. It is a crown corporation created by the Parliament of Canada in 1970 to help developing countries use science and technology. Support is directed toward developing an indigenous research capacity to sustain policies and technologies that developing countries need to build healthier, more equitable, and more prosperous societies. In carrying out its central mission *empowerment through knowledge,* IDRC provides funds for applied research and expert advice for researchers in developing countries, while building local capacity for research and innovation.

Approach to Evaluation:

IDRC recognizes the essential role that evaluation plays in the effective management of research projects and in producing relevant results from the research process. Its overall approach to evaluation prioritizes equally the use of rigorous methods in evaluation, and the use and adoption of evaluation findings. In order to coordinate the evaluation efforts of the Centre, a small unit was established in 1992. The Evaluation Unit supports the priorities of the Centre through the promotion of methodological development and processes of evaluative thinking that balance the opportunity to learn and the need for accountability.

By emphasizing a strong commitment to respond to, and balance, the needs of all of its partners, IDRC recognizes that upward, internal, horizontal and downward accountability are essential to its performance. Further these different levels of accountability need to be prioritized based on influence, responsibility and representation. Only by continuous learning and improvement can the Centre be more effective in carrying out its mandate and responding to its stakeholders. Accordingly, the Centre has several formal mechanisms in place to promote improved effectiveness, including: a five-year corporate strategy[1]; and external evaluations[2] of Centre programs at least every five years; (also see below: IDRC's Evaluation and Results Reporting System).

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[1] http://intranet.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/11256802861CSPF_2005_e.pdf
[2] http://intranet.idrc.ca/en/ev-89474-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

IDRC's approach to evaluation prioritizes valid and credible evaluations of high quality, using the most suitable methods to the situation. This approach focuses on building the ownership of, and participation in, evaluation by a broad range of partners. A key outcome of the evaluation process is informed social participation. In this way, evaluation makes a contribution to better governance, and transparency. Through our work in strengthening evaluation capacity and building the field of evaluation for development, IDRC not only contributes to a more effective development research community, but to evidenced-based decision making.

Evaluation and Results Reporting System:

Evaluation at IDRC is decentralized. Programs are responsible for their own evaluations. The Evaluation Unit provides central coordination and technical support. The Unit also conducts strategic evaluations and provides oversight on the evaluation system. IDRC is not only concerned with results because of the funding provided (what happened?), but also the processes, people, and contexts that contribute to change (how? and why?). By focusing on both results and processes, IDRC aims to demonstrate the outcomes of the development research it supports, while capturing rich learning and quality lessons that can be applied usefully.

Table 1 summarizes the evaluative mechanisms that are in place at each of the three levels of the Centre.

Table 1 IDRC's Evaluation and Results Reporting System

Org. Level	Reporting Mechanism	Content/ Focus	Responsibilities	Primary Users and Uses	Timing
Corporate	**Annual Corporate Evaluation Report (ACE)**	Synthesis of findings from the year's evaluation reports	**EU**: Prepare report **SMC**: Review and respond	**SMC**: Review and formulate actions to be taken **BoG**: Review and react to findings	Annual
	Corporate Assessment Framework (CAF)	Assesses management of performance in 7 key performance areas	**EU**: Coordinate data collection and synthesis. **PPG**: Archive and communicate with SMC	**SMC**: Use data in deliberations and decision-making	Annual
	Strategic Evaluations	Assess cross-cutting issues emerging from programming	**EU**: Conduct studies **SMC, PPB:** Engage, reach, and use	**PPB:** Improve programming **SMC**: Demonstrate results	Periodic
	Annual Learning Forum **(ALF)**	Findings from rPCRs and other evaluative documents	**EU, PPG & PPB:** Coordinate and organize	**All Staff:** Reflect and share on performance of IDRC to improve programming.	Annual

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Program	**Regional Director and Director of Program Area Reports**	Outline progress and directions of program areas and regional representation	**DPA, RD**: Prepare reports	**SMC, BoG**: Use as inputs into programming directions and organizational management	Every year – alternates between RD and DPA reports
	External Reviews	Summative evaluations	**PPB Management**: Set Terms of Reference **EU**: Manage studies on behalf of PPB management	**PPB Management**: Input into decision making and resource allocation to programs **Project Teams:** Integrate findings into next prospectus	Once at the end of the program cycle
	Program Monitoring and Evaluation	Variable: Formative evaluations	**Program Team**: Design and commission studies **EU**: Provide technical advice	**PIs**: Improve and adjust programming	Variable: throughout prospectus cycle
Project	**Project Monitoring and Evaluations**	Variable: Formative and Summative evaluations	**PO, PL**: Initiate and conduct or commission studies	**PO, PL**: Improve and adjust programming	Variable: throughout the project cycle
	rolling Project Completion Reports [rPCR]	Learnings and results from project design**,** implementation phase, and completion of project	**On 3 projects per program per year:** **Stage 1:** RO interviews PO **Stage 2:** TL interviews PO **On all projects over $150 000** **Stage 3:** PO selects colleague or manager to interview or completes independently (Stage 1 and 2 are completed on selected projects; Stage 3 on all projects over CAD $150 000)	**SMC**: Accountability for public resources **Programs**: Improve and adjust programming **EU, PPG:** Corporate learning and communications	Throughout the project cycle
	Recipient Interim & Final Technical Reports	Research, findings, development results and process	**PL:** Prepares the report **PO**: Reviews and approves report.	**PL, PO**: Accountability, document learning, manage project	Throughout the project cycle

Evaluative Thinking/Utilization-Focused:

One of the central roles the Evaluation Unit plays is strengthening a culture of evaluative thinking across the Centre. Evaluative thinking shifts the view of evaluation from only the study of completed projects and programs to an analytical way of thinking that infuses and informs everything the Centre does. *Evaluative thinking* is being clear and specific about what results are being sought and what means are used to achieve them. It assures the systematic use of evidence to report on progress and achievements. Thus, information informs action and is used in decision-making.

IDRC's approach to evaluation is utilization-focus and does not advocate any particular evaluation content, model, method, or theory. By promoting appropriate methodology for particular use, the Centre acknowledges that no one methodology suits every situation. Rather the primary intended users of evaluations should select the most appropriate focus, methodology and approach.

List of Acronyms:

ACE   Annual Corporate Evaluation
ALF   Annual Learning Forum
BoG   Board of Governors
CAF   Corporate Assessment Framework
DPA   Director of Program Area
EU   Evaluation Unit
IDRC   International Development Research Centre
GAD   Grant Administration Division
PI   Program Initiative
PL   Program Leader
PO   Program Officer
PPB   Programs and Partnership Branch
PPG   Policy and Planning Group
RD   Regional Director
RO   Research Officer
SMC   Senior Management Committee