



EVALUATION UNIT REPORT 2005-2010

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BACKGROUND

This report is part of the external review of the International Development Research Centre's Evaluation Unit (EU) and was prepared under the guidelines for such a review process. Centre programs undergo an external review every five years. These assessments contribute to ensuring IDRC's effective stewardship of the funds entrusted to it by the Government of Canada and by its donor partners, and to overall organizational improvement.

Description and Evolution of the Evaluation Unit

The EU is guided by its vision as stated in the *Evaluation Unit Strategy 2005-2010*, to support, “useful evaluation that promotes innovation and social change”. To realize this vision and support the Centre's mandate, the Unit's *Strategy* identified three key partners with whom we work to strengthen use and to influence the quality of evaluation and evaluative thinking: IDRC partners, program staff and management.

The framework for evaluation at IDRC is utility. We employ utilization-focused evaluation, which identifies intended use by intended users. To ensure that evaluation responds to the needs of diverse user groups and to make programming more relevant and effective, evaluation operates at multiple levels within the Centre. IDRC's decentralized evaluation approach builds evaluation capacity and activities with the Program and Partnership Branch, the Corporate Strategy & Regional Management Branch, and senior management to support both accountability and learning by projects and programs. The Evaluation Unit secures space for learning-oriented evaluation by ensuring that accountability for results is addressed at each level: rPCRs document the achievement of objectives, outputs and outcomes of all projects over \$150,000; external reviews of Centre programs ensure full evaluation coverage of spending every five years; and strategic evaluations assess the organization's achievements in key results areas (see Figure 1).

The IDRC culture provides the Evaluation Unit with the space to experiment, to learn from experience and to evolve the Centre's evaluation approach and system. The core values guiding the work of the Unit since it was established in 1992 remain utilization-focused evaluation and evaluation for development. However, reflecting on experience, assessing needs, building on strengths within the team and monitoring the changing contexts led the Evaluation Unit to add to and calibrate existing elements of our plan and processes. These evolutions are described throughout the report. The Unit focuses on four strategic areas:

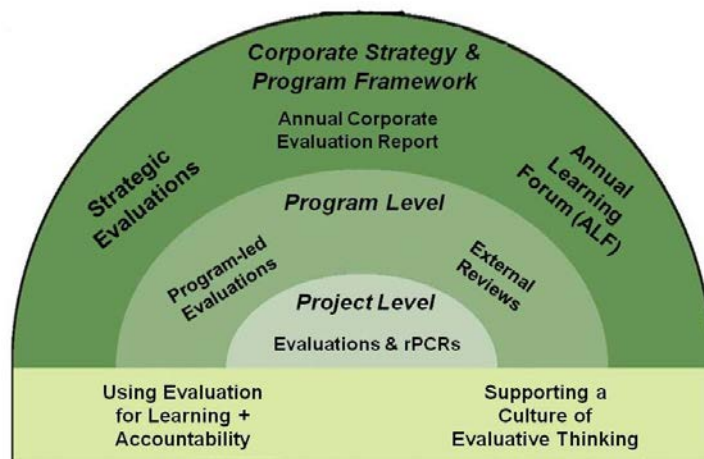


Figure 1: Levels of Evaluation at IDRC

1. Conducting strategic evaluations of IDRC's programming
2. Evaluation capacity development with program staff and research partners
3. Developing, adapting and testing evaluation tools and methods
4. Supporting organizational learning for program effectiveness

Overview of the Internal Service and Programming Roles

A distinctive feature of evaluation at IDRC is the dual role of the Evaluation Unit: in its internal service role, the Unit provides technical support and capacity building to IDRC management, programs, and partners; the Unit's programming role supports evaluation as well as capacity building and research on evaluation. These roles are mutually reinforcing and are driven by the evaluation priorities and capacity building needs of the Centre and its partners in the South. Working with programs reveals gaps that require further methodological development (e.g., evaluating transitional justice mechanisms). EU programming engages partners in evaluation research, and the products of our tools and methodologies are taken up by colleagues and partners (e.g., our project on accountability principles, 103415).

Internal service role

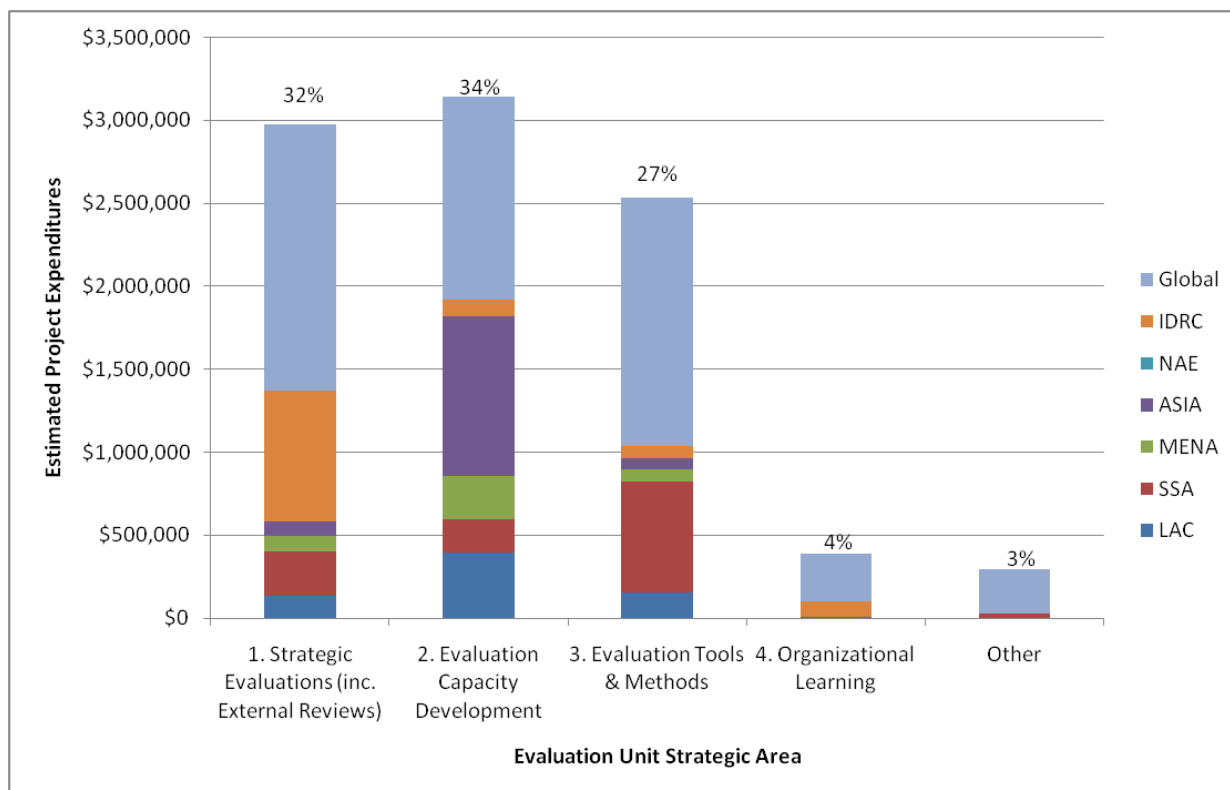
The Evaluation Unit strives to be flexible and responsive. To support the evaluation needs of the Centre, the Evaluation Unit:

- manages and conducts evaluations. Three primary types of evaluation occur at IDRC: strategic evaluations, which cut across various programs and projects to assess corporate results and programming modalities; external reviews of IDRC programs; and evaluations designed and led by programs of particular projects, themes, results, organizations, etc. Working with external experts, the Unit designs, conducts and disseminates the Centre's strategic evaluations, manages external reviews of programs presented to IDRC's Board of Governors, and monitors the quality of evaluation reports. See Annex 2 for the evaluations conducted during 2005-2010.
- provides technical advice and guidance to programs and regional offices. This includes requests for support designing and conducting evaluations and learning activities, as well as program planning. The Unit also introduces all new program staff and management to IDRC's evaluation approach.
- promotes organizational learning and capacity building in evaluation through training, workshops, a content-rich website, regular and innovative publications, a reference library and a speaker's series.
- takes responsibility for ensuring the integrity of the evaluation system and that modifications to the system meet emerging needs and priorities (while recognizing the system is a shared responsibility).
- is a collaborative member of "Team IDRC." The Unit works with Centre programs to support partnerships with external agencies, shares the Centre's experience with evaluation, and contributes to Centre reviews by Canadian Government agencies.

Programming role

The Unit receives an annual programming budget.¹ Since 2007, the EU has also received an annual operational fund of \$100,000 to support capacity building with IDRC staff (see figure 2.)

Figure 2. Estimated Project Spending Within Evaluation Unit Strategic Areas According to Targeted Region 2005-09*



* This table is based on total portfolio spending of \$9,330,000. The strategy and regional budget breakdowns were estimated by the responsible officer mid-2009 (the Centre does not capture this data in its systems). From 2007 it includes \$100,000 in operational funds for IDRC staff capacity building.

Structure of the Report

The rest of this report presents the main accomplishments and strategic lessons of the Evaluation Unit for 2005-2010. The next section highlights findings from evaluations and research supported by the Unit. Subsequently, five key outcomes of the Unit's work are outlined. Finally, the report presents our reflections on our accomplishments over the past five years and the challenges to be addressed in the future.

¹ Program budgets varied each year: 2006: \$1.4 million; 2007: \$1.2 million; 2008: \$1.2 million; 2009: \$800K; 2010: \$800K. Program funds are intended for work with partners. In the past three years, the Unit has received additional program funds to increase its project portfolio and to pay for external reviews of programs.

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION FINDINGS

This section highlights findings drawn from both our service and programming roles. The findings were identified as significant based on:

- their original or innovative nature;
- the significant level of effort and funding they represent;
- their strong connection to our *Strategy*.

The projects and evaluations referenced here account for 46% of total spending.²

Evaluation Field Building

Evaluation in the global South is constrained by capacity, narrow donor-driven agendas, fragmentation across agencies, and by the absence of citizen voice.

Seven Unit-supported projects (7% of spending) brought together evaluation professionals to draw out practice-based knowledge and insights into the state of evaluation supply and demand, as well as the opportunities and challenges for developing evaluation capacity in the regions where IDRC works (105730, 102267, 103414, 105323, 105451, 103917, 105325). In addition to those project outputs, the findings were captured in articles written by members of the Unit (Carden 2007a; Hay 2008b; Hay 2010).

Evaluators in Afghanistan, the Middle East and North Africa region, and South Asia contend that Northern donors still drive and limit the evaluation agenda: "Monitoring and evaluation is still to a great extent the "weak link" in development in the Middle East and North Africa, and is commissioned by international agencies in an audit-based approach that marginalizes the iterative learning dimension" (Moussa 2008). Afghan evaluators argued that donors focus solely on quick results instead of long-term change. They noted that "most donors are not willing to share their systems, data, and findings with the government and other stakeholders, including civil society" (Hay 2008a). Their vision and commitment is to evaluation as democratic, transformative, and relevant to key development challenges. The Unit has argued that this is "the real evaluation gap," and that, "... the citizens, development researchers and professionals of Southern nations [must] lead the way in building the field of evaluation research and practice in their region" (Carden 2007a). These findings are important as they integrate the perspectives of Southern evaluators and root the Unit's work on building the field of evaluation in the realities and priorities of the groups on whose behalf the Centre leverages resources.

² Many capacity-building and organizational learning projects (representing 41% of EU portfolio spending) are not expected to produce research findings (i.e., program reviews, dissemination, website support, and training).

Outcome Mapping

Outcome Mapping³ has been found to be a realistic alternative for planning, monitoring and evaluation.

The outcome mapping (OM) approach to planning, monitoring, and evaluating social change initiatives was developed by the Evaluation Unit in collaboration with research partners in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. OM's set of tools and guidelines steer project or program teams through an iterative process that identifies their desired change and encourages collaboration to bring it about. Results are measured by the changes in behaviour, actions and relationships of those individuals, groups or organizations with whom the team is working directly and seeking to influence (Jones, et al. 2008).

During this period, the Unit supported a virtual global learning community on outcome mapping (103520, 104663) and a number of regional initiatives for outcome mapping training and adaptation (103414, 103917, 105323, 105375, 105451). (10% of spending.) An on-line community, www.outcomemapping.ca, conducted numerous case studies and discussion posts from OM applications across the world and in a wide variety of sectors. Practice-based findings on how to better apply OM have been highlighted in background and ideas papers.

This research has shown that outcome mapping promotes four key principles: actor-centered development and behavioural change; continuous learning and flexibility; participation and accountability; and non-linearity and contribution (not control and attribution). To enhance its utility to development and research initiatives, OM processes have been further clarified. As one example, Roduner and Hartmann-Fässler (2009) created "OM Step 0": processes and preparations required prior to starting the intentional design phase of outcome mapping.

Research and experience has demonstrated that OM is more suitable in some contexts, and for some purposes, than others. OM's strengths come to the fore when: working in partnership; building capacity; a deeper understanding of social factors is critical; promoting knowledge and influencing policy; and to embed reflection and dialogue (Jones & Hearn 2009). In these contexts, OM can be effectively related to other evaluation tools and methods. Roduner and Ambrose (2009) pushed the debate on the relationships between OM and other approaches (such as Logical Framework Analysis) a step further, suggesting a fusion approach that melds the capacity and behaviour changes of OM with the situational results of the Logical Framework Analysis. Roduner and Ambrose's paper generated wide interest when it was posted on the OM Learning Community website (Walton 2009).

Transitional Justice

Theories of change in transitional justice require more clarification and testing through rigorous evaluation that is both participatory and externally validated.

The Evaluation Unit supported three projects (104666, 104116, and 105353) (7% of spending) on the development of appropriate methods and evaluation capacity to track and assess results in

³ While research on OM has led to important findings highlighted here, it is also a key outcome area for the Unit (see page 14).

transitional justice (how societies come to terms with legacies of large-scale human rights abuse).⁴

These projects found that transitional justice theory-building is still in its infancy; many of the theories of change that underpin transitional justice mechanisms (*inter alia*, truth commissions, reparations, memorialisation initiatives) are either untested or inconclusive. Programming around change processes is often built on assumptions about the larger social goals of transitional justice (their linkages to social healing, reconciliation, reformed identities, etc.). This nascent state of theory-building has implications for program evaluation: First, mapping out theories of change can be elusive when new ground is being broken. For this reason program evaluation must be accompanied by deeper research on the social change processes that arguably support or hinder transitional justice. Second, transitional justice programs should always include a rigorous, and participatory process. The theory of change underpinning the initiative should also be externally validated (Duggan, forthcoming 2010).⁵

Given the sensitive nature of transitional justice mechanisms and the social contexts in which they operate, evaluation in this field must be accountable to multiple constituencies and support - not undermine - the long-term social goals of transitional justice.

Transitional justice settings are often prone to relapses into violence and deal with traumatized populations. Externally imposed, orthodox approaches to program evaluations, may unwittingly contribute to the undermining of the long-term goals of transitional justice.⁶ Because many transitional justice programs aim to restore damaged inter-group relationships, the process uses that can emerge from participatory evaluation approaches such as self-assessment and peer review, can play an important and constructive role in recuperating or reconstructing lost social capital. When coupled with external evaluation, these methods could underpin emerging evidence on the effectiveness of transitional justice with equally important considerations of legitimacy and ownership of the process as a whole.⁶

Accountability

Due to the complex nature of research for development, the concept of accountability as used politically and as a key element of social transformation must be expanded to include the purposes and functions of research organizations.

The Unit supported two projects on accountability with the One World Trust (103415 and 105327), (4% of spending). Although accountability is a key underlying motivation for evaluation, the term “accountability” has been vague. “Upward” accountability to donors, while important, is insufficient on its own and does not recognize the multiple accountabilities inherent in research and development organizations. “Downward” accountability to communities can be difficult to realize for research organizations whose contributions to development are upstream from actual community impact. A fuller concept and framework of accountability developed by the One World Trust for international organizations and transnational corporations seemed

⁴ Transitional justice was a major focus of research in the Peace, Conflict and Development program. See [here](#).

⁵ This was a major learning emerging from project 104666, extrapolated from Natalia Ortiz' [summative evaluation report](#).

⁶ See the [Workshop on Evaluating Transitional Justice](#), 2-4 April, 2007.

promising, but needed to be adapted for research organizations (Blagescu, et al. 2005). In the original framework, accountability was presented in four dimensions: transparency; participation; evaluation; and complaints and redress. Findings from project 103415 modified the fourth dimension to “feedback handling”. This broader principle of inviting comment and critique on an organization's research activities could also include demands for redress for negative impact.

Research organizations face particular tensions in managing accountability.

The study found that for research organizations, multiple accountabilities are often not easily aligned and they create tensions. Donors' demands may conflict with those of beneficiaries, as can the demands of different research users. Organizations found transparency and participation a challenge, sometimes because of their expert-orientation or their desire to maintain a competitive advantage in their field. A final tension between researchers and policy makers is that researchers cannot be held accountable for policy impacts.

Six research organizations are now testing the project's adapted framework.⁷

Complexity Thinking

Complexity thinking is relevant to the design and evaluation of development and development research.

Complexity thinking is embedded in the research orientation of many Centre programs. While the field of evaluation as a whole has been rooted in positivist notions, is resistant to non-linearity and emergence, and has been slow to adapt concepts of complexity thinking (Williams & Imam 2007), the Evaluation Unit has found that complexity thinking offers useful insights for the evaluation of IDRC programs and projects.⁸ IDRC programs in complex systems and that requires adaptability. Therefore the Unit concluded that evaluations should not automatically penalize programs for diverting from original plans. The Unit asks external reviewers to evaluate the strategic choices programs made and advises them that the achievement of original objectives might not be possible or desirable. Programs are asked to document their contribution to outcomes, rather than establish attribution (Evaluation Unit 2009a) because attribution is difficult to prove in complex systems.

Strategic evaluations more usefully offer reflections on principles and context-specific issues to guide program staff and research partners instead of generic “lessons learned”.

Strategic evaluation findings do not offer generic “what works” answers, but pay close attention to context, exploring what works where, for whom, and how. For example, the study of the devolution of secretariats housed at IDRC (105591) offered seven principles for devolution; the study of the influence of research on public policy included a framework derived from patterns in case studies for characterizing dynamic policy contexts (Carden 2007b). The Corporate

⁷ They are: Center for Governance & Development (Nairobi); Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Growth (Buenos Aires); Cooperation for Peace and Unity in Afghanistan (Kabul); ForestAction (Kathmandu); Habitat for Humanity (Latin America and the Caribbean); Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural (Santiago).

⁸ Because these findings arise from both our internal service and programming roles there is no useful budget figure to attach.

Assessment Framework,⁹ which tracked sense-making and decision-making at the management level, was based on performance areas that do not have simple targets. The Evaluation Unit has found that, to be useful, evaluations must reflect complex and nuanced organizational practices and, thus, require complex and nuanced analysis.

Strategic Evaluations

This section highlights findings from the three largest strategic evaluations conducted during this period: capacity development; policy influence; and networks (18% of spending).

Capacity Development for Research

This evaluation provided IDRC with an intellectual framework and common language on capacity development, and assessed IDRC's experiences and results. Organizational case studies revealed that capacity development is fundamental but remains largely implicit. It has often not been reported on directly, and intent is not made explicit to partners. Support focuses more on individuals than organizations. IDRC's strength has been working along thematic lines with research projects, especially strengthening the capacities of researchers and organizations to conduct and manage research. Less emphasis has been placed on strengthening capacities to leverage research results to influence policy. Capacity development for individuals or research teams will not "trickle up" to institutional or research system levels without deliberate interventions. In light of this, IDRC should consider collaborating more with others, as it cannot address all of its partners' capacity-development needs (Adamo 2009).

The evaluation developed three initial frameworks for planning, monitoring, and evaluating capacity development (Bernard & Armstrong 2005, Neilson & Lusthaus 2007, Wenderoth & Lusthaus 2008), which have contributed to a growing literature on capacity development.

Policy Influence

The evaluation of the influence of research on public policy was published as *Knowledge to Policy: Making the most of development research* (Carden 2009a). It documented and assessed the success of 23 long-term projects to determine when and how influence happens. The evaluation developed two useful frameworks: one for conceptualizing policy influence (see outcomes, page 9 regarding its use), and the other for categorizing the contexts within which research took place. The latter reflects on the levels of interest, leadership, and capacities of policy makers and researchers on the topic, and relationship between the research and policy maker. The study illuminates issues of context – which is critical but difficult to capture. Maximizing opportunities for influence requires researchers to understand and adjust to dynamic environments.

Networks

This evaluation consolidated IDRC's knowledge on networks and identified ways to support healthy, active, and effective networks (Evaluation Unit 2006). Significant findings emerged around network sustainability. The evaluation found sustainability should be understood and

⁹ See Outcome: Evaluation thinking, page 12, for a more detailed discussion of the Corporate Assessment Framework.

assessed beyond the traditional view of financial and administrative viability to include dimensions of time, resources, relationships, and relevance. IDRC did not expect networks to be financially self-sustaining. The quality of relationships is more important than the quantity of members. Once established, member turnover is normal and healthy. IDRC networks were found to have diverse membership. This stimulated creative thinking, encouraged innovation, and expanded reach, but this diversity at times was too vast to bridge into productive working relationships.

OUTCOMES

The following five outcomes were chosen by the Evaluation Unit as the most significant because:

- they cut across the Unit's strategic areas of work;
- they represent significant financial and time commitments;
- they helped us to draw out significant lessons about strategy implementation; and
- they are important in strengthening the evaluation of development research.

They represent outcomes anticipated in our *Strategy* and also an unexpected outcome (the final outcome in this section on influence beyond IDRC).

Evaluations are Used at Multiple Levels within IDRC.

The Evaluation Unit designed strategic evaluations for use.

The Evaluation Unit leads the institutionalization of utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) at IDRC. The Unit maintains a consistent emphasis on high quality, relevant, use-oriented evaluation. The results of this effort are seen throughout IDRC's decentralized evaluation system.

The EU managed seven strategic evaluations during 2005-2010.¹⁰ Their design and implementation reflect how the Unit applied a utilization-focused evaluation approach and the outcomes from such an approach. Evidence from the studies on policy, capacity development, and networks is highlighted below, as these were the largest strategic evaluations in terms of financial and human resources.¹¹ All had common design features including:

- They explicitly identified uses and users;¹²
- They involved sustained work over time, including use-oriented dissemination during and after the completion of the study;¹³

¹⁰ Details can be found [here](#).

¹¹ The budgets for the Capacity Building Study (\$755,300), Policy study (\$671,575), and Network study (\$383,660) were substantially higher than the other four strategic evaluations conducted or disseminated during the *Strategy*. These ranged from \$70,000 - \$115,000.

¹² While in the Network study the original user for the study changed, in all studies shared a clarity on intended users that was reflected in the study's design and implementation. See [the discussion](#) on the shift in users in the overview by Earl.

¹³ For example, findings from the Policy study were developed into a workshop for project partners to improve their ability to influence policy and policy makers (Earl 2009). The Unit also used sharing of findings meetings to introduce, often in a fun and non-threatening way, concepts and debates emerging from evaluation theory and practice as a means to help staff frame their programming work and think more evaluatively. In the Capacity Development Sharing

- They involve advisory groups of Centre staff and managers; and
- They involved a mix of approaches and products to support quality and use. Different evaluation elements were designed to support different types of uses and users.¹⁴

The Unit used the conduct and dissemination of strategic evaluations to encourage changes in thinking, attitudes and behaviours; these changes result from the very act of participating in the evaluation process (Patton 2008). There is evidence that these studies influenced Centre thinking and language. For example, the [2006 CAF report](#) demonstrated that the language around policy influence across the Centre had become more consistent,¹⁵ in line with the language and conceptual framing done in the Policy study. Within individual projects, staff described policy influence in ways that mirrored the Policy study (Evaluation Unit 2008). Similarly, the 2007 CAF report noted that compared to the previous year, there was a “movement towards common understanding through articulation of the range of definitions [of capacity building] staff are using (Evaluation Unit 2007b).”

Evaluations integrate a deliberate utilization focus, and are being used in decision making.

The Unit pursued several strategies to institutionalize UFE in the Centre.¹⁶ For example, the Unit guided programs to explicitly lay out intended uses in reports. This both reinforces a focus on use, and helps readers understand the purpose of the evaluation. The Unit's annual quality assessment of evaluations documents the extent to which Centre-wide evaluation reports demonstrate a UFE-orientation. In 2000-2005, evaluation reports scored an average of 62% on quality dimensions related to utility¹⁷ (Evaluation Unit 2005). This score rose considerably in 2005-2010 – to an average of 80% on utility measures (Evaluation Unit 2009b).¹⁸ One use of evaluations at IDRC is to inform decisions about program and project design and implementation. The 2007 Corporate Assessment Framework (CAF) which analyzed IDRC documents, found 694 references to monitoring and evaluation in 276 documents. The assessment documented evidence that management and staff actively commissioned and used findings from monitoring and evaluation processes in decision-making¹⁹ and discussed or reflected on findings.

of Findings meeting organized for IDRC staff in October 2008, the “IDRC debaters”, a session in which two senior managers argued the merits for and against IDRC support for organizational development, was cited as “most liked” by a high percentage of participants ([Workshop Evaluation summary](#)).

¹⁴ For example, products of the studies ranged from an [animated video](#) for a staff learning event on networks, to a [conceptual framework and typology on capacity building](#), to a book on [research to policy](#).

¹⁵ Carden also documents these changes in “Knowledge to Policy”, 2009, pp. 191-197.

¹⁶ Including: bringing thought leaders in UFE to the Centre for staff learning and targeted inputs; revising guidelines on evaluations; changing Centre systems; prompts to encourage staff to consider use; and providing UFE oriented technical inputs to programs doing evaluation work.

¹⁷ There is a caveat on this data, which was described in the 2004 ACE report: “It is recognized that in looking exclusively at evaluation reports, the current quality monitoring system can under-represent the true quality of evaluation. Evaluation reports do not always provide a full description of evaluation processes and procedures, and as a result, the system will sometimes fail to register positive scores on indicators of quality when evaluators may have employed sound evaluation processes.”

¹⁸ The quality assessment form has evolved, which means that we cannot directly compare overall measures of quality from 2000-2005 to the present. However, using only the dimensions of evaluation quality that have remained constant – utility, feasibility and accuracy – there is still an overall trend toward increasing quality in evaluation reports.

¹⁹ Data from the [CAF 2006](#) also corroborated this finding.

The Centre supports a diversity of evaluation users.

Some Canadian government departments tailor all evaluations to a single primary user: the deputy minister (Borys 2009). In contrast, IDRC promotes not only management as users, but a range of potential stakeholders, as legitimate users of evaluation. This orients evaluation to the particular needs and contexts of the user and helps ensure the relevance of the evaluation.

The Unit has emphasized that evaluation users must decide on evaluation questions, what evidence is credible and useful, who is best suited to be the evaluator, and what methods will generate the best evidence. The Unit has provided technical support on evaluations designed for use by partners, Programs, Communications,²⁰ Partnerships, and management. Examples of use by a diversity of targeted users include:

- Partner Use:²¹ An evaluation of the [African Highlands Initiative](#) helped it go to scale from a successful local-level participatory natural resource management project to a project with national reach (Mekuria, et al. 2008). The International Institute for Learning on Social Reconciliation developed a monitoring and evaluation framework to be used by this new organization (Ortiz 2008).
- Program Use:²² The Pan Asia Networking program is using its evaluation of network projects (103940) to improve network governance and sustainability and to support other networking initiatives.²³ Based on an evaluation of its capacity in social and gender analysis, the Governance Equity and Health program developed a staff training program to improve the integration of gender and social equity issues into program-supported research.²⁴
- Program and Partner use:²⁵ The Unit has supported programs to undertake collaborative research processes with partners to improve evaluation approaches and methods specific to their sector. These include: the Developing Evaluation Capacity in ICT4D projects (104932); recipient-led evaluation in Research on Health Equity (104613), and the Ecohealth collaborative study on outcome-oriented monitoring and evaluation (105139).²⁶ A study involving nine partners of the Rural Poverty and Environment Program provided insights into the use of evaluation to improve program learning (Vernooy, et al. 2009). In each, sector-specific issues are addressed within a UFE context.

²⁰ Evaluating Large Conferences (104957) [Phase 1](#) & [Phase 2](#).

²¹ Data from quality assessment forms shows that the following evaluations were designed for use by partners: Review Report: Health and Dietary Diversity in Yemen, 2008, Malek Batal; Formative Evaluation of PAN's networking approach, 2008, Ricardo Wilson-Grau & Mary Jane Real; Mid-Term Review: Cities Farming for the Future, 2008, Yves Cabannes & Margaret Pasquini; and, Evaluating the MERCOSUR Network: Research, Outreach and Organization, 2007, Gary McMahon & Fernando Porta.

²² Evaluations designed for use by programs include: Governance Equity and Health program Gender Evaluation; Ecohealth malaria, chaggas and dengue evaluations; PAN's Networking Approach; and Evaluation of the Research on International Tobacco Control program's Small Grants mentoring program, 2008. The Canadian Partnerships evaluation of the Canadian Council of Area Learned Societies contributed to the decision to discontinue the program.

²³ A description of the Pan Asia networking evaluation and link to the report can be found [here](#).

²⁴ See the *Facilitator Gender Equity and Health Gender Evaluation Training Report: Recommended Next Steps* [here](#).

²⁵ The Partnership and Business Development Division [evaluation of the Capacity Building in Resource Management project](#) by Michael Bassey.

²⁶ An additional aspect of evaluation use in the Ecohealth study is that a key impetus for the study came from the program's external review, which criticized Ecohealth-funded projects as lacking clear theories of change, and urged the program to better document the outcomes of the research it supports.

- Management Use:²⁷ An evaluation commissioned by senior management on the devolution of IDRC programs is being used to plan the devolution of telecentre.org.

Evaluative Thinking

Centre staff demonstrate evaluative thinking and a commitment to organizational learning. This contributes to programming effectiveness by IDRC staff and partners.

Evaluative thinking is a “mindset in which individuals and organizations make evaluation and learning an ongoing priority, always looking for ways to use evaluation as a pathway to better results” (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations 2009). The Centre supports evaluative thinking by staff and partners. Evaluative thinking involves being results-oriented, reflective, questioning, and using evidence to test assumptions. A recent case study identified the factors at IDRC that are conducive to the uptake of evaluative thinking. They include: its research orientation, its systems, its staff, and the approach the Centre has adopted for evaluation (Amo & Cousins 2009). As a corporate level performance area, data demonstrating evaluative thinking was available in the CAF. References to monitoring and evaluation are found in documents that are not part of IDRC's evaluation system. This provides evidence that evaluative thinking permeates the organization (Evaluation Unit 2008b). As noted in the next section of this report, the closure of the CAF means that the Unit will have to identify a new way of tracking evaluative thinking at the Centre.

The Unit brings in expert support from respected development researchers to improve both corporate level and program level evaluative thinking. One example of this is the ongoing collaboration and input on strategy and prospectus planning for the 2010-2015 period with Patricia Patrizi and Michael Quinn Patton. Their evaluation (2009) is now being used to inform the work of external reviewers in the new approach to external reviews. The Centre has also invited Patton to work with the Agriculture and Environment Programs on the formulation of their new prospectuses. The ideas on "tensions" in the Patrizi and Patton paper have also influenced the thinking of the Unit.

Staff interest in evaluation and evaluative thinking and management support of it as a key element of IDRC's business model is reflected in voluntary participation in training and capacity building workshops.²⁸ The seriousness with which staff take these opportunities was reflected in their feedback on the curriculum of the International Program on Development Evaluation Training.²⁹

²⁷ Evaluations designed for use by Management include: Jim Armstrong and Alexa Khan, [Evaluation of IDRC's Experience of Devolution](#), June 2009. Use is documented in an email to F. Carden from R. Fuchs, available [here](#).

²⁸ In the review period, 26 partners and 21 IDRC staff benefitted from formal evaluation training through the International Program for Development Evaluation Training; a total of 180 staff attended five events in the Unit's "speaker series" which brought in well respected evaluators such as Quinn Patton, Patrizi, Bonbright, Pritchett, Khagram, Sridharan and Rogers. Outcome Mapping training was delivered by the Unit to 163 partners and 87 IDRC staff and interns. See a summary of Outcome Mapping trainings [here](#).

²⁹ See the full IPDET report by the IDRC team [here](#).

The Unit also developed various tools for capacity building including 12 *Evaluation Highlights*.³⁰ Evaluation capacity building is also evident in key Programs Branch-led activities that have benefited from Evaluation Unit support including the Governance Equity and Health "Research Matters" initiative.³¹

To fill gaps, deepen the culture, and ensure relevance, the Evaluation Unit experimented, innovated, and evolved different elements of the evaluation system at the Centre.

In the decentralized evaluation system at IDRC, the Unit nurtures and strengthens the system. In 2005-2010, this work ranged from leading particular elements to providing targeted inputs to others.

The Unit led an experiment to evaluate corporate mission level results called the Corporate Assessment Framework (CAF). The focus of the CAF was on the work of IDRC senior management in guiding program thinking and systems, and the way IDRC staff implement programs and projects in line with this thinking and these systems. The CAF was a novel approach to corporate performance measurement in both the public and private sectors.³² It coded and analyzed the content of hundreds of corporate and project documents (466 documents in 2007)³³ as well as triangulation with key informants to capture what the Centre reported on, discussed, and what decisions were made. The experiment was praised by some senior managers as "useful"³⁴ and "cost effective,"³⁵ and the findings were shared with all program leaders and managers. The CAF was highlighted as an innovation in performance measurement by Michael Quinn Patton (2008) and shared with the evaluation community (Hay 2008b). Due to changing priorities, IDRC management decided to discontinue the CAF experiment in 2009.

At the program level, to strengthen the evaluation system, the Unit assisted staff in prospectus planning,³⁶ and introduced approaches to program design that were more deliberate and largely unknown at IDRC (Ortiz & Taylor 2008; Evaluation Unit 2008). The Unit designed and implemented a new approach to external program reviews based on self-assessment and external validation of results by expert panels that has given programs new opportunities to be clearer and more specific about their results (Evaluation Unit 2009a).

Organizational learning processes developed and implemented by the Unit contribute to evaluative thinking.

During 2005-2010, the Unit played a leadership role in implementing a revised project completion reporting process (rPCR) and an Annual Learning Forum (ALF) designed to use

³⁰ Evaluation Highlights can be consulted [here](#). Some have been translated into Spanish.

³¹ See chapter 5, 'Evaluative-Thinking' in Knowledge Translation: A Research Matters Toolkit. 2008, [here](#).

³² See methods section of the Corporate Assessment Framework Report, 2007.

³³ This marks an increase in documents from the 2006 CAF, which included approximately 400 documents.

³⁴ Emails from [Stephen McGurk](#) and [Kathryn Touré](#), IDRC Regional Directors from South Asia and West Africa Regional Offices respectively.

³⁵ [Email communication](#) from Eglal Rached, IDRC Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa office.

³⁶ See [Annotated Outline for Program Prospectuses](#), for discussion at the 26 November 2009 Program Leaders Forum, notably Annex A.

project completion reports and evaluation findings.³⁷ Both efforts strengthened the culture of reflective learning at IDRC. Through the process, the “Project Completion Reports (rPCR), long disdained, became a source of energy and enlightenment, and a manifestation of evaluative thinking” (Patton 2008).

The number of completed rPCRs and their use has improved substantially since 2005. By January 2009, the Centre had reduced its rate of late rPCRs to one-tenth of the number that had been reported in the 2003 Auditor General of Canada report on IDRC.³⁸ Information generated from rPCRs is used in diverse ways and fed into learning processes at all levels of IDRC: for example, for the production of Director of Program Area reports;³⁹ to inform country-programming priorities;⁴⁰ and to strengthen corporate memory and performance.⁴¹ The Evaluation Unit remains committed to continuous improvement of the rPCR process.⁴²

The Annual Learning Forum evolved out of a desire to make use of the rich data being gathered through the rPCR process and other evaluation processes. It is the most concrete example of IDRC's commitment to being a learning organization. Its purpose is to share knowledge among colleagues, regions, and program areas to improve the performance of the organization. It was added to IDRC's calendar in 2005 and alternates each year between a one-day all-Ottawa staff event, and a series of smaller program-based team meetings. The program specific events are organized face-to-face or virtually and occur in Ottawa and in the regional offices.

Since 2005, four annual learning forums have taken place, covering a variety of topics including organizational capacity building and networks.⁴³ The ALF events include a range of preparatory work, papers and analysis,⁴⁴ and have been assessed by participants as “very useful.”⁴⁵ The development, roll-out and adoption of the rPCR and Annual Learning Forum processes⁴⁶ are concrete evidence that “the most convincing evidence that learning has occurred is subsequent translation into action.” (Patton 2008).

³⁷ Both of these initiatives involved staff from diverse corners of IDRC: Programs Branch, Resources Branch, Policy and Planning Group, Communications, and Evaluation.

³⁸ See the Memo from Fred Carden on Monitoring rPCR Completion Rates [here](#).

³⁹ At the April 2006 Program and Operational Meeting, the Director of the Environment and Natural Resource Management program stated that, “... rPCRS are used in the production of DPA Reports and [program officers] see that their work and analysis results in use by Senior Management Committee.”

⁴⁰ In 2007, IDRC's Regional Office in Singapore undertook an analysis of PCRs to reflect upon programming in Cambodia. See [here](#); IDRC's Regional Office for South Asia and China also analyzed PCRs for gender programming in 2005, available [here](#); and more broadly to inform the Asia wide RD report for 2006, [here](#).

⁴¹ The Pan Asia Networking program used rPCRs as part of a handover note for a program officer who preparing for maternity leave. C.Duggan's presentation, Peace, Conflict and Development program Team Retreat, Cairo, February 2008, available [here](#).

⁴² See Laura Haylock (2006), Working Paper: Review of 1 Year of IDRC Experience Implementing Stage 1 of the rPCR Process (August 2005 – August 2006) available [here](#).

⁴³ The 2009 ALF was replaced by a Centre-wide consultation on the new strategic framework 2010-2015.

⁴⁴ See the Annual Learning Forum webpage [here](#).

⁴⁵ In 2007, the ALF evaluation (available [here](#)) showed an average rating of 8.8 (out of 10) on the usefulness of the event.

⁴⁶ For a full account of how these processes were conceptualized and put into practice, see Carden and Earl (2007).

Outcome Mapping

Developed as a robust and rigorous method that addresses a gap in the development and research community, Outcome Mapping has evolved and adapted to different contexts and requirements. Through strategic support, the Evaluation Unit has fostered a successful spread and devolution of OM to an ever-growing community of users.

Outcome Mapping is increasingly being used by IDRC and by other organizations.

The Evaluation Unit supports the development, adaptation and testing of evaluation tools and methods appropriate to the complexity of development research. Recognizing that there is no one right way to evaluate, in 2005-2010, EU staff collaborated with researchers and evaluators on: approaches for organizational assessment, gender evaluation, evaluating research in divided societies, and the accountability of research institutes. Each of these activities generated outcomes; outcome mapping is the focus of discussion here because of the exceptional interest people showed in OM and because of the particular attention the Unit paid in disseminating and devolving in 2005-2010.⁴⁷

Outcome Mapping has been used for a variety of purposes (e.g., for development of a learning-oriented process for teacher education such as in the Secondary Teacher Training Environmental Education Program⁴⁸ and for evaluating a museum exposition's contribution to social reconstruction in war-torn Guatemala).⁴⁹ Outcome mapping has had resonance both within the Centre and in the research and development communities.⁵⁰ For example, the [Wikipedia entry](#) for outcome mapping was written by a South African translator (with no connection to IDRC) who used OM in his role as a project leader in a non-profit organization.

The Unit's involvement with OM has evolved over time. The publication of the outcome mapping book in 2001 (Earl, et al.) put significant demands on the team to present, train, and work with those using the methodology. Avoiding a proprietary view of OM, the EU thought of it as a resource for development practitioners and researchers that they could adopt, adapt and further develop. For this reason, during 2005-2010, the Unit spread OM with a strategy of devolution and shared ownership.⁵¹ This enabled the Unit to develop other areas of work.⁴⁷

The use of Outcome Mapping continues to expand across programs and regions.

With a deliberate strategy of less direct involvement by the Unit, outcome mapping has spread. OM is used globally by development practitioners and agencies in many cases outside IDRC's sphere of influence. Within IDRC, the Unit supports OM use when the approach is a good fit with the evaluation and monitoring needs of the users. The concepts underpinning OM have been reasonably influential amongst management and staff (see for example the new Agriculture and

⁴⁷ [Unit Spending Breakdown 2005-2009](#).

⁴⁸ See [Learning the way forward](#): Adapting Secondary Teacher Training Environmental Education Program planning, monitoring and evaluation process through Outcome Mapping.

⁴⁹ See [Excerpt from IDRC's Annual Corporate Evaluation Report 2007](#).

⁵⁰ For a set of case-studies and other examples of OM use see the [learning community](#).

⁵¹ For more on the history of OM, see [The Evaluation Unit at IDRC: A Short History](#), presentation by Fred Carden at the American Evaluation Association conference, Orlando, November 2009.

Environment Prospectuses).⁵² Also, there are programs that, to varying degrees of success, have used OM to plan, monitor and evaluate their work (e.g., Climate Change Adaptation in Africa, Governance, Equity and Health, International Model Forests Network Secretariat). Others have shared OM actively with their project partners (e.g., Acacia, Global Health Research Initiative, Urban Poverty and Environment, Pan Asia Networking, Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health, Governance, Equity and Health, and, Rural Poverty and Environment).

One of the best indications of OM's spread and uptake is found amongst the members of the online OM Learning Community which is funded by the Unit (103520, 104663). Facilitated by the Overseas Development Institute, the community sponsors research, training and advocacy, and is a forum for knowledge exchange. The English and Spanish discussion forums, events calendar, and repository of research reports, case-studies, and guidelines are housed at www.outcomemapping.ca. Since its inception in early 2006, the community has grown to over 1900 members.⁵³ Membership is global as illustrated in the OM learning community [online map](#) and reflects the perspectives of academia, NGOs, donors, international agencies, and independent evaluators. Discussions on the community listserv have increased from an average of 25 posts per month in the period June 2006 to August 2007 to 45 posts per month from August 2007 to October 2009. Visits to the website now number 300-600 weekly and have steadily grown from just below 300 visits in November 2007.

An ongoing study in the Unit is using web analytics to track the “virtual footprint” of OM uptake and use. The study examined: aggregated Google searches for “outcome mapping”, web traffic to online outcome mapping resources and references of outcome mapping within online social media (including blogs, micro blogs, images, articles, etc). It found that an estimated 40,000+ Google searches of “outcome mapping” have been requested since 2004 and average around 1500 per month and are increasing. This study also noted a constant “chatter” about OM within social media (Walton, 2009).

The uptake of outcome mapping in education materials is evidenced through its inclusion in different organizations' manuals and guidebooks (e.g., Barefoot Collective 2009; Mercy Corps' participatory evaluation manual; Smutylo 2005), university curricula,⁵⁴ as well as in more academic literature (Hummelbrunner & Williams 2010; Gray et al. 2007). One book and three articles by Unit staff have resulted in approximately 140 citations in Google scholar from a variety of different publications (some cited elsewhere,⁵⁵ some not). The total distribution of the OM book has reached over 5000 copies in three languages since 2005.⁵⁶ The findings demonstrate a persistent and increasing interest in OM and suggest that as more people learn about and utilize it, the influence of OM continues to spread.

⁵² Based on discussions with programs December 2009; public versions unavailable at time of writing.

⁵³ Project 104663 [Final Technical Report](#), 2009, 13.

⁵⁴ During 2005-2010, it has been reported to the Unit that OM has been included in the curricula of courses at universities in Canada, Ireland, USA, and Great Britain.

⁵⁵ For example see: Olsen, S.B., 2003. Frameworks and indicators for assessing progress in integrated coastal management initiatives. *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 46(3-4), 347-361.

⁵⁶ For total Outcome Mapping book distribution details see [this email](#).

Outcome Mapping theory and practice has proven sufficiently robust to adapt and evolve for different contexts and purposes.

The clear commitment in outcome mapping is to buck mainstream trends towards simple, linear metrics in development evaluation. Instead, OM promotes people-centered development for continuous learning. This resonated with a large number of other international development agencies, evaluation thinkers, and practitioners. The Evaluation Unit's choice of a "shared ownership" OM model has fostered adaptations in the theory and practice of OM. Systematic adaptations have been undertaken and documented by researchers and evaluators to explore the limits and possibilities of OM for different regions (e.g., Arabization of OM project 105451); different purposes (e.g., to infuse a gender focus⁵⁷ in ICT localization efforts)⁵⁸; and, different sectors (e.g., evaluating and improving the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene program by the International Water and Sanitation Centre).⁵⁹ Learning from these adaptations is captured through communities of practice on outcome mapping in the Middle East and Latin America. Evaluation Unit support for a community of practice in West Africa has slowed as we provide support to a partner attempting to rebuild.⁶⁰ Learning is also seen in the discussions and resource section of the online OM community and through periodic OM user's workshops (e.g., African OM user's workshop in Niger in 2007; a gathering of Middle East practitioners in Lebanon in 2007; and, the Latin American workshop in Montevideo in 2009). Adaptations in the implementation or practice of OM happen almost every time it is used, as there is no one way to employ the methodology.

Contextualizing an evaluation approach is about ensuring its cultural, historical, and developmental appropriateness, promoting local ownership and identifying the appropriate terminology. Evaluators and researchers in the Middle East and North Africa (103917) found that promoting OM's learning-oriented and people-centered approach to development required overcoming a number of challenges: the absence of a monitoring and evaluation culture, weak stakeholder accountability, and a history of audit-based approaches. They have identified ways to overcome these challenges by building indigenous evaluation capacity, theories and practices among Arab evaluators and researchers (Moussa 2007).

Evaluation Field Building

The Unit promotes Southern lead evaluation practice and research to address knowledge gaps and development challenges in specific contexts.

The Evaluation Unit has always placed priority on capacity building with Southern partners. In 2005-2010, the Unit work included: requests for outcome mapping training, building evaluation

⁵⁷ See the [Gendered Outcome Mapping](#) website.

⁵⁸ See the [OM Community Newsletter 2009 No. 2](#).

⁵⁹ See the [Water and Sanitation Centre](#) website.

⁶⁰ The West Africa Rural Foundation is a long standing partner of IDRC and the Evaluation Unit. Staff of the organization were actively involved in the development of Outcome Mapping. A major crisis hit the organization four years ago as a result of which the Centre could no longer support its projects. The Unit has continued to work with the West African Rural Foundation within the limits imposed through scholarships to attend events and keep its staff connected to the evaluation debates and networks; and through consultancies and recommendations to other agencies for their technical expertise.

"hubs", or focal organizations (103414, 103917, 105375), and building communities focused on broader evaluation research, practice, and capacity building. In the second half of this review period, the Unit shifted its emphasis from capacity building to the much broader work of field building, that is, building evaluation as a profession in the global South (Wind & Walton 2009). The Unit has critiqued the dominant donor model of training individuals in particular methods for its own reporting purposes. Instead we have argued for, and attempted to demonstrate, alternative paths for building evaluation capacity. There is evidence that other donors are listening.⁶¹

The Unit's work to reduce this "evaluation gap" has contributed to Southern partners connecting in communities of practice, advocacy and support around the use of evidence and evaluation. Southern partners are recognized as regional experts in development evaluation and play a lead role in building evaluation capacity and systems and providing technical advice to others.⁶² The absence of formal university curriculum in the South is a fundamental problem for the long term future of evaluators, evaluation researchers and evaluation leaders. The Unit is supporting universities from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka to work on graduate level evaluation curriculum (105724).

This evolution in the Unit's capacity building work is relatively new and raises exciting potential. It is an area in which we are still learning and debating how best to proceed and where best to focus our efforts. This work has explicitly connected with policy makers and users in the South,⁶³ building a [Community of Evaluators](#) in South Asia, and a range of other initiatives.⁶⁴ There is strong interest and support for field building in the donor community.⁶⁵ This has led to a number of initiatives in South Asia and to explorations in East Africa with Makerere University. It is not yet clear how these preliminary outcomes will evolve but they demonstrate strong potential and point to an important ongoing area of work for the Unit.

While recognizing that external agencies cannot create leadership, the Unit has experimented with a range of approaches to providing support when this leadership and drive exists or is

⁶¹ See this [Table of External Requests and Services](#) for requests from donors for broader input from the IDRC Evaluation Unit. Specific examples include requests from the World Bank that the Unit advise their evaluation capacity building initiative, from the Asian Development Bank to present the Unit's approach, from the UK'S Department for International Development to present thinking on evaluation field building, and from United Nations Evaluation Group / United Nations Development Fund for Women to provide guidance on gender and evaluation.

⁶² The "State of Evaluation in India" project (105325) team members are writing background documents for the Planning Commission.

⁶³ The "State of Evaluation in India" project (105325) includes Government of India Planning Commission Member Abhijit Sen on the Steering Committee. The Afghanistan Evaluation Dialogue that led to the study report included 5 staff of government ministries.

⁶⁴ For example, forming communities of practice on evaluation, (with the Peace, Conflict and Development program), a project (105353) supporting the development of a peer review methodology in the African Transitional Justice Researchers Network; connecting a group of ten Afghan evaluators (105730); supporting a curriculum development project with six universities in the region (105620); working with two evaluation associations (Sri Lanka and India); and supporting the aforementioned research project on the state of evaluation in India (105325).

⁶⁵ In South Asia, the UK's Department for International Development is a strong potential partner; in East Africa the Rockefeller Foundation has expressed strong support. Importantly, in India, the Government is actively engaged in discussions on building the field of evaluation.

emerging.⁶⁶ To build relationships that lead to evaluation communities and networks takes time and persistence.⁶⁷ For example, in 2004 the idea of an evaluation community was raised in India (with various donors and partners) but did not take hold. Many years and discussions later, the Community of Evaluators was launched in 2008. The nature of this work is often pro-active rather than responsive. That is, the Unit entices leading researchers and social scientists from other fields to apply their skills in the field of evaluation. In the evaluation network supported in the Middle East (103917), a key outcome has been bringing together a group of people from a region who did not know each other to begin building an evaluation culture in the region. One indicator of this is the number of responses that the Environment and Sustainable Development Unit (American University of Beirut) received to their open call to attend the Cairo conference on impact evaluation, and the passion of the conversations about how to serve the particularities of the Arabic-speaking Middle East.⁶⁸

The Evaluation Community

The Evaluation Unit contributes to greater acceptance of, and advocacy for use-oriented evaluation in the wider international development evaluation community. The Unit contributes to enhancing the role and positioning of Southern evaluators in development research evaluation.

As noted in the introduction to this section, this unexpected outcome is not formally part of the Unit's *Strategy* so has not been actively monitored. This outcome is important not only in terms of the positive impact on the reputation of IDRC and the Evaluation Unit, but also for the substantive value it brings back to the Centre through the exchange of ideas.

The Unit has an influence on donor evaluation systems and thinking.

The evaluation work of IDRC has been cited as exemplary in the OECD-DAC Peer Review of Canada (2007):

"The Committee encourages CIDA to build on IDRC's unique approach to capacity building in developing countries. CIDA could draw further on the Center's research to enhance its policy formulation and evidence-based programming. (p.17). . . Through its evaluation research, IDRC has been influential globally in promoting innovative techniques (e.g., Outcome Mapping)." (p.51)

Throughout 2005-2010, a range of United Nations, bilateral and multilateral and foundations have sought advice and information on evaluation systems and approaches at the Centre.⁶⁹ For example, in a recent exchange between an EU staff member and a World Bank officer on engaging on a new regional evaluation capacity building program in South Asia, the World Bank

⁶⁶ For example, the Community of Evaluators and the Developing Evaluation Capacity in ICT4D project discussing together whether to submit joint bids.

⁶⁷ For example, see discussions on the listserv of the Latin American Outcome Mapping Community, and how the members brought in elements of OM into their practice.

⁶⁸ 60 applications were received from 23 different countries—see [email correspondence](#) between Sarah Earl and Ziad Moussa 14/03/2009.

⁶⁹ See this [Table of External Requests and Services](#).

officer noted: "Clearly, IDRC is engaged front and center in evaluation research and capacity work in South Asia, and it would be good to align our program with ongoing efforts."⁷⁰

Evaluation is sometimes cited as a key interest of other donors in their consultations with IDRC. The discussions with the International Fund for Agricultural Development on partnership in 2005-2007 included evaluation as a key area of interest for collaboration with IDRC.⁷¹ Evaluation was the early entry point for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation discussions with IDRC; that contact was sustained through Unit staff participation in a Gates Foundation evaluation advisory committee on one of their programs.

The Evaluation Unit is an oft-tapped resource by Canadian and international NGOs, universities and agencies for advice and guidance on evaluation.

The Evaluation Unit's work on methods and on strategic evaluations has resulted in invitations to advise on evaluation from universities, private sector organizations, NGOs and foundations in Europe, Asia, and the US. Within Canada, the Unit is regularly asked to speak with students and professors from universities. The Evaluation Unit is consulted by government departments (federal and provincial levels) and has participated in research council committees on evaluation. In the civil society sector, the Unit is often asked to provide advice and evaluation information. At the 2009 Sri Lanka Evaluation Association conference, a Unit staff delivered the keynote address on methodology and another led a panel on evaluation capacity building. In Canada, Engineers without Borders has called on the Centre on an occasional basis over the past eight years for advice on tools and methods, and approaches to evaluation. Our work is picked up by other influential organizations. For example, the American Evaluation Association has publicized the *Knowledge to Policy* book in its newsletter.⁷² Human Rights Watch approached the Unit to request support for an organizational dialogue on the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system (Gorvin 2009). Our strategic evaluation on capacity development was featured in a prominent on-line newsletter on capacity building, www.capacity.org.⁷³

Publications on evaluation contribute to the Unit's influence both within the Centre and beyond.

The publications produced both by the Evaluation Unit and about evaluation at IDRC are significant and extend into several audiences, notably international agencies, donors, civil society organizations, and the academic community. The recent *Knowledge to Policy* book (Carden 2009c) has been publicized through invited talks, reviews in a range of journals and newsletters, as summarized in the Evaluation Unit's *Report on the Knowledge to Policy* book's presence on the web.⁷⁴ Since 2004, four books produced by the Evaluation Unit have placed in the top 20 bestselling IDRC books.⁷⁵ By way of examples of influence of our work in other spheres:

⁷⁰ See this [email](#) sent by N. Khattri, Independent Evaluation Group, World Bank, to K. Hay on 3 December 2009.

⁷¹ See Fred Carden's trip report [here](#).

⁷² See the [American Evaluation Association newsletter](#).

⁷³ See the article in the newsletter from Capacity.org [here](#).

⁷⁴ See the reports in [this email](#) detailing the *Knowledge to Policy* book's presence on the web.

⁷⁵ See Google Books Report [here](#).

- In the international evaluation community, the 4th edition of *Utilization-Focused Evaluation* (2008), Patton uses the experience of the Centre on evaluation to illustrate the process use of evaluation and evaluation findings.
- In the Canadian evaluation community: As part of an "Evaluation Capacity Building Research Project" (funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council), faculty from the University of Ottawa have prepared a case study on IDRC's efforts at building evaluation capacity within the organization. As noted in their introduction, IDRC was chosen because of "its reputationally high level of evaluation capacity." (Amo & Cousins, 2009).
- In the donor evaluation community, a recent publication by the Asian Development Bank (Serrat 2009) profiles Outcome Mapping.
- In the academic evaluation community, through a recent publication (Bonbright, et al., 2009), the Unit has worked with influential evaluation researchers at universities, other donor agencies and evaluation practitioners to research and write in support of a mixed methods approach to impact evaluation. The Unit has been invited to contribute to *New Directions in Evaluation* (a peer reviewed publication of the American Evaluation Association) on two subjects in 2005-2010: process evaluation (4: 2007, Ch. 6) and strategy evaluation (2010).

STRATEGIC LESSONS AND CONCLUSION

The Evaluation Unit has consistently worked to identify, manage and ultimately, learn from a number of tensions that have challenged the team throughout 2005-2010. The diverse needs and demands of our key partners (IDRC program staff, management and partners) are manifested in managing these tensions.⁷⁶ Chief among those encountered during the period under review were: *balancing deliberate programming with responsiveness; breaking new ground while remaining consistent with our values; and promoting the use of both findings and process benefits*. A brief discussion of key lessons and ongoing issues follows.

Balancing Deliberate Programming with Responsiveness

The Evaluation Unit strives to make meaningful contributions, through both scholarship and practice, to the field of program evaluation for international development. While doing so, we are cognizant that the very relevance of our work also hinges upon the Unit's ability to respond to the needs of the diverse users of IDRC's evaluation system. To achieve this, we have had to balance the programming and service roles set out in our *Strategy* and remain open to new opportunities. This has required an ability to recognize when to push an initiative forward and when to use a lighter, less direct touch. Two key lessons have emerged:

⁷⁶ "Tensions" acknowledge that the pursuit of multiple and competing values, ends, and benefits inevitably gives rise to challenges about how to work towards achieving balance. Identifying tensions (which cannot be "solved") and making them explicit creates an opportunity to learn from them and become more intentional and effective in managing them." (Patrizi & Patton 2009).

First we learned that innovation requires readiness to sow many seeds, with the corresponding risk that some will bear fruit, while others will be less successful or even fail to take root. For example, our efforts in evaluation field building and the creation of Southern-based evaluation hubs have yielded mixed results: the creation of the Outcome Mapping Learning Community is a case of successful devolution; however evaluation hub development has not gone as quickly as hoped in some regions. In 2005 and 2006, the Unit experienced a series of false starts in hub development in East, West and Southern Africa but continues to work at building effective partnerships in these regions. Building evaluation capacity closer to home has also yielded successes and failures. Our plans to galvanize a group of IDRC evaluation 'champions' in Programs Branch into a more formal community of practice did not materialize due to workload considerations. Response to the IDRC Graduate Research Award on Evaluation has also been mixed, with fewer high quality proposals than expected. Perhaps the learning here is that as a relatively young field, program evaluation in international development yields a limited pool of young researchers who choose evaluation as a discipline/profession early on in their academic careers.

A second key lesson emerging from work on both tools and methods and strategic evaluations is that the path to influence is unpredictable, non-linear and requires persistence and sometimes a willingness to cede control. For example, with the devolution of outcome mapping the Unit recognized that we would need to take a conscious decision to relocate the key debates around its use outside of the Centre, with a corresponding risk around the use and misuse of the method. We have also learned that scaling up influence requires persistence. Many aspects of the outcomes described above are actually the fruit of persistence. It has taken close to 10 years and the construction of a strong external constituency of adopters before a more generalized meta-level uptake at the Program level in IDRC occurred.⁷⁷

Two significant challenges are evident. First, the Evaluation Unit recognizes that despite our commitment to utilization-focused evaluation and methodological plurality, the Unit and IDRC have sometimes been perceived as only using and promoting outcome mapping. The need for thoughtful communication messages around how the Unit approaches and supports evaluation will need to be reinforced. A second challenge is associated with monitoring. Our perception is that we have been fairly consistent in monitoring our strategy implementation through annual reflection exercises linked to the production of the ACE report. However, we also realize the need to better track intangibles such as evaluative thinking, for which we now have no formal assessment framework.

Breaking New Ground while Remaining Consistent to our Values

As this strategy period draws to a close, the Evaluation Unit team recognizes the need to further interrogate how to better bridge supporting evaluation research with our commitment to building the field of evaluation in the global South. A number of our evaluation research projects are housed in Northern-based organizations. We have tried to address this challenge by

⁷⁷ New prospectuses being drafted for the Agriculture and Environment program area are now adopting the use of 'progress markers', a key element of Outcome Mapping. The success of OM for the Unit was never defined as the institutionalization of OM at IDRC. In fact, this would run counter to UFE. This intelligent integration of one dimension of OM demonstrates appropriate adoption.

supporting Southern evaluators to draw out practice-based findings⁷⁸ and looking for entry points from which our field-building activities can feed into Southern partner research agendas. In striving for this balance, there is collective agreement on the team that our work with Northern-based evaluators and organizations should involve those who share our philosophy, values and vision. Whether the Unit funds Northern or Southern institutions, the work we support is intended to be "for" development / development research and is in parallel with our work to foster an evaluation community that has an increasingly larger and stronger Southern representation. While we understand and have learned to make good use of our context (evaluation expertise is largely concentrated in the developed world, where the discipline has grown up), tensions emerge during the everyday decision processes about which route to take, given limited budget and time. This is a challenging, yet healthy source of debate on the team. While we do not have all of the answers, we are generating multiple ideas on strategies for moving forward.

In the Unit's work to build a stronger cadre of development evaluation communities and researchers in the global South, we have encountered some disappointment in our ability to locate and recruit Southern-based professionals for the evaluation of IDRC programming. The ongoing experience has been that appropriate evaluators for IDRC programs are a specialized group, requiring the Evaluation Unit to work extensively with professional networks and ties. As we struggle to balance the tension between our need for good evaluators and our commitment to evaluation field-building in the global South, we question whether we are doing all that we could to correct this North/South imbalance.

Promoting the Use of Findings and Process Benefits

Perhaps one of the most significant pieces of learning to emerge has been a deepening of our understanding of the linkages between findings as evidence, the process use benefits of evaluation and the enhancement of a culture of evaluative thinking. The Evaluation Unit consistently endeavours to straddle the boundary between the use of evaluation findings for articulating evidence-based decision-making and the parallel importance of good participatory process that facilitates use and buy-in to evaluation in the user. Our experience in developing and rolling out the strategic evaluations on policy influence and capacity development has illuminated an important lesson: findings alone are of limited use and rarely is a report sufficient to support social change, regardless of the methodology alone.

In the case of IDRC, the processes that accompany the design, conduct and dissemination of evaluations (use of adult education principles, group facilitation, regular feedback loops with users, etc.) is what makes evaluation relevant and alive for the user. The Evaluation Unit has learned that use is highly dependent upon our ability to communicate findings to our diverse partners in ways that allow them to quickly absorb new knowledge and apply it to their everyday work. To date, the Unit has had some success in sharing findings through print and face-to-face meetings, with few attempts to use video or other media. While the Unit is working to make presentations more visually interesting, we are conscious of a need within the Centre for tools,

⁷⁸ The One World Trust research on accountability includes six developing country case studies and the Overseas Development Institute, under the umbrella of the Outcome Mapping Learning Community, gives out awards for documenting case studies in the South. However, the GAN-NET project has encountered difficulties engaging Southern evaluators.

frameworks and other programming aids that allow IDRC staff and partners to translate the principles and context-specific issues that typically emerge from large strategic evaluations into practice for change at the program level. In order to address this challenge, in 2010 the EU will be starting a new initiative in collaboration with the Rockefeller Foundation and the Evaluation Program at Claremont Graduate University to translate findings from the Policy Influence and Capacity Development strategic evaluations into program tools.

Supporting use and managing the Centre's evaluation system in a climate of increasing multiple accountabilities continues to yield learning for the Unit. The last two years in particular, have been characterized by organizational change associated with the elaboration and approval of IDRC's next five year *Strategic Framework*. Bringing evaluation and evaluative thinking into the changing processes of planning and decision-making has been challenging. As this report notes, however, overall the response within the Centre has been positive. In the midst of shifting priorities and political pressures, we have been asking ourselves how we can best steward the Centre's evaluation system and help support a culture of learning in which there is openness to both successes and failures. An example would be our work with the African Technology Policy Studies Secretariat evaluation. Helping the Centre reflect upon the learning that emerges from critical findings and channeling them into program improvement is an area where we need to focus more attention and effort.

Another key lesson relates to the tension between using evaluation for accountability and evaluation for learning. When the Unit was created in 1992, it directed significant effort to evaluation for learning, which was a gap at the time. Over many years, the Unit was perceived to primarily value the learning dimension of evaluation, though the accountability dimension was present as well. In 2005-2010, the Unit more directly addressed how IDRC's evaluation system handles both. For instance, the improvements to rPCR completion rates were crucial for improving accountability, but the process uses of rPCRs and the use of rPCRs in the ALF ensured that they also informed learning. External program reviews are now restructured to ensure that they meet accountability requirements and also promote evaluative thinking within Programs. Overall, while there is a tension between the accountability and learning use of evaluation, we have tried to balance this within Centre.

Conclusion

The Evaluation Unit team looks forward to the Review panel's observations and comments and to discussing the report in more detail. The EU team has found that the data collection, analysis, discussion and drafting of this program report, while challenging, has been extremely useful. In general terms, the EU team feels it has well-developed and iterative processes and mechanisms for coordination and ongoing learning. However, the experience of creating this report has allowed us to uncover important monitoring gaps which would not have been detected by other means.

Annex 1: Acronyms

ACE	Annual Corporate Evaluation report
ALF	Annual Learning Forum
ASIA	This includes projects in both Asia regions of the Centre
CAF	Corporate Assessment Framework
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
EU	Evaluation Unit
ICT4D	Information and Communications Technology for Development
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean region
MENA	Middle East and North Africa region
NAE	North America and Europe
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OM	Outcome Mapping
PAN	Pan Asia Networking program initiative
PCR	Project Completion Report
rPCR	rolling Project Completion Report
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UFE	Utilization-focused evaluation

Annex 2: Overview of Evaluations Conducted 2005-2010

Fiscal Year	Strategic Evaluations ⁷⁹	External Reviews ⁸⁰	# of Program Led Evaluations ⁸¹
2005-2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connectivity in the Americas (ICA) • PAN Americas • PAN Asia Networking 	23
2006-2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive Grants 		19
2007-2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connectivity Africa 	14
2008-2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge to Policy • Devolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UPE • RPE • EEPSEA • Ecohealth 	23
2009-2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large Conferences • Strategy Evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCD • WRC • Canadian Partnerships • GGP 	

Acronyms:

Ecohealth:	Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health
EEPSEA:	Environmental Economics Program for Southeast Asia
GGP:	Growth, Globalization and Poverty
PCD:	Peace, Conflict and Development
RPE:	Rural Poverty and Environment
UPE:	Urban Poverty and Environment
WRC:	Women's Rights and Citizenship

⁷⁹ The Unit Strategy 2005-2010 committed to completing three strategic evaluations. All the outputs of strategic evaluations can found at http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-27759-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html.

⁸⁰ All external reviews of programs are available at: http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-111660-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html.

⁸¹ The full list of program-led evaluations are listed annually in the ACE report at: http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-27736-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html.

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