Evaluation Report: International Forum On Ecosystem Approaches To Human Health
Montreal, May 18-23, 2003

International Development Research Centre – IDRC

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I. Background

The International Forum on Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health was a joint effort between the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Université de Québec à Montréal (UQAM). Besides the financial support of these two institutions, the forum was also partnered by eleven Canadian and international institutions[1]. After three years of careful planning, the Forum finally took place in Montréal from May 18 to 23, 2003. Having UQAM as its official venue, this five-day activity brought together 358 participants from all corners of the world and from a wide range of sectors; namely donors, government representatives, academic, NGOs and researchers.

The goal of the Forum was to provide a platform for discussion of the ecosystem approach to human health[2], the evidence from the field, and the relevance of the approach to improving health and well-being. The Forum would also offer the opportunity for researchers, policymakers, practitioners and civil society representatives from around the world to share knowledge, and for institutions to consider strategies for a way forward (http//:www.idrc.ca/forum2003).

As part of its commitment with partners, the Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health Program Initiative (Ecohealth PI) from IDRC agreed to undertake a Forum evaluation. This evaluation will provide sponsors with an overall assessment of the Forum, and at the same time will help the PI to better design future events in terms of format, content and logistics.

The main objective of the evaluation was to identify short-term impacts of the Forum's participant contributions and benefits from the activity, and extent to which the activity achieved its immediate goals. The evaluation was done at two different levels of responsibility. At the level of IDRC, it involved the analysis of contents from abstracts, presentations and discussions, and signed testimonials from participants that received funds from IDRC to participate. At the level of the consultant (also hired by IDRC), it involved the realization of a survey with Forum participants and post-Forum interviews with Forum organizers.

This draft report presents results of Forum evaluation at the consultant level and it was carried out in two steps: a survey with participants during the second last day of the Forum and a post-forum interview with organizers. The report consists of seven sections including objectives, methodology used, results presentation and analysis, lessons learned, short term impacts and lessons learned and recommendations, and annexes. In sections V and VI are directly based on interviewee responses given during the interview process.

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[1] Health Canada, Environment Canada, CIDA, Ford Foundation, United Nations Foundation, Santé et Services Sociaux – Québec, United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), the Institut des Sciences de L'Environne, Biodôme de Montréal, the International Society for Ecosystem Health (ISEH) and the World Health Organization (WHO)

[2] Ecosystem approach to human health consists of specific strategies for addressing environmental degradation and its impact on human health. Part of this strategy entails efforts to collaborate and build on lessons that have been learned (http://www.idrc.ca/Ecohealth)

II. Objectives of the Evaluation

The objectives of this evaluation are:

1. To provide partners with an overall assessment of the Forum.

2. To better design future events in terms of format and content by:
   a) Assessing appropriateness of content of presentations;
   b) Providing insight on how to better present results in future research;
   c) Assessing logistical arrangements and participant's involvement in the Forum.

III. Methodology

The methodology used in this evaluation is the results of several meetings and discussions between the consultant and two programme officers (POs) from the Ecohealth PI. The POs provided the consultant with a set of guidelines indicating the most appropriate set of tools that needed to be produced for the collection of data. Two sets of groups were targeted to carry on with the evaluation, participants and Forum organizers. The evaluation took place in two steps based on the information needed, the appropriateness of the tools identified, and the groups targeted.

3.1. Step 1: Participant's Survey

This step involved the development of a participant's survey to gather qualitative and quantitative on-site information from participants (Annex 1). Through the survey, organizing team and sponsors will be able to assess achievements of Forum's goals, format, logistics and short term impacts from participants' viewpoint. The survey was carried out during the second last day of the Forum, in order to make survey results available at the last day of the Forum.

A set of six questions[3] were developed by the consultant and reviewed by two members of the Ecohealth PI and one member of the Evaluation Unit. Once comments by both parties were incorporated, the survey was translated into French and Spanish languages. Photocopies of the survey in three different languages were made and sent to Montreal for their inclusion in Participant's kits.

On Thursday, May 22, participants were encouraged during plenary sessions to fill out and deposit survey forms in boxes located on the Forum Inscription/Information Desk. By day end, 99 filled out forms were received and consequently processed (using Excel) by the survey team[4]. Preliminary results based on 99 responses were given to newsletter editors for their inclusion in the next day edition. IDRC POs gave, two weeks after the Forum, another set of 29 filled out participant's forms to the consultant for their inclusion in the final results summing a total of 128 forms.

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[3] Questions 1 to 5 were further broken down between 11 (maximum) and two (minimum) sub-questions.
[4] Two IDRC staff (a PO& an intern) and the consultant.

3.2. Step 2: Post-Forum Interview

The purpose of this step was to collect qualitative information from the organizing team viewpoint. It required the elaboration of an interview guide (Annex 2) to capture the perception of interviewees around successes, challenges and lessons learned from the Forum. The most important elements to be assessed in the interviews were the achievement of Forum goals, integration of key elements[5] of the approach, Forum format[6] and logistics, and knowledge management quality and relevance[7].

The interview guide comprised 12 open-ended questions prepared by the consultant. These questions would be asked to a selected number of members from the organizing committee, whose names and co-ordinates were provided by the Ecohealth POs responsible for the Forum evaluation. The name of 11 individuals from various levels and committees were provided, and included three members of the Program Advisory Committee, two members of the logistics committee and six members of IDRC Ecohealth PI, including a member from Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO).

Of the 11 selected interviewees, nine were able to take part in the interview process. Two members of the PAC were unable to participate due to personal reasons. Interviewees were given the choice to participate in the interview either by e-mail (2), by telephone (1) or person-to-person (6). Each interview took approximately two hours to complete. In the beginning interviewees were told about the purpose of the interview, were encouraged to be open about their responses and reassured on the confidentiality of the information given. Due to ethical reasons, names of interviewees will be also kept confidential.

Additional information was also reviewed and considered for the analysis and presentations of results, including list of participants and e-mails received by the Forum co-ordinator from volunteers and participants.

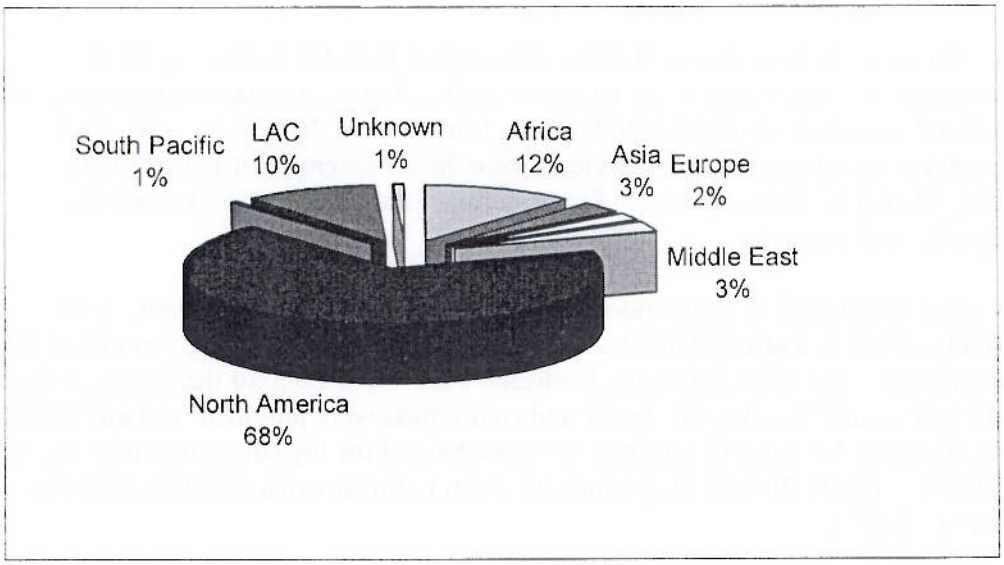
IV. Results Presentation and Analysis

4.1. Total Forum Population

Records (participants' list) provided by Forum organizers and co-ordinating committees showed that a total of 358 participants from 44 countries around the world (Fig. 1) attended the event. This participants' list provided information on the total population of the Forum, including participants, IDRC staff, organizers and volunteers. This information was later desegregated by gender and region, results showed that out of the 358 participants 175 (49%) were females, 176 (49%) were males and the remaining 7 (2%) were of unknown origin (See Figure 1).

[5] Integration of ecosystem and human health, transdisciplinarity, gender and social equity, links between science an policy
[6] Thematic content, increased awareness and other aspects
[7] Presentations, visual/audio-visual material, etc.

Figure 1: Total percentages of participants by region (N=358)



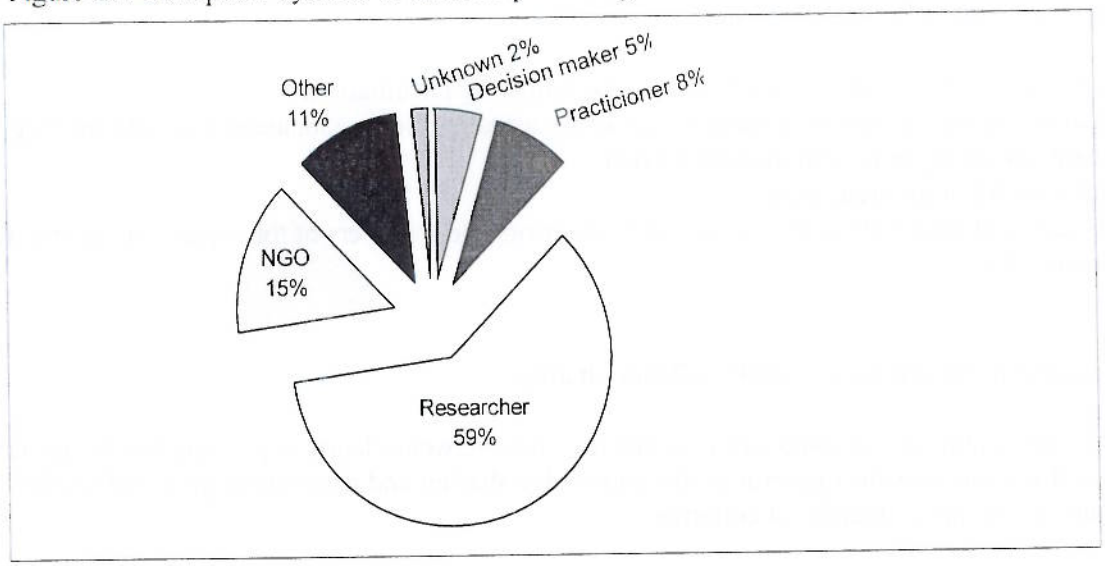
4.2. Analysis and Results of Participant's Survey

The main sources of information for this section are participant's list and survey carried out on May 22, 2003. Through the Participant's survey forms, we were able to capture the perception of participants, and obtain quantitative and qualitative information about the Forum successes and weaknesses.

Of a total population of 358 participants, 128 survey forms were received and consequently processed using Micro Soft Excel spreadsheets. The results presented in this section are based in the opinion of 36% of the total population that attended the Forum. Survey data was desegregated by gender, field of work (Fig. 2), region and age (Fig. 3) in order to obtain a participant's profile. The analysis of the data provided first hand information on gender distribution, age distribution of the Ecohealth community, and whether the event attracted a broad group of participants.

Results showed that there was nearly equal attendance by men and women and that a great majority of the participants came from the research community. Later in the report, the information will be used to further analyse information by gender distribution by region and see if there was equal access for women and men from the different geographic regions to participate in this type of events (Section 4.4).

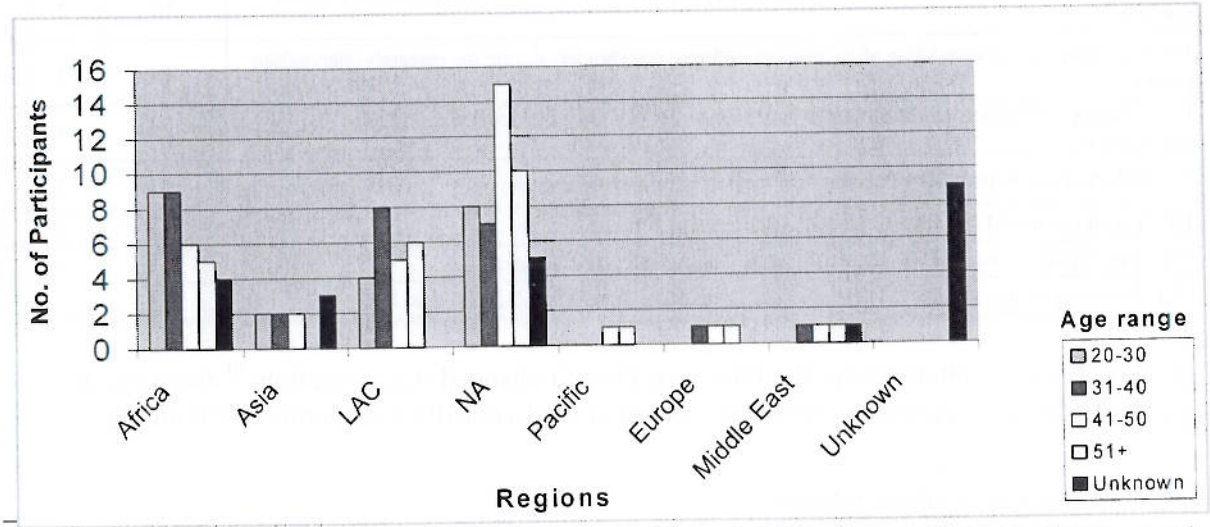
Figure 2: Participants by field of work in percentages



➢ Participants' Age by region

Desagregating participant's age by region provided information about potential scaling-up of the approach within the different regions. As shown in Figure 3 below, there is an even distribution among the different age groups in the various geographic regions. Thus implying, there is an important amount of individuals eager to either learn, investigate, fund or practice ecosystem approaches to human health. It also shows a promising future to position IDRC as a strong advocate of the approach and the successful establishment of "The Community of Practice[8]". Particularly, in the case of Africa where the number of young individuals interested in the approach, levels the number of middle age ones.

Figure 3: Age by region



[8] An up coming IDRC funded project, which main objective will be to link researchers, scholars and other interested parties in the approach, to eventually develop an Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health network.

4.3. Achievement of Forum Goals and Objectives

Results presented in this section are based on the following information:
Participants' survey[9], besides the standard questions asked the survey included a section inviting participants to openly comment about the event.
Interviews with Forum organizers.
E-mails received from volunteers, participants, sponsors and members of the organizing committee.
Participants' list

4.3.1. Platform for discussion and knowledge sharing

Survey results (Table 1) and responses from the nine interviewees clearly expressed that the greatest success in this event was the opportunity for knowledge sharing and networking provided to 358 participants from approximately 44 countries.

Table 1: Forum success – A platform for discussion & knowledge sharing
(5: Strongly agree; 1: Strongly disagree)

QUESTION 1 – PARTICIPANTS' SURVEY	AVERAGE	MAX	MIN
1. From my point of view, the Forum has been successful in:			
1.1. Contributing to a better understanding of new and/or existing elements of the ecosystem approach to human health (also referred to as Ecohealth)	4.5	5	2
1.2. Sharing of knowledge and experience regarding the Ecohealth approach	4.6	5	3
1.3. Clarifying with case studies and concrete examples the key elements of the Ecohealth approach	4.4	5	3
1.4. Promoting and understanding with examples of case studies the flexibility of the approach	4.2	5	2
1.5. Promoting and understanding the need for strategies to improve collaboration and build on solid research	4.3	5	2
1.6. Improving my understanding of the roles of different stakeholders during the research-intervention process	4.1	5	2
1.7. Fostering a reflection on the most efficient ways to integrate research results into policy development	4.0	5	1
1.8. Reflecting the importance of institutional support in research and policy	4.3	5	2
1.9. Providing a useful synthesis of the Forum discussion	4.0	5	2
1.10. Developing a common vision among stakeholders of the ways forward	3.8	5	1
1.11. Providing an opportunity to exchange views and information with other stakeholders	4.4	5	2

Although, for some interviewees the Forum still hasn't changed the perceptions[10] about the approach, it was considered an excellent opportunity to gather the Ecohealth community and build the

[9] Results of survey are available in Annex 1
[10] The ecosystem approach to human health is still being approached differently by researchers and academics.

knowledge of the approach together. Most interviewees felt that this event created a networking for strengthening the "Community of Practice", helping the sense of belonging to the community.

The statements below capture the success of the event at various levels.

Participant: "Wonderful ground to share my knowledge and learn develop and Ecohealth approach with community participants."

Participant: "Look forward to see spirit of the forum manifest in future community of practice, maintaining participation/dialogue and fostering new fora for this."

Forum organizer: "The success was having all these people together, feeling you're not alone. It built incredible strength..."

Keynote speaker: "The Forum is a gift that keeps on giving."

The Forum gave tremendous opportunities for people to present their views. Special attention is deserved by the poster-driven sessions, unanimously acclaimed by all participants and interviewees as the best tool ever used. Some participants conceived these sessions as a "new and more proactive concept" and "an effective platform discussion". The participatory nature of this tool raised a lot of interest among participants and stimulated a lot of discussions. According to one Forum organizer "the involvement was so impressive that half-hour after chairing a session, people were still discussing and exchanging ideas".

4.3.2. Presentation and understanding of key elements of the approach

There is an overall sense of achievement among forum participants and organizers regarding coverage and understanding of key elements of the approach (See Table 2 below). However, when it came down to the question of gender thematic coverage in presentation and discussions, the sense of achievement declined slightly. Most people feel the issue of gender roles and greater female involvement in the development and research of the approach is ill defined. In regards to broad representation, both participants and organizers coincided that a greater presence from communities, civil society, policy makers and governments from the South was missing in this event.

Interviewee: " Lots of sharing, however the forum was mostly research oriented and not for the community in general."

Participant: "Lots of talks about researchers but little about government involvement and their reality"

Table 2: Presentation and understanding of key elements of the approach
(5: Strongly agree; 1: Strongly disagree)

QUESTION 2 – PARTICIPANTS' SURVEY	AVERAGE	MAX	MIN
2. The Following Key Elements Of The Ecohealth Approach Have Been Clearly Illustrated:			
2.1. Transdisciplinarity	4.3	5	2
2.2. Community participation	4.4	5	2
2.3. Gender	3.7	5	2

2.4. Links between the health of human population and the ecosystem in which they live	4.4	5	2
2.5. Links between research results and policy	4.0	5	1

Some participants and interviewees felt that most research finding were "more at the level of processes and methodologies" rather than addressing practical issues (failure, finding solutions and dealing with conflict). Suggestions were made about the need to do comparative case studies (lessons, successes, pitfalls, adaptability, etc.) and document decisional impacts.

Participant: "I'd like to see addressed Ecohealth in the context of socio-environmental conflict, where social actors defend their interest."

Morning plenary sessions and discussions were identified as the most successful source of knowledge about the approach and holistic point of view in the research presentations. As equally pointed out by an interviewee, "mornings plenary and afternoon parallel sessions illustrated in great diversity and in concrete terms the links between Ecohealth and the environment". An observation made deserving attention is that a session specifically dedicated to explain key elements of the approach should have been allocated in the agenda.

■ **Integration of ecosystem and human health**

According to most participants, the Forum did give good examples on how people are attempting to contribute to the approach. Interview and survey results show "case studies" as the best tool for demonstrating the integration of ecosystem and human health approach. For instance, some participants and organizers feel that this tool and the "applied research nature of the majority of projects presented, illustrated in great diversity and concrete terms the links between health and the environment". However, the fact that some presentations were more concentrated in making that link left some participants with the feeling that the approach is still being overlooked.

■ **Transdisciplinarity**

Survey and interview results in particular, demonstrate a satisfactory level of achievement on presentations and discussions around this issue. Participants considered plenary sessions the best tool for discussing this key element; "they revealed a democratic spirit exercising transdisciplinarity". The topic generated a lot of discussions and ideas for strengthening the approach. For some participants the whole idea of transdisciplinarity brings a "great balance between biocentric and anthropocentric views". While others think the discussions demonstrated greater ecological and agricultural knowledge and little on the social sciences. The number of suggestions received in Participants' survey is also an indicator of this success.

Participant: "Excellent Forum. Inspiring to see both, transdisciplinarity and Ecohealth moving toward global acceptance."

The following suggestions are participant's contributions to the discussions in transdisciplinary, worth considering to further reflecting about potential ways forward.

Further inclusion of the social sciences

- It would've been important a deeper ethno-anthropological perspective looking at traditional knowledge within the approach. Thank you to the two researchers introducing this perspective.
- Surprised Canadian First Nation's issues were not raised from the beginning.
- Interesting flexibility that is being organized to get closer and support social aspects, most relevant but defiant more interpretation of intercultural approach.
- Focus on international issues understandable, but still a disconnect between people/place/ethic of the forum.
- Need more emphasis on the social sciences, participatory approach, and legal/policy perspectives. I would've liked to see more the Ecohealth approach applied to global issues (ex: impacts of globalized food systems and policies on both local and global food security).

The inclusion of other sciences

- Some disciplines were missing, for example: environmental engineering, economists, and town planners.
- There wasn't enough integration of topics in epidemiology and examples of policy implementation. Lots of incomplete work without future plans.
- I would've liked to see more issues in water-health.
- Some topics were poorly covered, for example: public health, health policies, ethics, globalization context, and the impact of economic policies, international trade/commerce.

Scaling-up of the approach

- There is need of a list of multi-disciplines that might be useful in Ecohealth projects and beware of project options.
- There should be some kind of follow up on action-thinking using an Ecohealth approach.
- Follow up through research issues like scaling-up.

Understanding transdisciplinarity

- Interdisciplinary – transdisciplinary, are they the same? We need to focus more on concepts and areas of conceptual conflicts.

■ Gender and Social equity

By general consensus, both in surveys (Table 2) and interviews, gender was highlighted as the weakest aspect of the approach covered in the presentations, as clearly expressed below by interviewees:

"People don't still have a common understanding on the topic", all countries see it differently. For instance, among Southern researchers still predominates the perception in how to benefit women only".

"The Forum platform did not provide a space to discuss gender, some people tried to cover it, but it wasn't systematically addressed".

"It is obvious that for various reasons, we aren't doing very well in the methods used – we need to learn how to be invasive".

■ Community participation

Another aspect that needs to be strengthened within this element is the issue of community involvement and participation. Some participants and interviewees would've liked to see more

examples of the approach around more participatory methodologies, community inclusion and capacity building.

■ **Links between science and policy**

So far, the Ecohealth approach has been successful in linking research and practice, but it is difficult to say how useful these results would be for policy makers. According to many interviewees, "There was lot of talks about research but little about government involvement and their reality". At the Forum it was evident there aren't many research findings in how to link the approach with policy. In a participant's opinion some presentations fell short in providing a more integral view "all about regional policies was discussed; however, rights and large scale policies were not addressed". "There is a need to improve/implement discussions with policymakers and researchers and community representatives".

Interviewee: "It is disappointing to see the lack of examples and tools to link the approach with policy. I was hoping we'd be more advanced on this front, but everything is the same."

According to participants and Forum organizers, there should have been greater representation and therefore participation of policy makers in the Forum. It was interesting to note the high score of 4 in a scale of 5 in table 2, suggesting participants were nonetheless satisfied.

The approach was effectively disseminated before, during and after the Forum. According to interviewees the Forum itself was a big dissemination event, where "approximately 10% or less were unfamiliar with the approach. Many dissemination tools have been developed in the context of the Forum. These tools include a supplement specifically dedicated to the Forum in Le Devoir during the week of the event, intended for the general public; bilingual daily newsletter, which according to many were very informative, and webcasting. The In Focus magazine destined to policymakers was launched at the Forum, there is also in progress a supplement and state of the art book meant for the academic and research community. Other tools are still in progress.

4.3.3. Forum format and content

■ **Thematic content**

From the organizers' perspective most themes were covered in the Forum, their opinion is supported by Participants' survey results, which show an average of 4.6 in a scale of 5. Most interviewees feel that this success is owed to the excellent work of the Program Advisory Committee and abstract review teams. The performance of the presenters has been highly regarded by both, participants and forum organizers. Particularly those made in morning sessions and more specifically, case studies and speeches such as the presentations made by Dr. Carlos Santos Burgoa, Dr. Ligia Noronha and Dr. Clifford Mutero, keynote speaker Dr. Grö Harlem Burndland, Honorable Herb Gray and Mrs.Cynthia Stirbys. At the end of the Forum, "people went back home with better ideas about the approach and what they would do". The following comments made by interviewees illustrate the degree of satisfaction concerning the thematic quality of the presentations and the presenters.

"Quality of presentations was exceptional throughout the week...I was impressed by the presentation of Southern researchers."

"The greatest success was the strong representation from Southern researchers who were able not only to present their research, but also share experiences and discuss areas of common concern. The quality of their presentation was high and elicited the respect and recognition from Canadian and North American scientist."

"It was a pleasant surprise to find many strong presentations and posters by researchers that submitted abstracts of lesser quality. In all presentations I attended it seemed clear that presenters had prepared themselves to do their presentations".

Across the event, only four presentations were mentioned as either being presented in an unfriendly format, being out of context or fallen off the Ecohealth approach track, i.e. environmental management perspective only. Suggestions made by participants in Forum survey presented about "Transdisciplinarity" in section 4.2 of this report could be useful in the identification of specific issues insufficiently covered within the thematic content of some presentations.

■ **Format**

Results from Participants' Survey (Table 3) demonstrate that all tools used in the forum were highly appreciated and enjoyed by most participants. As previously mentioned, "Poster-Driven Seminars were unanimously agreed as the best sessions of the event followed by "Morning Plenary Sessions" and "Down to the Ground Activities". Positive comments were made about the performance of IDRC staff as facilitators in some of the sessions. Only one negative comment was made regarding the facilitating style (not participatory) used by one discussant (facilitator) during the first day of sessions.

Table 3: Forum format and content for the facilitation of knowledge sharing and learning
(5: Strongly agree; 1: Strongly disagree)

QUESTION 4 – PARTICIPANTS' SURVEY	AVERAGE	MAX	MIN
4. For the purpose of learning and/or sharing knowledge I found the following sessions useful:			
4.1. The morning plenary sessions	4.6	5	3
4.2. The oral presentation sessions	4.3	5	2
4.3. The 10 Minutes of Fame	4.1	5	1
4.4. The poster driven seminars	4.3	5	1
4.5. The closing day plenary sessions	4.1	5	2

Regardless of the results above, some participants felt that some sessions were either boring, redundant or confusing. Also, a generalized feeling among both groups was the excess of parallel sessions in the program.

Table 4 below, summarizes qualitative information provided by survey respondents in "comments section" provided at the end of the survey form, and interviewees' comments about successes and failure of specific sessions.

Table 4: Successes and failure by session and/or activity

Session/Activity	Successes	Failures/Challenges
Morning plenary	- Good source of knowledge	- Working breakfast were too long, but we were in a good mood
Poster driven seminars	- Excellent strategy for IDRC	- Good discussions but unrelated to

	- Most successful because of the readiness and way people prepared, they reflected the organization of the team - At first sceptical about such an inclusive approach, but it demonstrated to be the best tool to discuss with downer levels and get to the nitty-gritty details - Good format - Impressed with quality of posters and presentations - Innovative - Opportunity to know and share other views on the approach - Format should be used extensively in COP direction	the posters - Posters should've remained displayed - More time needed for presenters - Too small. Suggest giant viewing session and then split into smaller groups - Should've been separated from oral presentations
10 minutes of fame	Really enjoyed it, discussion periods helped expansion of knowledge on larger issues	- 10 minutes of fame wasn't any different from oral presentations – only shorter
Oral presentations	- Good quality - Case presentations powerful tools, I would've preferred questions addressed as asked	- Least relevant need to address separate summaries of each afternoon session vs. plenary - Case studies gave little hope towards development
Down to the ground	- Great! Impact on Western society behaviour on Ecohealth needs to be addressed	- Only boat session was hindered by weather conditions - Needed microphones in the buses, difficult to understand because of the noise
Closing day plenary	- Panellists were pretty good	- Missing support acknowledgement - Closing day not appropriate, there should've been a synthesis to keep everyone in the same level - Not very energizing and unnecessary excepting last day - Informal discussions could've been more useful than plenary ones - Tedious and repetitive
Closing ceremony	- We invested a lot of time in the synthesis done by 3 young women who used excellent language	- We could've done better for Friday's session. Overall, disappointed it was very confusing and co-chairs were on a weird direction confusing the public about the way we'll be going. We knew this session would be a problem - We should've had a cultural presentation at the end

■ **Program**

Both, organizers and participants agreed that the program, although it was very good, it was too cramped. For many, a less crowded program might have allowed more opportunities for discussion/interaction during and after sessions. The majority of organizers interviewed felt that they

spent too much time running around and did not have the opportunity to fully participate and either benefit from and/or contribute to the discussions.

■ **Official program and related documents**

Overall, the documents included were of good quality and very well organized. However, a small number of interviewees and participants feel that the format wasn't user friendly "too much flipping and note taking. In the future, there should be more hand outs".

Abstracts

According to some members of the review team interviewed, the quality of the abstract varied greatly, however most were of very high quality". From nearly 400 abstract received and revieweed, 150 were selected. Some of the abstract chosen were not very good in terms of results and language, but their contents and format used were considered of good quality. The 150 abstract selected were sent back to their authors for revisions and editing. "The selection of abstracts was biased toward applied research (only few selected presentations were theoretical), which made the presentations to be graphic and close to the ground". The publication of revised abstracts in the proceedings will be even better since presenters have a clearer concept of the approach after their participation in the Forum.

Daily newsletter

From the participant's perspective, the daily newsletter were very useful and informative. However, for Forum organizers involved in their publication, this resulted to be a very time consuming and tiresome activity adding up to their workload.

Webcasting

This tool was considered a success among forum organizers, which continues to offer excellent coverage of the event.

Posters

Considered one of the best tools in the whole event, some posters were sophisticated in terms of their presentation and information conveyed.

Website and database

The team responsible for developing and maintaining the forum website and database considered this task one of the most challenging and difficult publication tools. The amount of work the website and database created hindered the development of an on-line forum that was supposed to take place before the big event. According to their response, although the site was easy to publish it was difficult to manage for the Forum's purpose. In future, it will be better to hire a professional to design and properly manage the database. "IDRC system was not ideal for this event".

Audio-visuals

Most interviewees expressed that audio-visuals in general went really well.

Proceedings

The publication of Forum proceedings have been delayed, most likely they will be published by year-end.

■ Logistics

Registration

Several problems were experienced on this front. Firstly the registration of international participants could've been more properly done. According to one interviewee, part of the problem is that there wasn't a lot of assistance outside Canada for the distribution and facilitation of information concerning Forum logistics. Secondly, on-site registrations should've been planned better, there wasn't a proper mechanism to check whether payments were made or not. The logistic team had to rely on trust heavily and then found out that eight people didn't pay. Another problem was that a full list of participants wasn't ready until the last day of the event.

"The registration set-up and planning was a problem (ex: no up-to-date list of participants was kept during the registration of participants at the forum, preventing us to know if speakers were present until the actual time of their presentation). Another avoidable problem was the re-doing of participant lists, address lists and presentation schedules prior to the forum which wasted valuable human resources time. A careful planning of a database for participants and presenters early on during the forum planning stages would have save lots of time and effort".

Venue

By general consensus, the UQAM set up was considered by most people difficult (directional signs were poor) but enriching. "It gave a sense of community based, very important in principle for students, researchers, community-based organisations, etc. Logistic co-ordinators expressed a lot of frustration in dealing with UQAM management and a unionized environment, getting human and material resources were very difficult. According to them it is a very bureaucratic system and sensed "there was non-commitment from UQAM. The messages did not come in the right strength from the Rector's office, directors did not informed sub-ordinate staff until the last minute".

Technical assistance from UQAM was not readily available due to work breaks. There were different technicians for each room, and they always came at the last minute, especially for afternoon sessions. In addition to the above, the Forum started on holiday Monday where most support staff was not around. For some however, this was a good start, since there were no interruptions caused by regular academic activities, which later became a problem during afternoon sessions. For some participants the set up of the rooms was awkward and difficult to get in and out.

Another observation made by interviewees and participants was the lack of restaurants and an appropriate dinning area, which could've stimulated more informal discussions and networking.

Translations

Simultaneous translations done by Public Works conference interpreters went very well. However, there were a lot of problems experienced due to the way microphones were co-ordinated by UQAM support staff.

Banquet/Cultural event.

For some participants the banquet and cultural event was a place for informal discussion. But from the logistic point of view, this activity was considered problematic. The Palais des Congrès for the gala dinner was not appropriate. Some participants complained about the lack of special food accommodations for people with special needs (vegetarians, diabetics, etc.).

Human resources

The work done by volunteers was highly praised by all Forum participants and organizers. Part of this success, according to logistic team members, was the volunteer task chart developed by Andres Sanchez. In addition to the high level of accuracy of the chart, the commitment demonstrated by the volunteers ensured a high quality performance and efficiency in their tasks.

4.4. Challenges and Solutions Encountered

Many challenges were encountered throughout the activity, noteworthy there wasn't always a solution. The greatest challenges identified by all nine interviewees in the overall activity were:

Globally

- Bringing together the Ecohealth community and ensuring a proper setting for exchange, and give people the impression they were all contributors to the approach. "To manage was a huge team effort, where the last three months the Ecohealth team, the Forum coordinator and the PAC had monthly conference calls and worked really hard until the last minute".
- To realize that all are approaching Ecohealth differently, demonstrating this is an approach in evolution. "At first, I was afraid that people will see the approach as a diagnosis, to avoid that we have to remain discussing and contributing to the approach so it doesn't become a dogma. The challenge for IDRC is to avoid the dogma".
- Although, there weren't substantial changes to the program it was slightly affected by the SARS outbreak short noticed cancellations and late confirmation. Solutions to these changes included re-routing of many participants, changes in morning plenary sessions[11] and prompt notification to participants by word of mouth and advanced notification in the daily newsletters. In spite of that "morning plenary sessions remained of high quality".

Thematically

- Although there was good visibility of women, the gender component was not analyzed, as it should've been. Some members of the IDRC team chairing sessions took the lead and put the subject on the table for discussion. However, they feel this topic should have been more central in the discussions.

- There were interesting case studies, but it was a challenge to bring forth the content and present it in a format relevant to participants and representatives in terms of cultural content, gender, transdisciplinarity, etc.
- Institutionalization of the approach.
- Missing participation from Southern policymakers.

Programmatically

- "Some people complained the agenda was too packed, however this gave different results considering the importance of the topic".

[11] When a particular session was cancelled the next presentation/session scheduled was brought forward.

- "Time management was the greatest challenge and it was successfully achieved by keeping the time scheduled for each activity planned, and achieving the feedback from groups to plenary sessions".

Logistically

- UQAM was a difficult venue to organize an event like this, rooms were difficult to find. However, organizers improvised directional signs to correct the problem. "In the end it was considered a minor problem because sessions still went on and we had great help from the students".
- There was lot of immigration problems and reception of per diem, particularly some countries in Africa (ex: Nigeria and Ivory Coast). The per diem problem was resolved by reimbursing participants on the spot.
- A lot of people from IDRC did not register prior to the Forum.
- Photocopying and translation of documents was a problem, particularly the English-French translation of the daily newsletter. This was an extra burden for one member of the IDRC team that was not anticipated.
- The elaboration of banners was a problem without solution, "ultimately they were made to UQAM specifications and not as we requested".
- Some aspects were beyond the control of Forum organizers, for example power point presentations where either the font used was too small or the presenter included big sections of text.

4.5. Gender Considerations and Summary of Gender Desegregated Data

4.5.1 Distribution of gender roles

The sources of information presented in this section were of qualitative and quantitative nature. Survey data and interview responses were analyzed at the level of Forum participants, program advisory committee (PAC), presenters and organizing committee.

<u>At the level of participants</u>

The main source of information is quantitative and is presented around gender representation by region in the Forum. To a lesser extent, qualitative information was also obtained through Forum organizer interviews about participant contributions in the discussions.

Survey results show that gender representation varied greatly among the different regions. The African continent had the biggest female representation in the Forum, followed by Latin America and Asia. Conversely, the biggest male representations came from North America and Latin America.

Figure 4 below, shows the proportions of gender representation by region against the total number of participants present. The Unknown category in these figures represents participants for which it was impossible to determine gender.

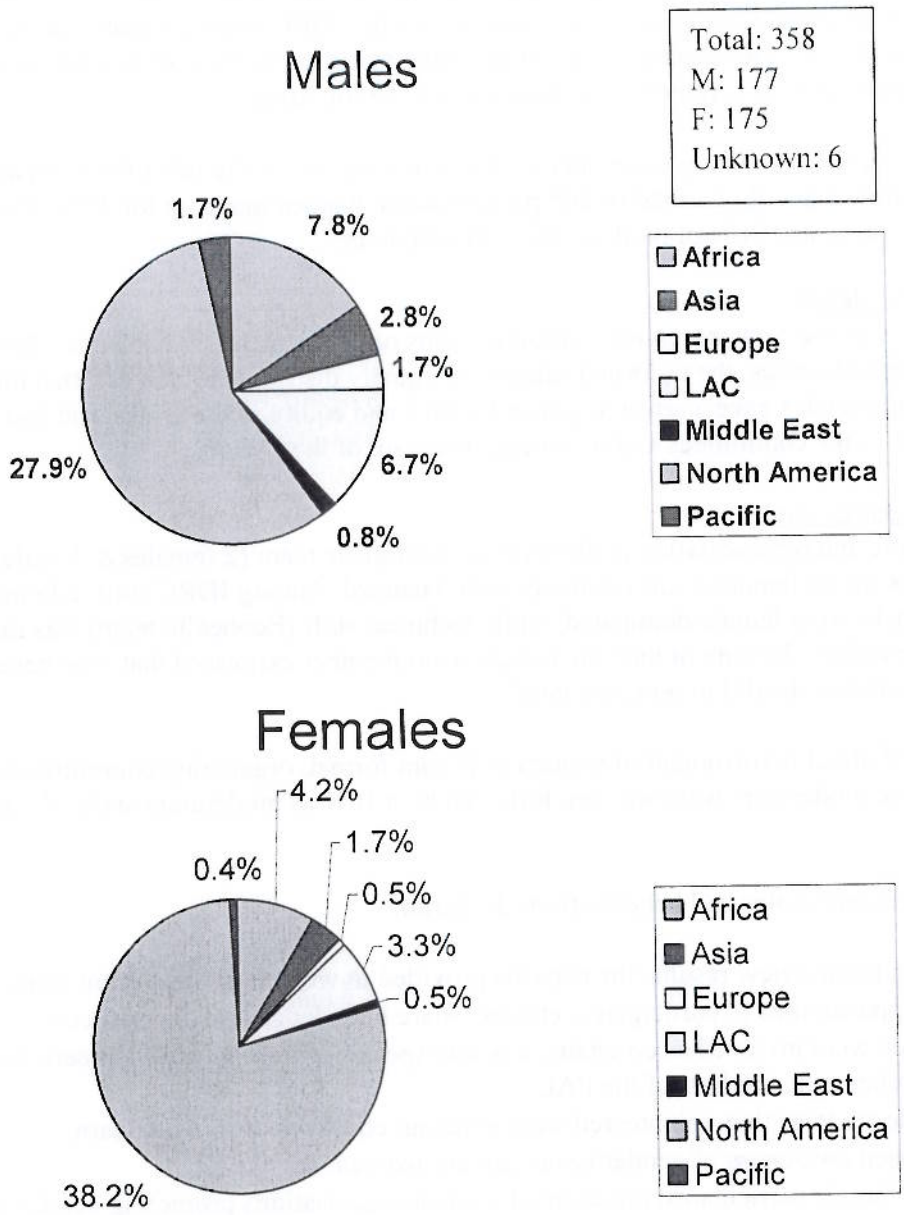


Figure 4: Gender representation by region in percentages

During discussion sessions, everyone had an equal chance to participate, particularly during morning sessions. For some interviewees, gender role and participation in the discussions was better balanced than in case studies presentations.

At the level of presenters

The nature of the information presented here is based on responses by interview with Forum organizers about the role of each presenter as key speaker and authors. Significant efforts were made to have a balanced gender distribution among keynote speakers, authors, poster sessions, panel

presentations and discussions. Although same efforts were made for case study presentations, the sessions were male dominated. Some members of the IDRC team felt that at the level of Ecohealth PI funded projects there seems to be a strong representation of females as principal or co-principal investigators for Latin America and Asia, but less so for Africa.

Members of the organizing committee provided records about the role of women at this level. These records show that out of a total of 205 presentations, women made up for 36% (73). In terms of roles, women represented 36% of moderators and facilitators.

At the PAC level

The PAC was the best-represented group in terms of gender roles and balance. Although, male outnumbered females, the tasks and roles were equally distributed. The fact that the PAC included two strong females gave a sense of power balance and equity in the group, and had a positive impact in the rest of the committees and the overall program of the Forum.

At the logistics level

Gender role and representation at the level of the logistic team (2 females & 1 male), including volunteers (more females) was relatively well balanced. Among IDRC staff, administrative and logistic tasks were female dominated, while technical staff (Ecohealth team) was male dominated (only 2 females). In spite of that one female team member expressed that "she never felt discriminated as she did in previous jobs".

In terms of direct involvement of women in Forum format, organizing committee records show that 15 % of the moderators were women, followed by a 10% as moderators and a 9% as facilitators.

4.5.2. Women's roles and benefits from the forum

According to interview results, the benefits provided to women in this Forum were:

- The opportunities to participate, network, share knowledge and experiences.
- Women were involved as co-chairs, keynote speakers, presenters, volunteers, audience, workers, researcher and members of the PAC.
- Female students that volunteered were given an equal opportunity to learn.
- Increased awareness of gender issues among women.
- Many female participants, represented women organisations promoting gender; one example is the Women Environmental Program (WEP) from Nigeria. Some of these organisations felt that the gender thematic was insufficiently covered in the Forum, but they were happy to see that the attempt of IDRC was there.
- Women learned from the conceptual – to the implementation and operationalization of the Ecohealth framework. "I heard a Nigerian woman saying I wish we had the same". The Forum allowed them to stand back and see their own.
- Finally, taking into account gender issues in projects and in the Forum planning and execution benefited women.

V. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The main lessons learned and recommendations made, mainly developed around Forum logistics and thematic content particularly gender. The statements below echo the opinion of the nine Forum organizers interviewed. Hence, the main purpose of this evaluation is to take into consideration their opinion and suggestions for the organization of similar events in the future.

➢ Thematic content

About gender and participatory

"If gender among our researchers is unbalanced that's probably why gender analysis in our research is not addressed. We need to be more invasive in our methods".

"The format of the forum should've been more inclusive (communities). It was very research oriented, it lacked participation from policy makers. In my assessment it wouldn't be wise to have this type of event every two years, considering the organizational aspects and time required succeeding"

About the approach

"The approach was presented as a new concept developed by IDRC causing some resentment among other institutions, who think the holistic approach is not new and have been approached before. It will be better for IDRC to show our work in relation to other existing approaches rather than presenting it as our new approach. If we do this we'll cut ourselves from other partners. We need to find a balance, contextualize what we're doing and not de-contextualize it. We need to try to be open and flexible."

"There was a conflict between the thematic, the organization and the conceptual. It was hard for the team to relinquish, in my opinion the co-ordinator needed to take ownership of the concept and concentrate less in logistical aspects. Perhaps, clearer definition of tasks was needed about who should've done the conceptual to have better end results. Overall it was a real team effort. Not sure who contributed to the conceptual. In the future we should have someone more in tune of IDRC and clearer definition of roles between logistics & forum co-ordinators."

➢ Format and Logistics

About the format

"The same format should be respected, however we should improve in everything ex: announcements, more abstracts, better quality, better selection and have a place to keep the posters throughout the forum".

"In future events we should plan carefully the database of presenters, participants, abstracts etc... including the ease of transfer of information between computers and web-based systems. We should start earlier in securing and confirming the participation of plenary keynote speakers, request presenters to provide papers on their presentations at least one month in advance to the forum."

"We need to plan ahead a post-forum exercise such as an immediate follow up perhaps through a final exercise, where participants have the opportunity to express their immediate post-forum goals."

"It would be useful to have one day for Regional Workshops to collaborate in building the community of practice in each region."

About the logistics

"There is need to plan carefully the overall timelines and key dates (ex: provide sufficient time between deadlines for submission of abstracts, their review and return of acceptance/ rejection decisions). It is important to ensure that organizers are freed of regular work tasks to be able to dedicate the necessary time to the organization of the forum and meet the deadlines set forth."

"Hire a company to do the organization and free IDRC POs in order to benefit and participate in discussions"

"A tour of the city should've been given to all participants. This type of activity should be built into the program for participants to see the city and associate it with the activity. For instance, it was unfortunate that international visitors coming to Montreal didn't know that the venue was built over a metro station that helps transport millions of people a day."

VI. Short-term Impacts and Follow up

Short-term impacts

Below are described the main short-term impacts of the Forum identified by interviewees.

The great amount of positive reactions from participants by e-mail and during international events such as an international conference in Washington, people left Montreal saying we are not alone. It is now IDRC's job to facilitate the networking and accelerate the establishment of the community of practice as a way of dissemination and slowly committing people. The forum helped reassure participants about their contribution to the community of practice.

People seemed happy and eager to show/share their knowledge. Many participants expressed at formal and informal conversations, the reassurance of knowledge and commonality perceived during the week of the forum. Other elements cited in these conversations included a better understanding (obtained by attending presentations and discussions) on how to integrate research and action with the participation of community groups that link environmental management to health; and, a sense of motivation in continuing to follow and disseminate the approach. The Forum helped to reassure people, especially participants from Africa that the eagerness to the approach isn't coming only from

IDRC. All participants were able to share, be more eloquent and more articulate in the sharing of their knowledge and ideas. Now the question is how to continue this momentum.

Follow up

The following are suggestions made by the nine interviewees, members of the organizing committee, about ways to ensure the momentum of the Forum.

- Webcast and publications of abstracts and proceedings;
- Improved projects performance;
- A completed publication strategy;
- Establishment of community of practice;
- More support for sharing information and supporting intellectual property rights of Southern researchers for publishing their project findings. Most are afraid of sharing their knowledge/ideas fearing they can be stolen. Losing ownership is an issue that needs to be addressed, perhaps when the community of practice is in place;
- Follow up the institutionalization of the approach and try to develop regional leadership through development of training sessions;
- Follow up should continue right away now feels that we are losing momentum. This was spoken, but it is hard to comply with reality. We got to keep the ball rolling in the short time in a very short time – 3 months. We should've planned for a post-forum activity even before the forum took place.

Annex 1: Survey results – totals (5: Strongly agree; 1: Strongly disagree)

Number of respondents: 128 Individuals	Decision makers=	5%	Africa=	26%
Females: 46%	Practicioners=	8%	Asia=	7%
Males: 52%	Researchers=	60%	Latin America=	18%
Age: average = 41 years old: range (23 - 73)	NGOs=	15%	North America=	35%
	other=	11%	Pacific=	2%
	Unknown	2%	Europe=	2%
			Middle East=	3%
			Unknown=	7%

SURVEY - AVERAGE	AVERAGE	MAX	MIN
1. From my point of view, the Forum has been successful in:			
1.1. Contributing to a better understanding of new and/or existing elements of the ecosystem approach to human health (also referred to as Ecohealth)	4.5	5	2
1.2. Sharing of knowledge and experience regarding the Ecohealth approach	4.6	5	3
1.3. Clarifying with case studies and concrete examples the key elements of the Ecohealth approach	4.4	5	3
1.4. Promoting and understanding with examples of case studies the flexibility of the approach	4.2	5	2
1.5. Promoting and understanding the need for strategies to improve collaboration and build on solid research	4.3	5	2
1.6. Improving my understanding of the roles of different stakeholders during the research-intervention process	4.1	5	2
1.7. Fostering a reflexion on the most efficient ways to integrate research results into policy development	4.0	5	1
1.8. Reflecting the importance of institutional support in research and policy	4.3	5	2
1.9. Providing a useful synthesis of the Forum discussion	4.0	5	2
1.10. Developing a common vision among stakeholders of the ways forward	3.8	5	1
1.11. Providing an opportunity to exchange views and information with other stakeholders	4.4	5	2
2. The following key elements of the Ecohealth approach have been clearly illustrated:			
2.1. Transdisciplinarity	4.3	5	2
2.2. Community participation	4.4	5	2
2.3. Gender	3.7	5	2
2.4. Links between the health of human population and the ecosystem in which they live	4.4	5	2
2.5. Links between research results and policy	4.0	5	1
3. The organization of the Forum (plenary morning sessions, oral presentations, 10 minutes of fame, poster driven seminar, closing day sessions) was adequate, more specifically:			
3.1. Time allocation (questions, discussions)	4.2	5	2
3.2. Room set up and equipment	4.4	5	2
3.3. Chair, moderator or facilitator's performance	4.5	5	2
3.4. Respect of program organization and schedule	4.7	5	2

4. For the purpose of learning and/or sharing knowledge I found the following sessions useful:			
4.1. The morning plenary sessions	4.6	5	3
4.2. The oral presentation sessions	4.3	5	2
4.3. The 10 Minutes of Fame	4.1	5	1
4.4. The poster driven seminars	4.3	5	1
4.5. The closing day plenary sessions	4.1	5	2
5. I am satisfied with:			
5.1. The content of the Forum	4.6	5	2
5.2. The support provided by staff and organizers	4.8	5	3
6. OVERALL ASSESSMENT:			
In a scale 1 to 5, indicate your degree of satisfaction with the Forum (1: unsatisfied – 5: fully satisfied)	4.3	5	2

Comments are welcome. For example, what you found to be the most interesting activities, and what you found to be the least relevant for your work. Were there issues that you would have liked to have seen addressed? What kind of follow up would you expect? Feel free!!

Annex 2: Interview guide

FORUM ORGANIZERS POST-FORUM INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON ECOSYSTEM APPROACHES TO HUMAN HEALTH
Montreal, May 22
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

1. What (and why) was the greatest success in the Forum? What was the greatest challenge?

2. Did the Forum achieve the goals initially set out for it?
- platform for discussion and knowledge sharing
- presentation of research findings and how they are addressing health problems within an Ecohealth approach
- effective dissemination of Ecohealth approaches research and practice among key stakeholders
- how well was the gender thematic covered in the Forum?

3. Was there any change in activities programmed during the Forum? If so, can you mention the reasons why? How successful were these changes?

4. Did you encounter any problems in terms of: (a) logistics (b) thematic content
- Were these problems foreseen? Did you find a timely and effective solution?

5. How did you perceive the gender (in)equity in terms of:
- Key speakers
- Authors and/or co-authors at the various activities planned (case studies, panel, working group sessions, etc.)
- Discussion contribution
- Forum participant
- Organization and logistics

6. What roles did women and men played in:
- the overall planning of the Forum (eg. PAC)
- the selection of presenters and abstracts (PAC & team)
- the planning and implementation of logistics

7. Specifically; how women were involved and benefited from the Forum activities?

8. What kind of short-term impacts among participants have you identified? Changes in attitudes, behaviour, and reassurance of knowledge or acquisition of new ones?

9. What is your opinion about the quality of the abstract publications, presentations and effectiveness of presenters? What were their strongest and weakest attributes?

10. Overall, what elements in the Forum have you identified as success? As challenges? (lessons learned) in terms of:

- key elements (integration of ecosystem and human health: transdisciplinarity; gender and social equity; links between science and policy)
- format, thematic content, logistics, increased awareness, other aspects, etc.
- knowledge management quality and relevance (publications, presentations, visual/audio-visual material, etc.)

11. As an organizer, what has been your relationship with peers, participants and donors?

12. What recommendations would you make to improve similar Forums in the future?