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Quality Assessment of IDRC Evaluation Reports
November 2002

Although evaluation reports are only one element of IDRC's evaluation system and do not represent the entirety of evaluation activities, they are an important element of IDRC's knowledge system. In order to monitor the quality of the evaluation reports and identify areas for improvement, IDRC's Evaluation Unit conducts regular reviews of the quality of all evaluation reports commissioned by the Centre or related to IDRC supported activities. An electronic and print copy of all evaluation reports should be forwarded to the Evaluation Unit for inclusion in the inventory.

IDRC maintains a decentralized evaluation system in which programming units are responsible for planning, conducting and utilizing evaluations of their projects and programs. Besides conducting strategic evaluations of cross-cutting issues, developing methodologies, and supporting projects, the Evaluation Unit also acts as a resource for programming units by facilitating evaluation planning and implementation, providing technical assistance and feedback, supporting and giving trainings and workshops, and offering logistical and methodological support. In special cases, the EU can itself manage or implement an evaluation for a programming unit.

In this decentralized, use-oriented evaluation system there is a natural tension between evaluation's role in supporting program learning and demonstrating accountability for achieving results. In order to maintain the balance between learning and accountability in such a system, it is neither feasible nor desirable to standardize quality through the creation of a single format to which all evaluation reports must adhere. Instead, the Evaluation Unit judges the quality of an evaluation report based on the degree to which it demonstrates that the evaluation has fulfilled the purpose for which it was conducted using 4 internationally recognized program standards: utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy

How is Quality assessed?

According to the African Evaluation Association, these 4 quality enhancement standards are intended to help ensure that an evaluation will:

- serve the information needs of intended users and be owned by stakeholders (utility);
- be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal (feasibility);
- be conducted legally, ethically and with due regard to the welfare of those involved in the evaluation as well as those affected by its results (propriety); and,
- reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine worth or merit of the program being evaluated (accuracy).

For more information on the program evaluation standards see
http://www.afrea.org/keydoc.htm, http://www.eval.org/EvaluationDocuments/progeval.html, and http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/jc/.

Table 1. Questions Guiding the Quality Review of Evaluation Reports

1. UTILITY		2. FEASIBILITY	
1.1 Were the users identified?[1] Yes☐ No☐	Who were the identified users? Comments?	2.1 Were the evaluation issues/questions identified? Yes☐ No☐	What were the evaluation issues? Comments?
1.2 Were the uses identified? Yes☐ No☐	What was the planned use? Comments?	2.2 Given what could have been done in the evaluation, was the design of the evaluation adequate to address those issues/questions? (e.g. resources allotted, timing, perspectives represented, information sources consulted) Yes☐ No☐ Insufficient detail to assess ☐	If no, in what way was the design inadequate? Comments?
1.3. Did the report describe how users participated in the evaluation process?[2] Yes☐ No☐	How did users participate? Comments?		

3. ACCURACY		4. PROPRIETY	
3.1 Given what was actually done in the evaluation, did the evaluation use appropriate tools and methods? Yes☐ No☐ Insufficient detail to assess ☐	If no, in what ways were the tools and methods inappropriate? Comments?	4.1 Was there an expressed intent to enhance the evaluative capacity of *the user(s) of the evaluation* as a result of this evaluation? Yes☐ No☐	What was the intent? What was the result? Comments.
3.2 Did it apply the tools and methods well? Yes☐ No☐ Insufficient detail to assess ☐	If no, how were the tools and methods inappropriately applied? Comments?	4.2 Was there an expressed intent to enhance the evaluative capacity of *those being evaluated* as a result of this evaluation? Yes☐ No☐	What was the intent? What was the result? Comments?
3.3 Is the evidence presented in the report? Yes☐ No☐	Comments?	4.3 Did any of the content of the evaluation report raise ethical concerns? Yes☐ No☐	If yes, what are those concerns? Comments?
3.4. Overall, does the evidence substantiate the conclusions/ recommendations? Yes☐ No☐	Comments?	4.4 Was this evaluation a part of the PI, Secretariat, or Corporate Project's evaluation plan? Yes☐ No☐	Why? Why Not?

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[1] *User* is different from the *audience* of the evaluation. *User* is more specific and requires an action on their part.
[2] This differs from assessing whether the evaluation was participatory or not.

The reviewer of an evaluation is guided by two sets of related questions that are designed to elicit information about each of the four dimensions of evaluation quality (see Table 1 opposite). One set of questions asks for a yes or no response with respect to whether or not the report contains elements considered to be essential parts of a good evaluation. A corresponding set of questions directs the reviewer to consider and record precisely how those elements are addressed in the report.

These two complementary sets of questions generate two different kinds of data about a particular report: the first set of questions refer to the presence or absence of elements essential to a quality evaluation; the second set of questions direct the reviewer to carefully consider the reasons for a yes or no answer, generating descriptive information about how those elements are, or are not, addressed in a given report. Together, they provide data that are useful for identifying and analysing issues that may be affecting the quality evaluation throughout the center.

How is information about the Quality of Evaluation Used?

To provide feedback to programming units on their evaluation activities

The process of reviewing the quality of evaluations conducted by program initiatives, secretariats, corporate projects, regional offices, and other groups in the Centre enhances the ability of the Evaluation Unit to provide effective support to programs by providing a common set of criteria against which the quality of any evaluation can be judged. The process of systematically reviewing, analysing, and recording particular aspects of evaluation reports ensures that Evaluation Unit staff are well-equipped when providing feedback and technical support to programming units in their evaluation activities. It also allows the Evaluation Unit to monitor Centre-wide quality trends, which can signal the Evaluation Unit to provide training or other interventions to ensure IDRC staff have the skills and tools required to produce quality evaluations.

In the Evaluation Unit's annual reporting to Senior Management Committee and the Board of Governors

Assessing the quality of all evaluation reports against a common framework generates data that can be aggregated, permitting a review of the overall quality of submitted evaluations. Beginning in 2002, an assessment of the quality of evaluation reports was presented in the *Annual Report on Evaluation Findings* (AREF) to IDRC's Senior Management and the Board of Governors. The Evaluation Unit Annual reports are available on the Evaluation Unit's website at:
http://intra1.idrc.ca/evaluation/publication.html

What other information about evaluation reports does the Evaluation Unit collect?

In addition to data about quality, the Evaluation Unit also collects information about the evaluators that are employed by IDRC. A profile of the evaluators' sex, organizational affiliation (if any), relationship to the initiative being evaluated, and the country in which they work is captured in a database. This information allows the Evaluation Unit to monitor the extent to which IDRC is consistent in its commitment to gender equity, participatory development, and building and using Southern capacity in evaluation.