



*Secretariat for Institutional Support
for Economic Research in Africa*

EVALUATION

of

**THE SECRETARIAT FOR INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT
FOR ECONOMIC RESEARCH
IN AFRICA**

(SISERA)

June 2004

Evaluation
of
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1 SUMMARY

- [1] *The International Development Research Centre (IDRC), acting on behalf of the SISERA Steering Committee, engaged Bannock Consulting to conduct an assessment of the performance of the Secretariat for the Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa (SISERA), and in the light of this assessment, to make recommendations concerning the programme's future strategic directions and the management and governance structures necessary to pursue this strategy. The document presents our assessment and recommendations.*
- [2] *We reviewed the specific actions undertaken by SISERA to support African economic research centres under five categories:*
- [3] **Strengthening of institutional support:** *This was carried out through core grants, seed grants, technical support, training of researchers and measures to improve capacity utilization*
- *This support was in most cases well targeted and effective. Institutional support played a role in enabling Partner Institutes such as CREA, DPRU, and EPRC not only to establish themselves as centres of research excellence in their area of focus (in each case poverty), but also to forge close links to their national policy community and to play a highly visible and significant role in policy dialogue. SISERA also achieved success with some Emerging Centres. AIAE is a particularly good example: through the dynamism of its founding Director, and the creation of a very effective network of research associates, it has, after only three years, come to play a very visible and high profile role in Nigerian policy-making. Additionality is always hard to determine in these circumstances, but there is little doubt that the SISERA network includes some of the most vibrant and dynamic policy research institutes in Africa.*
 - *Collaboration with the World Bank Institute was particularly successful and allows SISERA to organize training for researchers in the area of poverty reduction. The responses to our questionnaire and our interviews suggested that such training was one of the most popular activities initiated by SISERA, and research related to poverty reduction has been a common denominator among the most successful centres (EPRC, CREA, DPRU). The decision by the WBI to discontinue their collaboration with SISERA (due to a change in WBI policy) was thus highly unfortunate. Efforts to replace this support with resources from UNDP are to be encouraged.*
- [4] **Enhancement of managerial capacity of economic research centres:** *This component of the Secretariat's work was focused on key individuals within each institution; e.g. directors and finance officers, who were reached through meetings, workshops, seminars and training; and mentoring.*
- *This was carried out through a 'hands on' approach, which involved regular visits by Secretariat staff, and in depth discussions with the centre directors of the problems they were experiencing. This hands on approach is a distinctive feature of SISERA's activities, and helps to differentiate it from competing institutions such as ACBF.*
 - *The expertise and experience accumulated as a result of this approach to capacity building is in many respects unique to SISERA and a key strength to be exploited, as it formulates its strategy for the future.*

- *The heavy workloads on the Secretariat staff have meant, however, that SISERA has done relatively little as an institution to develop this expertise. We recommend that SISERA make this a key element of its organizational learning strategy for the future. This will require in turn a more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation effort, in order to compile additional evidence and learn lessons concerning best practices in capacity building. In addition, SISERA has much too low an institutional profile and 'brand recognition' in the development policy research community generally and among donors (and potential supporters) in particular. Additional staff and a clearer strategic direction regarding these areas specifically are needed to enable SISERA to strengthen its profile and establish its 'brand' as a recognized centre of excellence in building capacity for policy analysis and dialogue.*

[5] **Actions to improve the networking of African economic research centres:** In addition to organizing regular meetings of centres in its network, SISERA launched two sub-regional networks.

- *ROCAPE was only launched very recently, and so has relatively few activities to report. SEAPREN was launched several years ago, but was relatively inactive until NEPRU assumed responsibility for managing the network in 2003. Since then SEAPREN has been very active, holding regional meetings and launching collaborative research projects for which it has helped securing funding.*
- *The logic and strategy behind these networks is, however, somewhat unclear. They do not seem to be vehicles for direct capacity building, as is SISERA itself. And since the networks are constructed on a purely geographical basis, the centres in the network are unlikely to share the same thematic interests. What then should be the research agenda of such networks? Regional integration is, of course, one possible common policy issue which might be the basis for common activities in the sub-networks, since they are constructed on a regional basis. The sub-regional networks could very well decide to pursue research on regional integration issues, but this is likely to prove problematic in terms of policy impact, since the regional integration institutions are generally rather weak, and in most cases lack the capacity to demand and absorb policy research and analysis. So even if the sub-regional networks successfully pursue a regional integration research agenda, they may well find it difficult to achieve significant policy impact because of the absence of absorptive capacity for research among policy-makers at the regional level. On balance, then, the strategy behind the sub-regional networks remains problematic.*

[6] **Linking researchers and end-users:** This was also viewed as important task for SISERA. In principle, this is the responsibility of the individual research centres and the sub-regional networks. In practice, SISERA has not played a direct role in linkages at the national level, but instead has focused on fostering linkages with regional and global actors such as the African Development Bank and the World Bank Institute.

- *The links established by SISERA at the regional and international levels have proved useful and worthwhile. At the regional level, the collaboration with AfDB has led to a visiting scholar program. At the international level, SISERA has, through the EAGER and SAGA projects, helped establish links between the centres in its network and institutions such as Cornell.*
- *SISERA has no competitive advantage in acting as an intermediary between research producers and users at the national level: this is better left to the centres in the network, which know their research and policy communities better than the Secretariat. SISERA can encourage its centres to build these linkages, and SISERA's ultimate impact depends on the centres' success in doing so.*

- *Those centres in the network which have been particularly successful in building these linkages seem to have enjoyed this success because of the personality of their director, and on their director's ability to identify emerging 'hot' policy issues and focus the centre's research on these issues. This makes success inevitably somewhat fragile.*

[7] *We found it useful to characterize SISERA's rather complex set of principles, strategies and activities in terms of 'Five Ms':*

- Money:** Core and seed grants, resources available through research projects such as SAGA, and dissemination and connectivity grants.*
- Mentoring:** Advice and guidance provided to the directors of the research centres, as well as to their staff (including finance officers and administrators) and to researchers; and technical support.*
- Meeting:** Conferences, seminars, workshops and meetings which allow the centre directors to meet other directors, donors and end users.*
- Monitoring:** Monitoring of the projects and research carried out by the centres to ensure compliance with minimum standards, and the appropriate utilisation of financial resources and implementation of the work programme.*
- Mediating:** Acting as an intermediary or broker between African researchers and policy research institutes and donors outside the region*

[8] *The impact of SISERA's interventions on its partner institutions varied considerably across these five areas. While all directors interviewed consider their participation in the network as beneficial for their institutions, the different M's are valued in very different ways by each director. Some directors valued highly the mentoring provided by the Secretariat, while others valued the financial support provided by SISERA, since it gave the directors 'breathing space' – time to reflect; resources to hire new researchers, the opportunity to explore new issues, etc. Some emerging Centres found the opportunity to meet their peers particularly valuable as a way of reducing their isolation.*

[9] *SISERA has, since its inception, followed a consistent strategy of working with policy research institutions instead of individual researchers. This strategy was predicated on the assumption that there existed in most countries adequate capacity to carry out policy research and analysis, in the sense that there were a sufficient number of researchers trained in modern research techniques, and any deficiencies in such capacity would be addressed by institutions such as AERC. Instead, the key obstacle to high quality, 'home grown' policy research was identified as the lack of well functioning research institutions within which researchers could pursue their careers. For many countries it was reasonable to make this assumption, and institutional weakness is indeed endemic in the region. But SISERA's experience with its emerging centres suggests that in some countries, at least, there is a deficiency of well trained researchers. In these circumstances, attempts at institutional strengthening may prove ineffective.*

[10] *We also assessed the perceived benefits of SISERA interventions from the viewpoint of government institutions and determine the value-added of its activities to policy-making. Assessing the impact of research and analysis on policy is an inherently difficult exercise, and there are few if any quantitative studies which are in any way conclusive. Measuring the impact of 'upstream' interventions in capacity building, of which SISERA and the centres in its network are an example, is a particular challenge.*

- *Overall, we would conclude that the impact on policy has been mixed. Some policy research institutes in the SISERA network have been outstandingly*

successful in pursuing a research programme which has had a significant impact on policy discussions and dialogue within their country, and now both government and civil society look to these institutes to take a lead in producing new and relevant research on certain key policy issues. Other institutes in the SISERA network, in contrast, have had little if any influence on policy.

- [11] *Impact on the policy process remains an important goal of the programme, and so it is important for SISERA to understand why some of its partners have been so successful, and others have had so little impact.*
- [12] *Based on his own experience in Indonesia, Peter Timmer argues that there are “... four factors that can make policy oriented research successful. First, the analyst should be involved with the same policy-makers or in the same policy setting for the long term. Second, there is a need to find a balance between keeping analysis and advice confidential and the ultimate publication of the key models and results. Third, the analysts should rely on the analytical paradigms of the mainstream of the economic profession even while examining deviations from their underlying assumptions. Lastly, there should be continuing demand from policy-makers for problem-oriented analysis.”*
- [13] *Our interviews and discussions did not suggest that Timmer’s second and third conditions raised any particular issues in the SISERA context. His fourth condition, that policy-makers must have a genuine demand for analytical work, does, however, seem to be an issue in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular the francophone countries and limits the impact of research on policy in a number of countries. Our discussions suggested that in many countries in which SISERA works, the ‘demand side’ of the policy market is still very weak: many governments are unreceptive to new ideas and research findings, or if receptive, lack the staff with skills to understand technical research results well enough to identify the policy implications of the research. SISERA has certainly strengthened the supply side of the policy market, but in many countries the demand side remains a significant obstacle to bridging the gap between research and policy.*
- [14] *Whether SISERA could realistically extend its activities to strengthening analytical capacity within government is not at all clear, given SISERA’s limited resources and the large number of countries in which it operates.*
- [15] *Leaving aside these weaknesses on the demand side, Timmer’s observations also help identify what may be the most important factor affecting whether SISERA’s partner institutes have an impact on policy: sustained focus on a few key policy issues. In order to be successful in policy outreach, then, SISERA’s partners must ‘place their bets’, focusing their efforts and resources on just a few key policy issues (and on the ministries and researchers likely to be involved in these issues), and sustain this focused commitment for over a period of at least several years. The most successful centres in the SISERA network seem to have placed their bets in this fashion, and in most cases have focused on poverty as their area of focus.*
- [16] *We also carried out an institutional assessment of SISERA.*
- [17] *We assessed first its operational capacities. The most important concern regarding operational capacity is the delay in appointing a permanent Executive Director. Elias Ayuk has performed very well as Acting Executive Director. He has not only provided day to day leadership for the Secretariat but has also recently launched a very valuable strategic planning exercise. Nevertheless, he has had to perform in effect two jobs, and the human resources of the Secretariat are stretched very thin indeed as a result. Centres in the SISERA network are clearly aware of this, and it has caused concern among many of the centre directors and staff. In addition the workload on individual staff is too high; the existing network includes over 20*

economic research institutions in 18 countries, and the Secretariat receives as well a stream of requests from other centres that wish to join the network. It is clear that the Secretariat requires additional human resources.

- [18] *The absence of an Executive Director and more importantly, insufficient staff numbers has also had an effect on the orientation of SISERA. Current staff is focused on internal organisation, process and activities, with relatively less attention paid to outwardly oriented, 'external' activities such as profile raising and attendance at international conferences and workshops.*
- [19] *Access to funding and funding sources has decreased in the near past particularly due to the gap between donor funding cycles. Initially SISERA received funding from IDRC, CIDA, USAID, Coopération Francaise, DGIS, the EU and the AfDB. At present, only IDRC, Coopération Francaise and USAID (through the SAGA programme) are major donors, and changes in USAID policies give some concern regarding the longer term prospects for its support to SISERA. Recent developments have, however, been encouraging: SISERA has recently received a grant from AfDB and DGIS has approved one of CAD1.3 million over 4 years.*
- [20] *Another problem experienced by SISERA has to do with timing of donor funding. The delay between the contract negotiation with donors and the signature of contracts has meant that on some occasions SISERA's ability to provide support to the members of its network has been subject to delays, which frustrate the centres and reduce their loyalty to SISERA.*
- [21] *The simple and rather flat structure of SISERA and its governing body facilitates timely monitoring and evaluation of the performance of each staff member and is a source of strength. The small number of staff in the Secretariat means, however, that it is often difficult to sustain contact with some of the emerging centres, particularly those operating in difficult circumstances. This makes it difficult for SISERA to design and pursue an effective exit strategy for unsuccessful centres, which would help it focus its resources more effectively in centres with more potential for development.*
- [22] *We also assessed SISERA's adaptive capacities.*
- [23] *The ability of the staff to adapt and respond to changes in the environment is significantly hindered by their current workloads. Programme officers need to keep up to date with issues such as the interests of donors, emerging policy issues, as well as methodological advances and new research techniques. To do this they require time dedicated to learn, reflect and innovate. This cannot be achieved with the current staff numbers and workloads.*
- [24] *Although considerable effort is focused on management of the Secretariat, the severe time pressures on the staff limit the time they have available for longer term planning. As a result, much of the reflection and organizational learning and innovation seem to be occasioned by external evaluations. This is undesirable: learning and adapting should take place within the organization on an ongoing basis. This is important, not only for the effectiveness of SISERA, but for its ability to attract, motivate and retain good staff.*
- [25] *We examined SISERA's online presence. The url for the website is cumbersome, but more important, links to the IDRC website. While formally appropriate, this tends to reinforce perceptions of an excessively close relationship, which may complicate relationships with other donors. It would be better to register another url, such as www.sisera.org.sn.*
- [26] *The SISERA web page provides basic information regarding the Secretariat and its activities but little (besides contact information) on the centres in the network. This*

is important because the web page appears to be intended to inform third parties, rather than to serve as a tool or service provider for the research centres which are members of the network. It does not serve either purpose effectively.

- [27] Improved monitoring and evaluation is central to the strengthening of SISERA's adaptive capacities. Evaluation is inherently difficult for SISERA, because it intervenes to build capacity far upstream in the policy analysis and dialogue process. It is difficult, to say the least, for SISERA to properly measure its success, because this success depends to a large extent on the actions and behaviour of the centres in the network, and their actions are only indirectly influenced by SISERA.*
- [28] Measuring the impact of policy research itself is widely regarded as a difficult and challenging exercise. Measuring the impact of initiatives to build capacity for policy research is harder still. Nevertheless, SISERA's monitoring and evaluation efforts to date seem largely confined to some quantitative indicators of programme activities, with relatively few attempts to measure the impact of these activities on the behaviour of the centres in the SISERA network, and no systematic attempt to measure the impact of the Centres on the policy process at the national level.*
- [29] While acknowledging that this is a very difficult task, we recommend that more systematic attempts be made in future to measure the impact of SISERA on the institutions with which it works directly – the centres in its network. We recommend that SISERA do this by adopting an alternative approach, Outcome Mapping, which focuses on determining whether or not these activities are having an effect on the behaviour of those targeted. A change in the behaviour of 'boundary partners', rather than the fact that particular activity has been completed, is likely to be a more accurate and useful indicator for both management and accountability purposes.*
- [30] An analysis of the environment within which SISERA operates clearly shows that this environment has changed. Most importantly it has done so partly due to the actions of SISERA. One change is of particular importance over the longer term: the dramatic shift in aid modalities, as donors move from project-oriented to programme-oriented support, and from there to general budget support.*
- [31] This presents both opportunities and (in the longer term) serious threats to policy research institutes and may, over time, have profound implications for the policy research institutes in SISERA's network.*
- [32] The opportunities are clear – the shift to general budget support, devolved decision-making and local contracting should increase the demand for policy analysis on the part of developing country governments. This increased demand should widen the opportunities available to the policy research institutes already in the SISERA network and stimulate the emergence of new centres which can in time join the network.*
- [33] The threats are less obvious, but these same changes in aid modalities are likely to pose serious problems for policy research institutes in developing countries. At present policy research institutes in developing countries have a range of potential clients. A shift to general budget support will replace this range of clients with a single client – the country's own government. It could become difficult, for instance for any research institute to publish research critical of, or embarrassing to the government when that government is the only purchaser of policy research in the country.*
- [34] Without a tradition of support for policy research by the philanthropic sector or the private sector in Africa, this threat is a serious one. As a result, it may be that donors have to make commitments over the longer term to secure the independence*

of policy research institutes, and this may be one role which SISERA might play, as an efficient manager of such support – the mediating activity...

- [35] *We argue that SISERA must address four strategic issues over the medium term:*
- *The Programme’s strategic directions, i.e. whether it should continue to focus on its current set of activities, or attempt to diversify its portfolio of activities.*
 - *Whether SISERA can exist as a “stand alone” institution, or alternatively should seek another institutional home or a long-term, strategic partner – and if so, how this partner should be chosen.*
 - *Both the choice of strategic directions and the choice of an institutional home or long-term partner raise issues concerning SISERA’s management and governance.*
 - *The need for a higher and more stable level of funding over the medium term, which is in turn linked to the perception of SISERA among donors and potential supporters of the programme; the need to establish a clear identity and a higher profile for SISERA among the donor community and the impact on this identity and profile of SISERA’s current relationship with IDRC and its future relationship with IDEP and the UN system.*
- [36] *The Programme’s strategic directions must take into consideration SISERA’s competitive advantages. Here it is useful to return to the roles played by networks, and SISERA’s ability to play the six possible roles which can be played by networks:*
- *Filter*
 - *Amplifier*
 - *Investor / Provider*
 - *Facilitator*
 - *Convenor*
 - *Community builder*
- [37] *It is clear that SISERA can and does act as an investor through its grants and training activities, and this has formed a large part of its work. It has also acted as a facilitator through organizing training workshops, the publication of the SISERA Working Paper series, and other activities. It has not been particularly active as an amplifier, and currently does not devote significant resources to this role, but there is no reason to think it would not have the technical competence to play this role should it decide to do so. In addition SISERA, through its programme of technical assistance, staff visits to centres, and meetings of centre directors has also helped build a strong sense of community among the directors and staff of the centres in its network.*
- [38] *Assessing SISERA’s ability to play the other two roles, of filter and convenor, was more complex. Our view is that SISERA should not seek to act as an intermediary between research users and research producers, first, because it has no particular technical or informational advantage in doing so, and second, because this undermines the role and position of the research centres which it is trying to strengthen.*
- [39] *SISERA does, however, have a strong competitive advantage in performing the filtering and convening roles with respect to institutions based outside Africa (for example donors, international organizations, other research institutions, etc.). In this case, SISERA can play an effective “brokering role” between local researchers and research institutes and the rest of the world. To some extent the programme has*

already begun to play this role with respect to the EAGER and SAGA projects, and has done this very effectively.

- [40] *Before considering possible institutional homes for SISERA, we ask whether the programme does indeed need a home, or whether it has a sustainable future as a free standing institution. Our view is that the programme might be organized as a free standing and autonomous institution, but the experiences of other networks suggest some potential difficulties with such an arrangement:*
- *The lack of critical mass within such an institution as small as SISERA (which is much smaller than AERC, for example)*
 - *The resulting potential for intellectual and professional isolation of the person heading SISERA if it is located outside an academic institution or a policy research institute*
 - *The difficulties often experienced in establishing strong governance structures for networks such as SISERA*
- [41] *On balance, we think the issue of lack of critical mass and intellectual isolation point in the direction of basing SISERA within a host institution, but it is difficult to reach a definite conclusion on this issue.*
- [42] *Nonetheless, if SISERA does need a home, the first point to note is that the appropriate choice of a home depends on what SISERA is and does. The choice of strategic directions for SISERA is still subject to discussion, but the point to remember is any choice of strategic directions has implications for the choice of a partnership or a merger.*
- [43] *If SISERA were located within another institution, such an arrangement could take one of two forms:*
- *The programme might be “housed” within another policy research or teaching institution. In this arrangement there is symmetry between the partners, in the sense that both the programme and its partner are involved in economic policy or teaching.*
 - *The alternative is one in which the programme is “hosted” by another institution which is not primarily engaged in economic policy research or capacity building. This arrangement is asymmetric, in the sense that SISERA and its host have different missions. Maintaining a distinct identity and mission for the programme seems more likely under an asymmetric arrangement, since the institutions involved are likely to have somewhat different missions, operating procedures and governance structure, and so merging these structures will be less natural and straightforward. This is in essence the situation since 1997: SISERA has existed as a Secretariat within IDRC – a much larger institution, with a broader mandate than SISERA.*
- [44] *The proposed move to IDEP would represent an asymmetric arrangement, and the key concern raised by a possible move to IDEP is SISERA’s programmatic autonomy and the authority of its Steering Committee in establishing and monitoring this programme. It is our understanding that such autonomy and authority have been successfully embedded in a draft agreement with IDEP and ECA (to which IDEP is responsible). We are, however, sceptical that such autonomy will be accepted at other levels of the UN system, and would not be surprised if the current draft agreement were not called into question by UN headquarters in New York.*
- [45] *Should an agreement with IDEP not be possible, we recommend that the search for an appropriate partner or host begin again immediately. The selection of such a*

partner should be guided by the same set of considerations outlined in IDRC's own guidance document for the establishment of secretariats. These include:

- *strategic direction*
- *the need to develop a sound and realistic business plan*
- *a systematic approach to performance management*
- *an accountability framework*
- *operational and structural issues*

[46] *At the same time as the search for a new host takes place, and in parallel with this search, we strongly recommend that fresh consideration be given to the alternative of establishing SISERA as a free standing institution, despite the problems of governance and professional isolation that this may entail.*

[47] *Two final points should be made about the management and governance of SISERA. First, the delay in appointing a permanent Executive Director is very unfortunate, and has been a major obstacle to the continued growth and success of SISERA. That the programme has achieved good results over the past two years is due, in our view, to two factors:*

- *The soundness of the initial conception of SISERA and the strategic directions it has pursued: SISERA is fundamentally a very good idea, and satisfies an important need in Africa*
- *The ability and dedication of the Secretariat's staff, in particular the Acting Executive Director and the Coordinator for Programme and Operations. The Acting Executive Director, for example, has not only filled an important gap in the organization's leadership, but has continued his work as a programme officer, working closely with centres in the SISERA network and helping to identify new members who might join the network. The other members of the Secretariat's staff, including the Programme Officer, also display a very high degree of dedication and professionalism.*

[48] *Second, there is a need to strengthen SISERA's governance structures. It is difficult to make detailed recommendations in this respect until the issue of SISERA's institutional home has been resolved, but as part of any strengthening SISERA will need to engage in a fuller planning process, to ensure that all parties have the information they need to fulfil their roles. The Steering Committee will need financial and programmatic information more than annually to assess implementation of agreed plans and adjust where necessary. Management will need the formal guidance of a Steering Committee to assure that it is on the agreed path and will, ideally, benefit from the Committee's contacts and complementary perspectives to make rigorous strategic decisions.*

2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

[49] We are grateful to the staff of SISERA's Emerging Centres and Partner Institutes, who responded to the detailed and lengthy questionnaire concerning their relationship with SISERA. We are also grateful to all those listed in Table 9, who gave generously of their time during our interviews and telephone conversations. Our greatest debt, however, is to Elias Ayuk and Catherine Daffé, who provided us with a wealth of information on SISERA and its activities.

3 INTRODUCTION

- [50] The International Development Research Centre (IDRC), acting on behalf of the SISERA Steering Committee, engaged Bannock Consulting in October 2003 to conduct an assessment of the performance of the Secretariat for the Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa (SISERA), and in the light of this assessment, to make recommendations concerning the programme's future strategic directions and the management and governance structures necessary to pursue this strategy. The document presents our assessment and recommendations. The assessment was carried out by Stephen Yeo, with the collaboration of Ibrahima Hathie and Enrique Mendizabal.
- [51] Stephen Yeo is a Principal Consultant in Bannock's Public Sector Division, where he is responsible for work on economic policy issues, international trade, and private sector development and for its work on knowledge management for policy analysis. Before joining Bannock, he was Chief Executive of the Centre for Economic Policy Research, the leading European research network in economics and the focus of most European research on international trade policy. He has extensive experience in trade policy research, as well as involvement in building capacity for policy analysis in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 1995 he worked with the Department of Trade and Industry in South Africa to establish the Trade and Industrial Policy Secretariat (TIPS, www.tips.org.za), which provided policy advice to the Department, through a project funded by IDRC in Ottawa. He has served on the TIPS Advisory Board since 1997. More recently he worked with IDRC to establish the Southern African Trade Research Network (SATRN, www.satrn.org), which was launched in 2001. He currently chairs SATRN's Technical Advisory Committee. He has also worked with the Ford Foundation to evaluate their Initiative in International Economics, and with IDRC in evaluating their global programme in Technology, Employment and Competitiveness.
- [52] Ibrahima Hathie is Professor and Department Head of the "Tronc commun" at the Ecole Nationale d'Economie Appliquée in Dakar. He received his Ph.D. in Agricultural & Resource Economics from the University of Connecticut in 2000. His research interests lie in agricultural policy, environmental economics and participatory research methods. He is a member of the African Trainers Network on Agricultural Policy Analysis and the author (with R. A. Lopez) of "The Impact of Market Reforms on the Senegalese Peanut Economy" in the *Journal of International Development*.
- [53] Enrique Mendizabal is a research analyst at Bannock Consulting. He has a BA in Economics from the University of the Pacific in Peru, and an MSc in Social Policy and Planning for Developing Countries from the London School of Economics (LSE). He has worked as a research assistant at the Secretariat of the Andean Community, specializing in the negotiations to liberalise trade in services within the region. He has also participated in numerous competitiveness assessments of the Peruvian economy, studies of

foreign direct investment and worked with the Peruvian FTAA team. More recently he has specialised in the theoretical and practical use of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, applying it to the border region between Malawi and Mozambique. He is now undertaking the background research on the links between global markets and the artisanal and small scale mining sector for a DFID-funded project.

4 OBJECTIVES

[54] The specific objectives of the evaluation, as set out in the Terms of Reference, are:

- i. Review and assess the specific actions that SISERA has undertaken to provide technical and financial support to African economic research centres and to reduce the isolation of these centres.
- ii. Assess the perceived benefits of SISERA's interventions from the viewpoint of its partner institutions and determine the value added of its activities to economic research centres.
- iii. Assess the perceived benefits of SISERA interventions from the viewpoint of government institutions and determine the value added of its activities to policy-making.
- iv. Assess SISERA's governance structure and staff composition in light of the Secretariat's mandate.
- v. Evaluate the relationships between SISERA and its donors and other capacity building institutions in AFRICA, e.g. AERC, ACBF, etc.
- vi. Determine the challenges and associated risks facing SISERA in the context of the current objectives and identify new strategic opportunities.

5 METHODOLOGY

- [55] The evaluation of SISERA was carried out between October 2003 and January 2004. We approached the evaluation of SISERA and the research centres in its network from two different perspectives.
- [56] First, we identified the possible strategic roles which can be played by SISERA – and by the research centres in its network:
- i. Filter
 - ii. Amplifier
 - iii. Investor / Provider
 - iv. Facilitator
 - v. Convenor
 - vi. Community builder
- [57] The first two roles are often used to characterize the role of the media, but they apply to policy research institutes and networks as well. They can be explained very simply. We all suffer from ‘information glut’ – there are just too many things to pay attention to and think about. ‘Filters’ provide an easy means of deciding what to pay attention to. ‘Amplifiers’ take a given message and present in ways that allow it to be understood and absorbed more quickly and easily.
- [58] For producers of research (whether in universities or policy research institutes) ‘investors’ play an important role, providing resources – money to carry out research (the provider role) or services which make it easier to do research (the facilitator role). The facilitator role has a variety of aspects, including the organization of conferences and meetings, and the publication of working papers and policy briefs.
- [59] The ‘convening’ role is also important, both for research producers and research users. For research producers convening involves the ability to identify and bring together ‘the right group of researchers’ to plan and carry out a research project. For research users, convening involves whether the organization, process or network is perceived as ‘the place to look’ and ‘the people to consult’ on a given policy issue, and whether it has the ability to bring together the right policy-makers and researchers to discuss a particular policy issue. This is not merely a question of filtering (which might mean nothing more than a good working paper series) but involves the ability to command an audience in the policy community and private sector, which depends on authority and credibility.
- [60] Networks also play an important role in building and sustaining research communities (which are themselves networks). Standards and shared values play an essential role of the life of any community, and the research community is no exception. In research communities such standards can involve the expectation not only that research is of high quality, but (in some environments) that research is done at all! The importance of setting a such

standard is hard to measure in quantitative terms, but experience suggests that networks can play a valuable role in creating the expectation that doing research is an essential part of one's professional career, and in maintaining—and raising the standards of the research which is done. Standard setting is a classic example of a public good with important externalities: networks can help create this important public good, which benefits both the research community and the users of research.

[61] These six roles provide a useful framework in which to analyse the activities of policy research institutes and networks in order to judge their effectiveness and impact. We use this framework to analyse not only the activities of SISERA itself (which is the hub of a network of research centres and an intermediary between donors and the research centres in its network) but also the research centres in the SISERA network (which are also the hub of their own networks, and intermediaries between producers and users of policy research).

[62] This approach is not enough, however, to help us to understand the characteristics that allow the institutions to be effective and have an impact on policy.

[63] To explain effectiveness, we shift the focus to a second perspective – the internal capacity of the organization and the external environment that it confronts. Here, we adopt a framework used in recent work on the evaluation of capacity building.¹

[64] This approach involves four broad groups of factors:

- operational capacities (resources, knowledge, and processes)
- adaptive capacities (resources, knowledge, and processes)
- the external environment facing the institution
- the institution's internal environment.

[65] Operational and organisational capacities depend on factors that include:

- staffing
- infrastructure and technology
- financial resources
- strategic leadership
- programme and process management
- networks and linkages with other organizations and groups.

[66] The external environment depends on:

¹ Douglas Horton et al., *Evaluating Capacity Development: Experiences from Research and Development Organizations around the World*, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2003. [also available at http://web.idrc.ca/ev_en.php?ID=32194_201]. This work draws in turn on Lusthaus, C., M.H. Adrien, G. Anderson, F. Carden, and G.P. Montalvan. 2002. Organizational assessment. A framework for improving performance. Ottawa/Washington DC: International Development Research Centre and Inter-American Development Bank; and Lusthaus, C., G. Anderson, and E. Murphy. 1995. Institutional assessment: A framework for strengthening organizational capacity for IDRC's research partners. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.

- the administrative and legal systems in which the organization operates
- the policies and political environment that influences the organization;
- the social and cultural milieu
- the technology available

[67] The institution's internal environment depends on factors that include

- incentive and rewards systems
- the organizational 'climate' or 'culture'
- the history and traditions of the organization
- leadership and management style
- clarity and acceptance of the organization's mission
- extent of shared norms and values promoting teamwork and pursuit of organizational goals
- organizational structure.

[68] Finally we use these two perspectives to analyse the strategic choices facing SISERA in 2004 and beyond. The six roles help identify areas where SISERA might have a competitive advantage in capacity building and networking institutions in Africa, and so inform SISERA's strategic choices. The institutional assessment framework, on the other hand, highlights what is necessary for SISERA to implement its strategic choices and achieve its strategic goals.

[69] The structure of the report responds to the requirements of both the Terms of Reference and the assessment framework outlined above. The objectives of the former are presented in Section 7 and those of the latter are developed in Section 8. Some of the information required to respond to the concerns expressed by the objectives of the evaluation, in fact, are also necessary inputs for a more complete assessment of the performance of SISERA.

[70] Therefore Section 7.1 deals with the review of the specific actions that SISERA has undertaken since 1997. Section 7.2 discusses the benefits of SISERA as perceived by the partner institutions. This section is largely based on in-depth interviews and questionnaires answered by key personnel of the centres. Section 7.3 follows a similar aim to discuss the perceptions of policy-makers. The structure of SISERA's governance and staff composition is discussed in Section 7.4. Finally, Section 7.5 offers a picture of SISERA's relationships with other institutions.

[71] Section 8, based on the methodology mentioned above, uses this information and carries out an assessment of SISERA's organisational capacity.

[72] Section 9 draws from these to put forward a series of recommendations regarding SISERA's new strategic role for the future. In this section we consider the challenges associated with SISERA's external environment, the sub-regional networks, its financial sustainability, the move to IDEP and the new roles SISERA should play.

[73] Finally, Section 10 presents a set of conclusions and recommendations.

- [74] The team carried out the following activities to obtain the information necessary for this evaluation:
- i. Desk work: desk work was conducted to obtain information from the centres and other local and regional initiatives to build the picture of the external environment. This stage of literature review also allowed us to learn about SISERA's history and place it in the context of this evaluation.
 - ii. In-depth interviews: Interviews were conducted with key players within and outside the SISERA network to obtain a thorough understanding of the activities of the Secretariat. These interviews were carried out during meetings with centre directors and staff, and via extended telephone interviews.
 - iii. Questionnaires: A questionnaire was distributed to all SISERA centres to determine the following:
 - *How has SISERA assisted each institution?* In what ways has SISERA strengthened the institution's internal capacity to carry out its mission? These questions focus on the difficulties experienced as an organization before the SISERA intervention, whether the assistance from SISERA was well targeted, i.e. did it address the most important difficulties faced; and the extent to which the SISERA assistance has enabled them overcome these difficulties.
 - *What has been the impact of SISERA's assistance on activities and outputs?* These questions focus on changes in the nature of the research carried out, workshops and conferences organized, and the publications issued to communicate research results to policy-makers.
 - *Has SISERA's assistance increased the impact on the policy process in the centre's country?* It is difficult to trace the impact of research on policy choices: there are possible many reasons why a policy has been chosen. These questions focus instead on 'intermediate' indicators: whether the centre met more often with policy-makers to discuss its research, whether policy-makers cited the centre's research in their public statements or background papers on policy issues, and whether the centre's research was used in the media or in public debates over policy issues.
 - *In what ways has SISERA strengthened each institution's internal capacity to carry out its mission?* These questions focus on the difficulties experienced as an organization before the SISERA intervention, whether the assistance from SISERA was well targeted, i.e. did it address the most important difficulties faced; and the extent to which the SISERA assistance has enabled them to overcome these difficulties.
 - *Are you satisfied with the assistance you have received from SISERA?* These questions focus on whether the assistance from SISERA has been satisfactory and has dealt with their needs.
 - *In what ways does the assistance provided by SISERA differ from that provided by other donors or funding institutions?* These questions

focus on whether SISERA assistance is more timely, efficient, well-targeted or more flexible than other assistance received.

[75] Copies of the questionnaire (in both English and French) can be found in Section 0.

6 FINDINGS

6.1 SISERA: The Background

[76] In 1997, USAID, CIDA and IDRC recognised that to successfully tackle Africa's economic challenges, African countries needed to invest in the development of human and institutional capital that would be capable of providing policy-makers with sound economic policy advice. Such policy advice would have greater credibility and ownership if it were provided by locally based researchers and research centres, and so priority was given to strengthening local 'Policy Research Institutes' (PRIs). These PRIs suffered from a lack of both human and financial resources, and were in particular relatively isolated from the policy community and civil society in their own countries. The Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa (SISERA) was established to foster the emergence of such locally owned and driven policy research institutes.

[77] SISERA's goals were:²

- To improve working conditions and incentive systems in research centres;
- To improve managerial capacity and governance structure;
- To facilitate networking among centres and users of their work;
- To facilitate funding of commissioned research work by the centres;
- To support training activities for researchers as part of their research centres; and
- To improve the dissemination of research results, particularly among current and potential users.

[78] To achieve these goals, SISERA's strategy might be summarised into *three pillars*:

- i. capacity building
- ii. capacity utilisation
- iii. institutional networking.

[79] These pillars served as the foundation for what was identified by SISERA as the *four main components of its strategy*:

- i. *Broad Geographical Coverage*: In order to draw on the experiences of a range of African countries, and to have a broad impact on policy analysis and dialogue, SISERA's activities are directed at the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa. SISERA has two working languages, English and French, which reinforce the aim of broad geographical coverage.

² SISERA Medium-term Strategy, p.2

Similarly, SISERA has identified a number of institutions that represent the region and that include well established and promising centres. The Secretariat has also recognised the special challenges faced by Francophone research centres which are the result in part of their isolation due to the language barrier, and has given priority to Francophone centres in West and Central Africa.

- ii. *Leveraging Existing Networks and Initiatives*: SISERA's actions and the centres' potential research results need to take advantage of and to leverage other initiatives in the region. Hence it has established links with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the World Bank Institute (WBI), the African Universities Union (AUU), the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), and Cornell and Clark Atlanta universities. These relationships aim to allow the SISERA network to benefit from established networks, knowledge acquisition and dissemination of research results among African and global policymaking circles.
- iii. *Mobilization of partners*: This involves mobilisation at three levels: policy research institutes, donors and policy-makers. At the institute level, SISERA facilitates the organisation of meetings, discussion and publications that will allow for the exchange of information and experiences. At the donor level, the Secretariat seeks to maintain close contact with donors to maintain the high profile of the network and its members. At the policy-maker level, SISERA has chosen a strategy based on the presence of key regional organizations in its own governing structure (Steering Committee) and sustained interaction with senior African policy-makers.
- iv. *Participation in intellectual fora*: This is one of the means through which SISERA aims to make its research useful and influential in policy-making.

[80] These main components are then implemented through *six specific program activities*:

- i. *Strengthening of institutional support*: This is provided through institutional and capacity utilization grants, technical support and training of human resources. The objective is to strengthen the institution's capacity to produce high quality, policy relevant research.
- ii. *Enhancement of managerial capacity*: An important component of the enhancement of managerial capacity is the support provided to the directors of the research centres through seminars, training sessions and, most significantly, mentoring. These activities typically serve as opportunities to exchange information and experiences with other directors, thus helping to disseminate and encourage the adoption of best practices.
- iii. *Networking of African economic research centres*: SISERA works directly with institutions rather than individuals, and aims to create networks of research centres as opposed to networks based around individual researchers. In addition to its own network of Emerging Centres and Partner Institutes, SISERA has established two 'sub-

networks', covering Southern and Eastern Africa (SEAPREN) and Western and Central Africa (WECAPREN / ROCAPE).

- iv. *Linking researchers and end-users*: As the core of SISERA's mission, its efforts are focused towards developing the necessary institutional capacities that will allow research centres to reach and influence the end-users of their research. An underlying goal of SISERA is to reduce the isolation faced by African research centres so that they can actively participate in policy discussions, debate and dialogue between civil society and the government in their own country, and in addition play a more active role in the world 'market' for policy ideas with respect to the region's own development.
- v. *Collaboration with other African initiatives and institutions*: Collaboration with other institutions or networks brings about the exchange of experiences and builds contacts with potentially influential civil society actors. Although some of the links with other institutions have been a response to funding needs, others are driven by the demand from the research centres for specific training and technical support. Hence the collaboration with the AfDB, for instance, through a visiting scholar program; and with the WBI in the provision of workshops on the analysis of policies for poverty reduction.
- vi. *Internal activities*: These activities include the publication of research results, resource expansion, meetings of SISERA's Steering Committee and/or the institutions' directors, audits and consultancies that might address specific technical or managerial concerns expressed by the research centres or observed by SISERA staff.

[81] This is, in summary, the formal strategy of SISERA. In practice, we found it useful to characterize this rather complex set of principles, strategies and activities in terms of 'Five Ms':

- i. *Money*: Core and seed grants, as well as resources available through research projects such as SAGA. It also includes dissemination and connectivity grants.
- ii. *Mentoring*: Advice and guidance provided to the directors of the research centres, as well as to their staff (including finance officers and administrators) and to researchers; and technical support.
- iii. *Meeting*: Conferences, seminars, workshops and meetings which allow the centre directors to meet other directors, donors and end users.
- iv. *Monitoring*: Monitoring of the projects and research carried out by the centres to ensure compliance with minimum standards of quality, as well as the appropriate utilisation of financial resources and implementation of the work programme.
- v. *Mediating*: Acting as an intermediary or broker between African researchers and policy research institutes and donors outside the region

6.2 The environment in which SISERA operates

[82] SISERA can be characterized as a network of policy research institutes, with a secretariat acting as the hub of the network. This characterization is accurate, but does not take account of the full complexity of the environment within which SISERA operates, which is in fact a set of interlocking networks. Our review of SISERA's Annual Reports between 1997 and 2003 and the Medium-term Strategy and Indicative Work Program (2000) suggests that these networks have the structure depicted in Diagram 1.

[83] The diagram below shows one way of depicting this web of networks. A number of points are worth noting:

- Both SISERA and the research centres play a role as intermediaries or network hubs. SISERA acts as an intermediary or broker between donors and the research centres in the SISERA network. Each research centre in turn acts as an intermediary or broker, i.e. as a hub of a network comprising its researchers and the users of its research outputs.
- IDRC (and to a certain extent IDEP) plays a similar role to SISERA, building capacity of institutions (often networks) around the world.
- There are a number of other networks involving SISERA. SISERA acts as a hub connecting donors not only with individual research centres but also with the two regional sub-networks of SISERA research centres (SEAPREN and ROCAPE)
- SISERA has direct contacts with some of the end users of the research output of the research centres in its network.
- The centres act as hubs between the knowledge acquired or shared through the network and the end-users of their research.
- The centres also act as hubs linking donors and the researchers.
- Some users of research use the output of more than one SISERA research centre
- Some donors who support SISERA also give support to individual centres in the SISERA network
- The sub-regional networks (SEAPREN and ROCAPE) are formally the responsibility of SISERA; although they are becoming more independent through their direct interaction with other institutions, donors and users.
- Other institutions provide similar and complimentary services to some of the members of SISERA

[84] With this complex structure in mind we will first evaluate the performance of SISERA and then of the research centres themselves. We must therefore focus on the activities that make up the capacity building process and the state of both hubs.

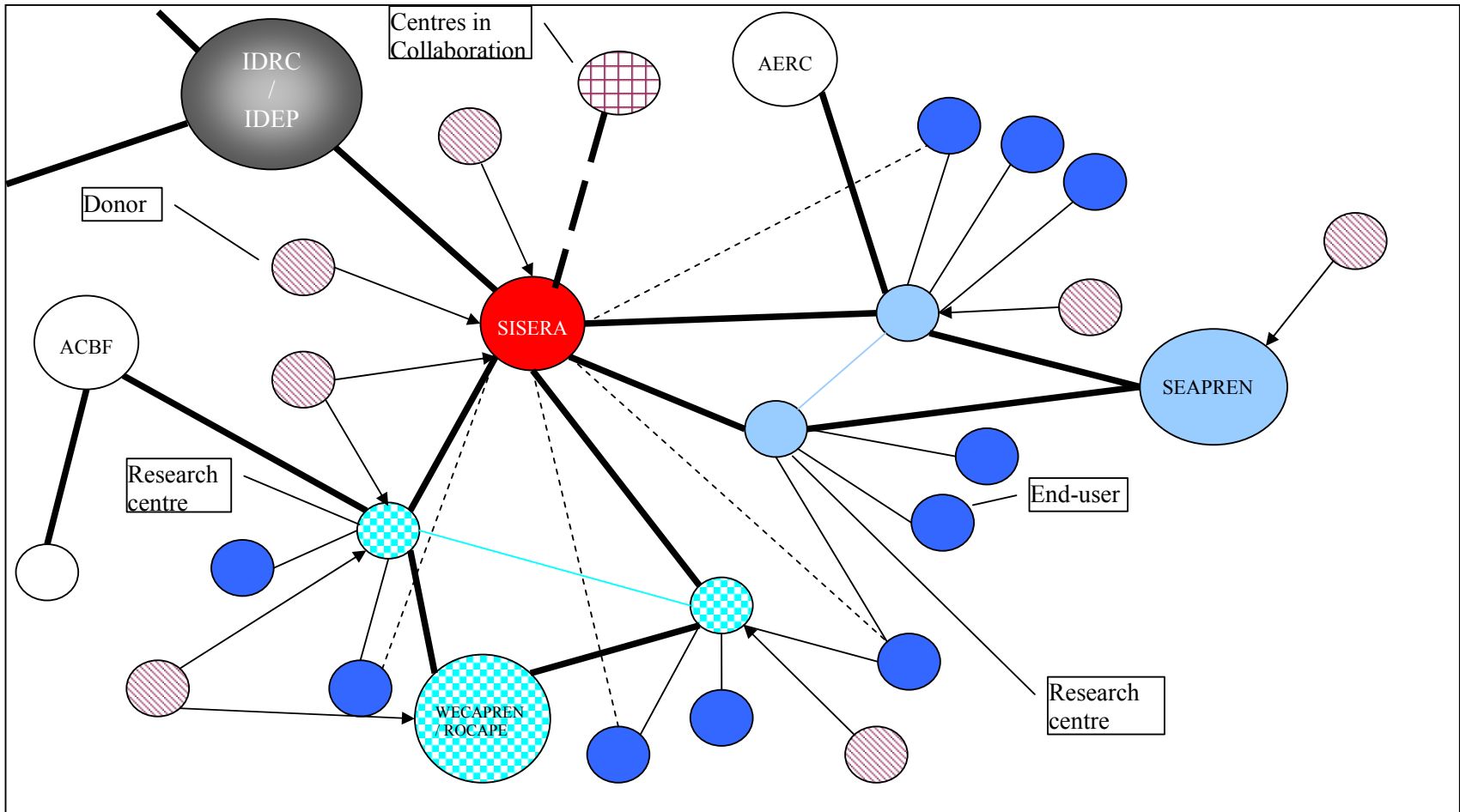


Figure 1: SISERA and the Networks Which Surround It

7 ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

- [85] The specific objectives of the evaluation, as set out in the Terms of Reference, are:
- i. Review and assess the specific actions that SISERA has undertaken to provide technical and financial support to African economic research centres and to reduce the isolation of these centres.
 - ii. Assess the perceived benefits of SISERA's interventions from the viewpoint of its partner institutions and determine the value added of its activities to economic research centres.
 - iii. Assess the perceived benefits of SISERA interventions from the viewpoint of government institutions and determine the value added of its activities to policy making
 - iv. Assess SISERA's governance structure and staff composition in the light of the Secretariat's mandate
 - v. Evaluate the relationship between SISERA and its donors and other capacity building institutions in AFRICA, e.g. AERC, ACBF, etc.
 - vi. Determine the challenges and associated risks facing SISERA in the context of its current objectives and identify new strategic opportunities.
- [86] We focus on issues (i) to (v) in the section which follows, and return to issue (vi) in Sections 9 and 10.

7.1 Specific Actions Undertaken by SISERA

- [87] In this section we review and assess the specific actions that SISERA has undertaken to provide technical and financial support to African economic research centres and to reduce the isolation of these centres.
- [88] To evaluate the specific actions undertaken by SISERA to support African economic research centres it is necessary to trace its activities. The following section presents a critical review of these activities according to the five specific program activities described above (strengthening of institutional support, enhancement of managerial capacity of research centres, networking of African research centres, linking researchers and end-users, and collaboration with other institutions).

7.1.1 Strengthening of institutional support

[89] Institutional strengthening is provided through core and seed grants, technical assistance, training for researchers and capacity utilization initiatives. According to SISERA's Annual Reports and information provided by the Secretariat, these constitute the bulk of all its activities. Their main characteristics are described below:

- **Core grants:** Core grants are awarded to Partner Institutions with the objective of strengthening their capacity to design, implement and disseminate research agendas with strong local inputs. The grants may cover the costs of research support facilities, research projects, and participation in seminars and publications. In general, core grants are designed to augment the capacity of the institution and not merely that of the individual researcher. Hence the request for the grant must be accompanied by documentation supporting its intended role in overall institutional strengthening.
- **Seed grants:** Seed grants have the same purpose as core grants but are designed for institutions with lower capacity to absorb resources (Emerging Centres).
- **Technical support:** Technical support is provided through a process of visits to the centres, in which SISERA programme staffs determine the progress in implementation of on-going projects and identify problems that are being encountered by the institution. Typical issues which arise include difficulties in developing proposals, their ability to manage funds and carry out research within the projects' time limits, etc. From these visits, SISERA is able to organize training initiatives or meetings among the members and other networks to exchange information and update their skills.
- **Training of researchers:** This support includes training, sabbaticals and internships in conjunction with regional (e.g. the African Development Bank), global (e.g. the World Bank Institute) and academic institutions (e.g. the Programme de Troisième Cycle Inter-Universitaire, PCTI). Training has as an objective the development of the capacity to analyze, formulate and implement policies on current economic issues; while creating and strengthening bonds and networks among researchers, research centres and clients.
- **Capacity utilization:** Capacity utilization support aims at providing funding for centres to use more fully their existing capacity in research that will serve the institution's priorities and contribute towards raising their profile. The support comes in the form of research competition funds, such as the Strategies and Analysis for Growth and Access (SAGA) grants funded by USAID beginning in May 2002.

[90] A list of these activities since 1997 is presented in Table 1. It should be noted that in its initial phase (from 1997 to 1999) SISERA focused on establishing its institutional structures and securing resources from donors, and not on providing financial and other support to the research centres in its network.

- [91] Since 1997 core grants have been awarded to all Partner Institutions with the exception of CEDRES (in Burkina Faso) and CIRES (in Cote d'Ivoire). CREA, CEREK and CIRES, however, received doctoral grants and, CIRES a SAGA grant during the current fiscal year (from April 2003). CEDRES and CIRES have received a relatively high number of technical support visits (5 for CEDRES and 3 for CIRES) and training of researchers activities (47 person days for CEDRES and 62 for CIRES). And since CIRES is the only Partner Institution to be awarded a SAGA grant, it could be said that the technical and capacity building effort paid off. Nonetheless, while CEDRES's Director, Dr. Soulama, highly valued these support visits and training activities, in an interview he suggested that his institution was going through a difficult period due to internal factors, and would soon put forward new proposals.
- [92] Seed grants were awarded to 5 of the 11 Emerging Centres, except INESOR in Zambia (which opted instead for a connectivity grant). Training of researchers was less consistent in the case of the Emerging Centres. Only, GREAT, in Mali, benefited from significant training activities (although NISER, LEA, GESDRI and GREAT had some, too). Technical support visits, however, were consistent, and most centres, probably with the exception of AIAE (which received some training), enjoyed visits almost annually. LEA, in Gabon, for instance, has been visited almost every year since 1999, and so has GESDRI, in Gambia, since 2000.
- [93] These visits show a close relation to the award of institutional support grants. NIEP in South Africa, for example, received one visit each year since 2001, prior to the seed grant during the current fiscal year (which was accompanied with 78 person days of training of researchers).
- [94] GREAT's case is interesting, because it has been pointed out as an example of an unsuccessful centre by almost all those we interviewed. In fact, the Secretariat noted that the centre lacked the internal capacity needed to use the seed grant which it received, and wanted to return the grant. It constitutes, however, a useful experience for SISERA which has now learned how to design a strategy to deal with institutions such as GREAT, which is less a centre than a loose grouping of researchers working together. In this case, the grant helped create a centre.
- [95] It is significant that of the 11 Emerging Centres affiliated to SISERA, only 6 received some kind of institutional support. In fact, during the course of our evaluation we were able to determine that some centres were considered 'unaccounted' for and communication with them was sporadic and unreliable. It is fair to ask what SISERA and such centres have gained from the partnership; and whether SISERA's limited resources would be better utilized in working with other centres or networks. An interesting example of this isolation is the case of CEE in Madagascar. Clive Gray (HIID) suggested that the centre *is performing reasonably well*, considering that *the head* [Pepe Andrianomanana] *is somewhat on his own*. SISERA did not report any activities involving CEE until recently through collaboration with SAGA and as the result of USAID's new five-year strategic plan for Madagascar launched in October 2003. Failure

to maintain contact with this centre does not seem to be the fault of the Secretariat, which made repeated attempts to contact the centre, without success.

- [96] Maintaining contact with some Emerging Centres has clearly been problematic, either because of difficulties peculiar to the Centre or because of political turbulence and disruption. In these circumstances, despite the efforts of the Secretariat, contact is difficult to maintain. Augmenting the human resources available to the Secretariat may be the answer in some cases, but in others the Secretariat may need to consider a more explicit 'exit strategy' for weak or failing institutions. This is discussed in more detail below.
- [97] During our interviews the question often arose of whether SISERA needed an exit strategy for its successful members, which would allow them to 'graduate'. While this may indeed be necessary, the experience of the emerging centres suggests that a more pressing issue is whether SISERA needs to articulate an exit strategy 'at the low end'.
- [98] This is, of course, a difficult issue, requiring much judgement. The conditions under which many centres operate are indeed very difficult, and patience and determination is essential in nurturing institutions in these circumstances. On the other hand, there are clearly some environments and some centres that cannot and will not flourish whatever assistance is provided by SISERA. A more clearly articulated strategy for ending these unsuccessful interventions would seem to be desirable.
- [99] In this respect it is worth noting that SISERA's strategy of working with policy research institutions instead of individual researchers was predicated on the (implicit) assumption that there existed in most countries adequate capacity to carry out policy research and analysis, in the sense that there were a sufficient number of researchers trained in modern research techniques, and any deficiencies in this capacity would be addressed by institutions such as AERC. Instead, the key obstacle to high quality, 'home grown' policy research was identified as the lack of well functioning research institutions within which researchers could pursue their careers. For many countries it was reasonable to make this assumption, and institutional weakness is indeed endemic in the region. But SISERA's experience with emerging centres suggests that in some countries, at least, there is a deficiency of well-trained researchers. In these circumstances, attempts at institutional strengthening are likely to prove ineffective.

Table 1: SISERA's Activities – 1997 -2003

	(July)1997/99	1999 /00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	April 1 2003 to Feb. 2004
SISERA						
Total Expenditure on SISERA	2,308,608	1,364,879	866,146	1,763,921	3,667,611	(to Sept. 30) 1,189,693
Number of staff employed by Secretariat	2 (in 97) then 4 (in 98)	4	4	4	5 (+ the IDRC regional Director acting as SISERA's ED)	6
Partner Institutions						
CEDRES						
Institutional support grants - volet doctoral						62,970
Technical Support – visits number	2	1	1		1	
Training of researchers ³ - number of person days			30	3	14	
PI's meeting attendance	Yes ⁴ No ⁵ Yes ⁶	Y ⁷	N ⁸	Y ⁹ N ¹⁰	N ¹¹	Y ¹²
Yaoundé II / CERE						

³ Please note that Basic Poverty Courses organized in collaboration with WBI, included the participation of researchers not coming from SISERA's Partner Institutions i.e. from universities and participants from the DRSP national teams. For more details, see annual reports 2001-2002 and 2002-2003.

⁴ Dakar, April 9-10, 1998

⁵ Abidjan, Nov. 24-25, 1998

⁶ Harare, March 6-7, 1999

⁷ Böhn, Dec. 6-8, 1999 apart the GDN conference

⁸ Accra, July 13-15, 2000

⁹ Ouagadougou, May 2-4, 2001

¹⁰ Dakar, Nov. 27-28, 2001

¹¹ Kampala, Nov. 18-20, 2002

¹² Bamako, June 16-19, 2003

	(July)1997/99	1999 /00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	April 1 2003 to Feb. 2004
Institutional support grants - core grant (Yaoundé II) - thematic - volet doctoral	206,411		12,000			77,980
Technical Support	1		2		1	
Training of researchers - number of person days		10		3		
Research project grants SAGA						53,846
PI's meeting attendance	Y-Y-Y	Y	Y	Y-Y	Y	Y
CIRES						
Institutional support grants - volet doctoral	2					69,660
Technical Support		2			1	
Training of researchers - number of person days			20	21	21	
Research project grants SAGA						47,797 52,627
PI's meeting attendance	Y-Y-Y	Y	N	N-Y	Y	Y
CREA						
Institutional support grants - dissemination - core grant - volet doctoral					28,380 298,300	74,040
Technical Support	2			1	1	1
Training of researchers - number of courses - number of person days			550 (cf. note 3)	Two 3	two	
Research project grants - Network (preliminary meetings) - SAGA					34,141	93,117

	(July)1997/99	1999 /00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	April 1 2003 to Feb. 2004
PI's meeting attendance	Y-Y-Y	Y	Y	Y-Y	Y	Y
DPRU						
Institutional support grants - managerial capacity - core grant				22,410	246,900	
Technical Support				1	1	1
Training of researchers - number of courses						one
Research project grants SAGA						114,657
PI's meeting attendance	N-Y-Y	Y	Y	Y-N	Y	Y
EPRC						
Institutional support grants - connectivity - core grant		18,124			299,500	
Technical Support			1	1	1	
Training of researchers - number of courses - number of person days		10		One 7	One 24	1
PI's meeting attendance	Y-Y-Y	Y	Y	Y-Y	Y	Y
ESRF						
Institutional support grants core grant		218,000				
Technical Support	1	1		1	1	
Training of researchers - number of courses - number of person days				14	One 10	
PI's meeting attendance	Y-N-Y	Y	Y	Y-Y	Y	Y
ISSER						
Institutional support grants - core grant			278,000			
Technical Support	1	5	1	1	1	1
Training of researchers		One				

	(July)1997/99	1999 /00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	April 1 2003 to Feb. 2004
- number of courses					One	
- number of person/days					21	
PI's meeting attendance	N-Y-N	Y	Y	Y-Y	Y	Y
IPAR						
Institutional support grants - core grant					295,340	
Technical Support				1	1	
Training of researchers - number of courses - number of person days					one 10	
PI's meeting attendance	N-N-N	N	N	N-Y	Y	Y
NISER						
Institutional support grants - core grant - connectivity			282,400			50,300
Technical Support			1		1	1
Training of researchers - number of person days		40			35	
PI's meeting attendance	N-Y-Y	Y	Y	N-Y	Y	Y
EMERGING CENTRES						
AIAE						
Institutional support grants - seed grant					49,700	
Technical Support				1		1
Training of researchers - number of courses - number of person days				one	14	
PI's meeting attendance	N-N-N	N	N	N-N	Y	Y
GESDRI						
Institutional support grants - seed grant					47,140	

	(July)1997/99	1999 /00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	April 1 2003 to Feb. 2004
Technical Support			3	1	1	1
Training of researchers (number of courses or number of person days spent at courses)						
PI's meeting attendance	N-N-N	N	N	N-Y	Y	N
GREAT						
Institutional support grants - seed grant			43,100			
Technical Support		2		1		
Training of researchers - number of person days			20	31	14	
PI's meeting attendance	N-N-N	Y	Y	Y-Y	Y	Y
INESOR						
Institutional support grants - connectivity				51,320		
Technical Support	1		1	1		
PI's meeting attendance	N-N-N	Y	Y	N-N	Y	N
LEA						
Institutional support grants - seed grant		33,506		45,400		
Technical Support	1	1	1	1		1
Training of researchers - number of courses - number of person days				3	One 14	
PI's meeting attendance	N-Y-N	Y	N	Y-N	N	N
NIEP						
Institutional support grants - seed grant						54,230
Technical Support				1	1	1
Training of researchers - number of person days						78
PI's meeting attendance	N-N-N	Y	Y	N-N	Y	Y

	(July)1997/99	1999 /00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	April 1 2003 to Feb. 2004
MEMBERS OF NETWORKS (Seapren or Wecapren)						
BIDPA						
Technical Support	1	3				
Training of researchers (number of courses or number of person days spent at courses)						
Research project grants - network (preparatory meeting)		67,209				
PI's meeting attendance	N-N-N	Y	Y	N-N	Y	N
CEPEC						
Technical Support	1				1	
Training of researchers - number of person days				231 (see note 3)		
PI's meeting attendance	N-N-N	N	N	N	Y	N
NEPRU						
Technical Support					2	1
Training of researchers (number of courses or number of person days spent at courses)						
Research project grants - SAGA - SEAPREN					19,296	114,667 378,830
PI's meeting attendance	N-N-N	Y	Y	N-Y	Y	N
OTHER SUPPORT¹³						
ACEG: African Centre for Economic Growth - dissemination grant				23,253	39,500	

¹³ Represents grants to other institutions in the African economic research area to fund thematic seminars or publications

	(July)1997/99	1999 /00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	April 1 2003 to Feb. 2004
ACMF: African Capital Markets Forum - dissemination grant			15,450			
ADPN: African Development Policy Network - seminar			12,246			
AERC: African Economic Research Consortium - dissemination grant - seminar	20,000			10,000 29,730		
ATPS: African Technology Policy Studies Network - seminar				24,626		
CAPEC (Benin) ¹⁴ Training of researchers - number of person days				132		
CIERA (Burkina Faso) ¹⁵ - PTCI - other					1,172,762	
CODESRIA - seminar	55,376					

¹⁴ Represents number of researchers/courses and sector public staff/courses attendance for the Distance learning courses on Fiscal Policy organized in collaboration with WBI.

¹⁵ Represents mainly the supports to the “Programme de 3e cycle inter universitaire – PTCI” (phase II) and to the volet doctoral. The grant for the Phase I was signed in 1994 and the funds provided from CIDA, USAID and IDRC. The total amount disbursed for the Phase I (from 1994 to 1999) was of \$ 2,514,191 CA. The project is managed by SISERA.

	(July)1997/99	1999 /00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	April 1 2003 to Feb. 2004
DGEP: Direction générale de l'économie et de la planification Training of researchers - number of person days				209		
ECA: Economic Commission for Africa - seminar		20,000				
ENDA Tiers Monde - seminar				25,000		
PSCGT: Pan-African Consultative Forum on Corporate Governance - seminar				20,000		
GDN: Global Development Network - seminar		59,310				
University of Cape Town - seminar				25,000		

7.1.2 Enhancement of managerial capacity of economic research centres

[100] SISERA has opted for a “hands on” approach to enhance managerial capacity of the centres in its network. Hence an important component of the Secretariat’s work is focused on key individuals within each institution; e.g. directors and finance officers. To do this, SISERA resorts to various activities among which we can highlight the following:

- Meetings;
- Workshops, seminars and training; and
- Mentoring.

[101] At meetings, directors and staff from the centres have the opportunity to network, share experiences and best practices and receive specialized training. The training provided by SISERA seems to have responded to their concerns, which underscores SISERA’s ability to respond flexibly to the needs of its partners and helping to ensure its continue relevance. For example, there were presentations on institutional self-assessment and fund raising in the fiscal year 2002/3; and during the fiscal year 2001/2, the finance officers of some institutions (CREA, GREAT, LEA, CEDRES, CEREG and PTCI) received training in financial management of projects. On more than one occasion, centres’ directors have expressed their desire to improve their institutional self-assessment techniques.

[102] Fund raising capacities are particularly important in determining the success of SISERA’s effort to strengthen the African institutions. To ensure the sustainability of their activities and maximize the impact of their research the centres require a continued inflow of funds. SISERA might therefore consider providing additional training in fundraising to allow centres to access funds without its assistance or intervention. This might be the subject of a future presentation or training session, or (more likely) the focus of ongoing assistance to the centres.

7.1.3 Networking of African economic research centres

[103] The most important initiative by SISERA in this area has been the launching of two sub-regional networks: the West and Central Africa Policy Research Network (WECAPREN) in the Anglophone countries, and the Réseau de Recherche Ouest et Centre Africain sur les Politiques Economiques (ROCAPE) in the francophone countries; and the Southern and Eastern Africa Policy Research Network (SEAPREN). These networks have exposed SISERA members to other institutions thus expanding the links and opportunities for funding and practice.

- [104] ROCAPE was only launched very recently, and so has relatively few activities to report. SEAPREN was launched several years ago, but was relatively inactive until NEPRU assumed responsibility for managing the network in 2003. Since then SEAPREN has been very active, holding regional meetings and launching collaborative research projects for which it has helped securing funding.
- [105] While SEAPREN is now active and functioning well, a larger question remains of the strategic intention behind these sub-regional networks. At one level, of course, they pursue interesting and worthwhile activities and so make a broad contribution to capacity building and policy-making. At another level, however, the logic behind these networks is somewhat unclear. They do not seem to be vehicles for direct capacity building, as is SISERA itself. And since the networks are constructed on a geographical basis, the centres in the network are unlikely to share the same thematic interests or research agendas. Regional integration is, of course, one possible common policy issue that might be the basis for common activities in the sub-networks, particularly since the sub-networks are constructed on a regional basis. The sub-regional networks could very well decide to pursue research on regional integration issues, but this in turn is likely to prove problematic in terms of policy impact, since regional integration institutions in Africa are, almost without exception, rather weak, and in most cases lack the capacity to demand and absorb policy research and analysis. So even if the sub-regional networks successfully pursue a regional integration research agenda, they may well find it difficult to achieve significant policy impact because of the absence of a demand for their research among policy-makers at the regional level. On balance, then, the strategy behind the sub-regional networks remains problematic.
- [106] The assistance that SISERA provided to other African economic research centres, institutions and networks is also important. For the same reason as above, it provided grants to other institutions to fund thematic seminars, publication of African economic research and educational programmes; e.g. training at the Masters Doctoral level in the francophone countries through the Programme de Troisième Cycle Inter-Universitaire (PTCI).
- [107] Meetings of directors and researchers within and outside the network are important. Among the perceived benefits from participating in SISERA, the directors interviewed highly value these opportunities. This is more so among the Francophone centres, which, because of language and strong hierarchical structures, tend to work in relative isolation. Nonetheless, and although SISERA has made it clear that it assists institutions rather than individuals, some centres, particularly those linked to academic institutions, have suggested the need to organise scientific meetings and seminars to reduce the isolation of researchers. Targeting individual researchers and increasing their individual human capital can certainly benefit the institution in which they work. Isolated and potentially successful researchers (who have perhaps benefited from training funded by SISERA) have strong incentives to leave the institution in which they are based in order to further their careers or simply to gain access to a broader research and policy community. If on the other hand, these researchers are targeted and integrated into this community through their institution, the incentives to remain

in the institution increase. If they do stay, the institution is strengthened in a more sustainable way by the augmentation of its human resources.

[108] This could be an explanation for the difficulties experienced by GREAT, for example, which finds it difficult to retain its better trained researchers. It is also possible, however, that these problems are due as well to a lack of transparency in the management of the centre and personality conflicts within the institution (which the Secretariat is working to address).

7.1.4 Linking researchers and end-users

[109] SISERA has also performed this role, though this is more properly the responsibility of the sub-regional networks and/or the individual research centres. Since its creation, the Secretariat has established contacts with local, regional and global research users in order to help strengthen its profile or provide services to its member centres. SISERA has, for instance, developed Visiting Scholar programmes with the African Development Bank, and is in the process of doing so with the Banque Centrale des Etats de l’Afrique de Ouest and the Banque des Etats de l’Afrique Centrale.

[110] Essentially, SISERA has focused on the establishing linkages at the regional and international levels, and this seems the correct strategy. Many centres in the SISERA network, of course, participate within their own national policy-making processes, advising parliamentary committees and policy analysts within their own countries (e.g. EPRC is advising the government of Uganda on poverty issues and NISER is using core grant to organize workshops with legislators). However, these contacts must be made by the centres themselves and not all centres seem to have been successful in achieving this. Also it has been noted that SISERA has not been able to position its brand-name in the African economic ‘research market’, which limits its ability to help the smaller emerging centres achieve recognition from their own policy communities. To the extent the SISERA builds stronger linkages at the regional and international levels, this ‘brand recognition’ (for promoting high quality, policy relevant research) is likely to spill over at the national level and benefit the centres.

[111] One issue of concern is the imbalance between the work carried out to strengthen research centres’ institutional capacities and end users’ capacity to demand and use the research produced by the centres. In principle it would be desirable for SISERA to address both the supply and demand, but in practice it has focused on the producers of research, particularly in the initial period following its creation. As a consequence, many centres (e.g. IPAR, IDEP, CEPC and CIRES) report difficulties in engaging with policy-makers in their countries because there is little interest in research. Dr. Kibua (IPAR) adds that there is no demand for knowledge on the part of the private sector in Africa, which views research as the responsibility of the government, and who believe that research institutes should work for the private sector on a pro-bono basis. This is important particularly since there are strong reasons to believe that the private sector will need to play a growing role over the longer term in the financial sustainability and independence of research centres in Africa, as we discuss below.

[112] Ideally, then, SISERA should engage more actively in not only linking with end users, but also, if possible, strengthening their capacity to demand and apply the knowledge produced at the research centres. Otherwise, SISERA's intervention might contribute to the brain drain or discourage potentially successful centres. Alternatively, SISERA could improve the centres' own outreach capacities providing them with the tools necessary to independently engage and lobby governments, thus creating a demand for their own services.

7.1.5 Collaboration with other institutions

- [113] SISERA has been relatively successful collaborating with other institutions. During its first phase (1997/9) it worked towards establishing long-term relationships with regional and global institutions. Hence, in 2000, it began working in collaboration with the AfDB and the World Bank Institute. The latter provided SISERA, until the most recent fiscal year, with training for researchers in the area of poverty reduction. The departure of the WBI may have a significant effect on the members of the SISERA network. The responses to our questionnaire and our interviews suggested that such training was one of the most popular activities initiated by SISERA, and research related to poverty reduction has been a common denominator among the most successful centres (EPRC, CREA, DPRU); and it has been so recognised by the centres' directors.
- [114] An important feature of SISERA's governance structure is the composition of its Steering Committee, which includes members of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the African Development Bank (AfDB). This helped ensure that SISERA is responsive to the African context.
- [115] SISERA's relationship with USAID has resulted in new opportunities through the SAGA program. Similarly, Cornell University and Clark Atlanta University cooperate with SISERA in research and training activities that benefit the African research institutions. Finally, during 2000 and 2001, SISERA participated in a Global Development Network Conferences in Bonn and Tokyo. These links with international institutions give SISERA exposure within a wider forum and help raise the quality standards within the network. This suggests that efforts need to be made in both directions to ensure that SISERA will become a more visible member of the international economic research community.
- [116] SISERA is an IDRC Secretariat, and as such, is legally and administratively part of IDRC. The perception of a very close relationship to IDRC has made it difficult on occasion for other IDRC Secretariats (such as TIPS) to raise core and project funding from other donors, and has on at least one occasion caused difficulties with one of SISERA's supporters. This might make it difficult for SISERA to broaden its support by attracting other donors. On the other hand, the proposed move to IDEP may give rise to exactly the same perception and problems, since it is part of the UN System. A particular effort must be made to establish a clearer perception of the identity and achievements of SISERA on the part of international development agencies. A more vigorous publicity and outreach campaign has a role to play in this.

- [117] In summary, SISERA has passed through two very distinctive phases. In the first, which is fully described in its mid-term evaluation, it engaged in its own institution building. During this period, 1997/9, SISERA was engaged in creating the appropriate network governance structure and establishing strong links with donors and end-users of the centres' research.
- [118] From 1999, however, SISERA's work has consisted of more of harvesting the fruits of the first phase, building its relationships with a wider range of partner institutes and emerging centres. To some extent, however, it has seemed to lose momentum towards the end of the second period. This may be a natural reaction to the institution building in the first phase and the network building of the second phase, but the loss of momentum may have been exacerbated by three factors:
- The difficulties since 2002 in appointing a permanent Executive Director
 - Insufficient staff numbers, particularly at the Programme Officer level. This was compounded by the need for the senior Programme Officer to fill the role of Acting Executive Director, in addition to carrying out his normal duties
 - Uncertainty concerning the institutional home for SISERA in the long term.
- [119] This has affected SISERA in a number of ways. The training activities in poverty analysis, carried out in collaboration with the World Bank Institute, seem to have been highly popular with the centres, and helped position some of these centres to play a key role in the formulation of their countries' poverty reduction strategies. Management and policy changes at the WBI, however, led the Institute to end its collaboration in 2002. The end of the collaboration seems to have had little or nothing to do with SISERA, and everything to do with the WBI's internal policies and priorities. SISERA has begun negotiations with the UNDP to replace the WBI, but these negotiations inevitably take time, and it is unfortunate that such an important and popular activity has been interrupted by circumstances beyond the control of the Secretariat.
- [120] In addition, SISERA's has much too low an institutional profile and 'brand recognition' in the development policy research community and among donors (and potential supporters). Additional staff and a clearer strategic direction regarding these areas specifically would have enabled SISERA to address this issue in a timely fashion.
- [121] The period of uncertainty through which SISERA has gone through with respect to partnerships and funding from donors may to some extent also be explained by an incorrect perception about the relationship between SISERA and IDRC. Although SISERA functions in programmatic terms as an autonomous institution, its legal and financial status as an IDRC secretariat, and its perceived closeness to IDRC (for instance, its interim Executive Director until March 2003, Dr. Gilles Forget, is IDRC's regional Director for West and Central Africa) has blurred the that independence and possibly complicated relationships with potential collaborators and donors.

7.1.6 Evolution of SISERA expenditure

[122] As described above, SISERA places a significant emphasis on training activities for researchers. The task of capacity building within the institutions was taken seriously from the start; this can be seen in Figure 3 below. Expenditures on programme activities are dominated by training, managerial capacity building and core grants. The lower levels of expenditure for programme activities during 2000/1 are explained by a considerable drop in training initiatives and the absence of core grants. On the other hand, the rise in operational expenses is explained by explicit provision in the budget figures (for the first time) for the salaries of SISERA staff. It is also important to notice that the 2000/1 fiscal year was a transition year, between the first and the second phase; and the overall budget decreased in 16% with respect to the previous fiscal year.

Figure 2: Composition of SISERA's expenditure – 1997-2003

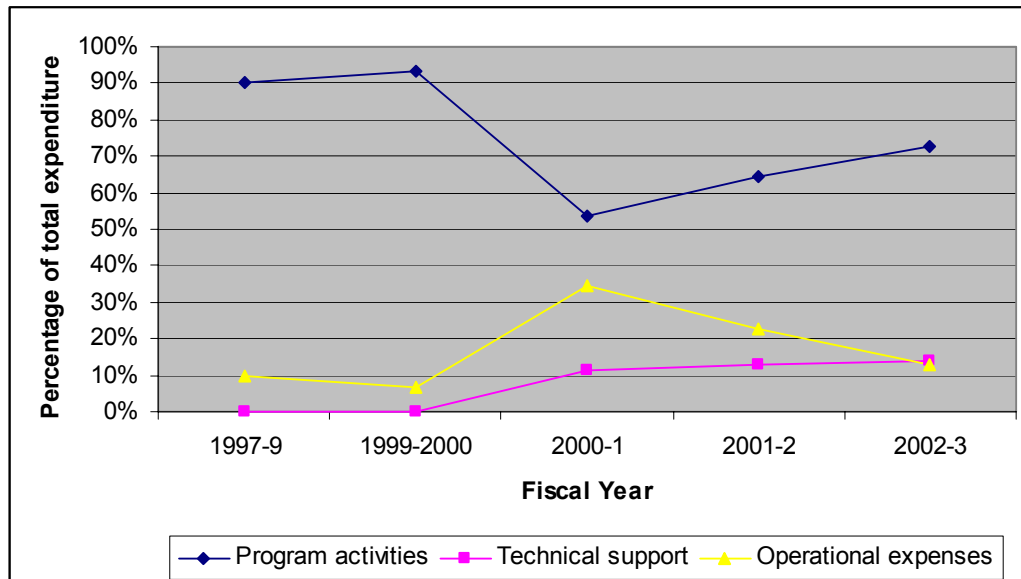


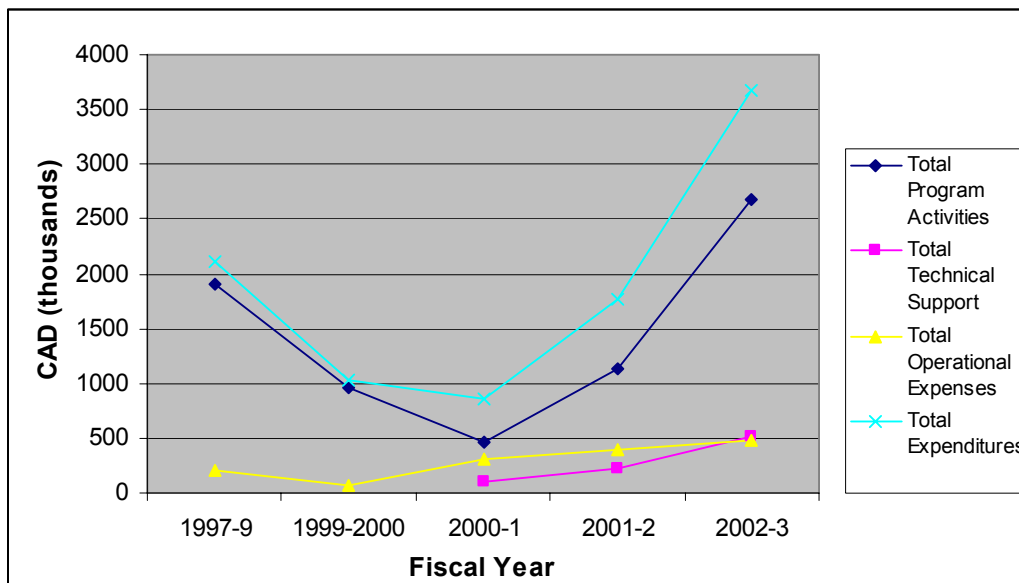
Table 2: SISERA – Expenditure 1997-2003

Expenditures (in Canadian Dollars)	1997-9	1999-2000	2000-1	2001-2	2002-3
Program Activities					
Training	1629041	438241	288602	351081	1398558
Sabbaticals and Internships	22212	4586			
Managerial capacity building	90178	93947	58375	122344	86806
Electronic connectivity of centres	0	14124	4000	43000	8320
Collaborative research	63065	192261	45305	88148	341946
Core grants	100000	186411	0	498000	623358
Seed grants	0	33506	32275	1684	125540
Dissemination	0	1564	36629	29901	88957
Total Program Activities	1904496	964640	465186	1134158	2673485
As a percentage of total expenses	90%	93%	54%	64%	73%
Technical Support					
Salaries			79095	108322	403862
Travel			19481	52516	74167
Relocation			0	39149	14503
Steering and technical committee meetings	8690	5897	1080	26575	23687
Total Technical Support			99656	226562	516219
As a percentage of total expenses	0%	0%	12%	13%	14%
Operational Expenses					
Salaries			149483	197519	68671
Staff training		3211	743	1489	1479
Rent	15000	18000	18000	18000	25125
Travel			44559	63277	61456
Capital Equipment	10530	4800	0	11232	41166
Non-capital Equipment		1200	5394	176	996
Communication costs	4152	0	3240	1993	4553
Office expenses	10102	2044	411	873	594
Printing and reproduction		2572	2898	2475	3698
Other		3723	4110	5626	594
Professional and special services		0	24202	20925	41700
Overhead	162905	32950	48264	79616	227875
Total Operational Expenses	202689	68500	301304	403201	477907
As a percentage of total expenses	10%	7%	35%	23%	13%
Total Expenditures	2107185	1033140	866146	1763921	3667611

[123] Figure 3 shows SISERA's expenditure by category. Most significant is the importance of programme activities in the secretariat's budget. It is worth noting that:

- SISERA devotes a significant proportion of its funds directly to the centres in its network. This assistance is also marked by a clear ‘investment’ period before 2000/1, and a ‘production’ period thereafter.
- SISERA’s costs in ‘delivering’ these programmes (its operational costs) are surprisingly small – currently about 13% of the total budget. If there were to be a significant drop in funding, this would inevitably affect programme activities – there is little if any slack to cut. This vulnerability should, however, stimulate sustained efforts to secure additional sources of income, while keeping operational expenses at their current low levels.

Figure 3: SISERA’s Expenditure by Category – 1997-2003



[124] For many institutions, the costs of delivering their activities are a matter of concern – because these costs are too high. For SISERA, these costs are, if anything, a matter of concern because they are too low! While this reflects in part an admirably lean and efficient organization, it is also the result of staff numbers that are too low relative to the organizations mission and objectives. Overall, SISERA’s delivery costs are surprisingly low – too low.

7.2 Impact on partners

[125] In this section we assess the perceived benefits of SISERA's interventions from the viewpoint of its partner institutions and determine the value added of its activities to its network.

[126] The impact of SISERA interventions on its partner institutions vary in form and magnitude. While all directors interviewed consider their participation in the network as beneficial for their institutions, the services are valued in different ways by each director. A common perception, best articulated by Haroon Bhorat of DPRU, is that the support provided by SISERA gives directors 'breathing space'. Financial support in particular, but also the technical assistance, training of researchers and other related activities, give directors time to reflect; resources to hire new researchers, the opportunity to explore new issues, etc. Table 3 reviews the ways in which SISERA's support has benefited some of the centres.¹⁶

[127] Among the various effects of SISERA's assistance on the centres, according to their directors, it is possible to highlight the following:

- Difference in the perceptions of SISERA's policies across the centres: While SISERA awarded AIAE CAD 5,000 for two research papers, it gave NIEP CAD 23,000 for two research projects. As a consequence, their perceptions of the relevance of the financial support are different. To the question *is the size of SISERA's support for research projects realistic, in the sense that it provides the resources necessary to achieve the stated objectives of the research proposal?* answers included:

No. For instance in the SEED grant we got, \$5000.00 was for two (2) research papers, but in reality it could barely suffice for one.

Okey G. Oji (AIAE)

Yes, because in between the two research projects supported by SISERA, our researchers do undertake other commissioned research projects.

SISERA is more flexible compared with other donors.

Moses Rangata (NIEP)

- Difference in opinion: While AIAE is very satisfied with SISERA's adherence to timelines, NIEP considers it unsatisfactory. In fact, it suggests that this is because the Secretariat is currently understaffed. Although these perceptions refer to very specific, and probably unrelated and one-off cases, they do point out the importance of consistency. Similarly, while the Secretariat argues that AIAE's seed grant of CAD 49,700 is significant, the centre's opinion is that the grant was not realistic with respect to the funding needs and work plan; even though the seed grant seems to cover about 65% of the essential costs of running the institution.

¹⁶ Information from questionnaires submitted via e-mail to the directors of the institutions and interviews with them at their offices, November 2003 – January 2004.

- Different stages: Partner institutions and emerging centres are in different stages of development. Thus NISER, a large and well established institution, does not believe that SISERA's assistance had any significant effect on its ability to influence the policy process and that NISER is unlikely to make large changes in its research agenda simply as a result of SISERA's assistance. For GESDRI, however, SISERA's support has had a tremendous impact, introducing the centre into the wider economic research community for the first time.
- Meetings: SISERA has been successful in reducing the isolation of the research centres in its network but still more needs to be done, mostly among the emerging centres, and particularly the Francophone ones.
- Magnet: It is also important to note that of the centres below all but AIAE reported having approached SISERA to join. This means that the SISERA initiative had created expectations among the research community. SISERA must be careful to satisfy the expectations of those who joined; otherwise incentives to participate are lost and the network, as a whole, loses.
- Demand: There is a perception that more needs to be done about the external environment, particularly on the demand side. Successful emerging centres might soon find that potential users of their research lack the interest in or capacity to absorb policy research.
- Others: Other donors and networks play an important role in the centres' work. The sub-regional networks, in particular SEAPREN, are gradually playing a growing role in the work of the centres. Similarly, AERC and ACBF provide support that is sometimes complementary and sometimes competitive. CEPEC, for instance gives ACBF priority over SISERA because it provides them with more financial resources and ACBF was responsible for creating CEPEC.
- Internal problems: There is a perception among the centres that SISERA has staff shortages and governance difficulties. These perceptions might become more widespread as the move to IDEP advances and implications of a new institutional home are not yet clear to all members of the network. It should also be noted that this issue could be easily addressed by increasing the participation of the partner institutions and emerging centres in the governance of SISERA. Many have suggested that a representative of the members joins the Steering Committee on a rotating basis.
- Overall satisfaction: All questionnaire respondents, as well as most of those interviewed, held the common view that SISERA's assistance, with all its possible problems, was, at least, satisfactory, and, with few exceptions, of better quality than that provided by other capacity building institutions, such as ACBF.

Table 3: Responses to the Questionnaire – Some Highlights

Centre	AIAE	NISER	NIEP	GREAT	CEPEC	GESDRI
How has SISERA assisted your institution?	The seed grant awarded by SISERA is not realistic (at CAD 5,000 for two research projects it is only 65% of estimates).	Core grant from SISERA was realistic although they have had to tailor their objectives to match the resources and assistance available. They have also benefited from SISERA's broader support; rather than NISER's original focus on specific research topics.	NIEP's seed grant is realistic considering the requirements. It provides resources necessary for two research projects (CAD 11,500 each). They have also benefited from a three day workshop and the visits of SISERA's Senior Program Officer who helped them write the proposal for the seed grant. However, support to NIEP is recent, and prior to the seed grant, they and only received 2 visits; only since 2003 they have been benefited by training of researchers.	GREAT has benefited from a seed grant from SISERA and technical support and training. These two are extremely important for the institution. The grant has provided GREAT with funds to obtain basic equipment and cover rent costs.	CEPEC has only received financing for the training of researchers on poverty reduction policies from the World Bank Institute. Not surprisingly, it considers financial assistance crucial.	For GESDRI, the seed grant allowed it to establish itself as an emerging centre and engage in economic research for the first time. The grant, although realistic in terms of research, does not cover the staff salaries. Also, although, technical visits have been reported by SISERA (6 in total) GESDRI's Director does not report any non-financial assistance from SISERA

Centre	AIAE	NISER	NIEP	GREAT	CEPEC	GESDRI
<p>What has been the impact of SISERA's assistance on your activities and outputs?</p>	<p>Research fellows were led to new areas of research under the SAGA competition. This has proven to be rewarding for the institution. SISERA also provided support in improving their research methodology bringing higher quality results. However, financial assistance from SISERA has not yet allowed them to carry out significant research on these new topics nor participate in more meetings.</p>	<p>SISERA's assistance has provided NISER with funds to research new topics and enhance the depth of its research and analysis. It has not, however, influenced its research methodology or interests. The funds have also allowed them to purchase new software and hold more workshops and meetings with local researchers and policy makers. In general, the assistance is welcomed but primarily to strengthen their own structure.</p>	<p>SISERA's support has not yet yielded significant changes in methodology, quality of research, quantity or composition of research portfolio. Also they continue to use the same dissemination channels; i.e. inviting policy-makers and other stakeholders.</p>	<p>The response to the questionnaire and the interview do not yield much information and GREAT only acknowledged the importance that meetings and training have for its researchers. It is not clear if this had had an impact on the quality of its activities.</p>	<p>CEPEC is optimistic of receiving financial assistance to research new topics and develop new methodologies and capacities to improve the quality of their research. So far they have been able to use the help from SISERA to organize meetings with policy makers and researchers.</p>	<p>The principal impact of SISERA on GESDRI is that without the seed grant it would not have been able to carry out economic research. Hence, the effects of SISERA's assistance are not clear yet.</p>

Centre	AIAE	NISER	NIEP	GREAT	CEPEC	GESDRI
Has SISERA's assistance increased your impact on the policy process in your country?	SISERA's grant was the first and gave AIAE the opportunity to host several policy dialogues and forums in collaboration with institutions such as the World Bank, USAID, DfID, UNECA and UNIDO. These forums have resulted in an improved public profile and capacity strengthening has increased AIAE's consultant's image significantly. AIAE is now engaged in sustainable relations with key government institutions and international development and financial agencies.	NISER acknowledges SISERA support but can not determine if SISERA's assistance has been crucial in increasing their impact on the policy process. They attribute this to their 50 year history and experience.	Again, the assistance has not matured yet. NIEP does report to be engaged more closely with policy makers but the fruits of this are still uncertain.		The impact they have on the policy process has improved slightly, but more work needs to be done on the external environment in Guinea; since there is still no culture of research.	
In what ways has SISERA strengthened your institution's internal capacity to carry out its mission?	SISERA provided the foundation for an improved research methodology at the Centre. The introduction of	SISERA's institutional support to NISER has not been entirely successful in their view. Staff training has only been limited and difficulties still remain.	A problem that has not received much attention by SISERA is NIEP's difficulties in recruiting experienced	GREAT reported difficulties in the qualification of its staff that were solved by the assistance of SISERA. However,	SISERA has supported CEPEC in identifying other research organisations and establishing relations with them;	SISERA's support has helped GESDRI develop more effective governance structures and access information to identify its

Centre	AIAE	NISER	NIEP	GREAT	CEPEC	GESDRI
	audits improved their accounting and financial controls. While SISERA has significantly contributed to their access to information technology, difficulties remain in internet connectivity and electricity supply. SAGA has provided new ideas and opportunities for research. Finally, although SISERA has allowed them to identify other relevant research organisations, they have not yet been able to establish strong relations with them. Also they have not yet properly identified or linked to their stakeholders.	In other areas, such as financial resources, facilities, internal communications and networking with other SISERA centres, although assistance has been effective, lingering difficulties remain. NISER does report success, however, in identifying other relevant research organisations and building strong relationships with them. Also, they still require support in more topical research, publishing of findings, engaging with stakeholders and organising workshops	researchers; which persist even with additional assistance from other institutions. Support has been successful in developing monitoring and evaluation capacity within the institution and identifying and linking with other relevant research organisations within and outside the SISERA network.	it has expressed trouble keeping the most capable researchers. It has also helped in the acquisition of information technology equipment, although a deficit still remains. Interviews, however, suggest that SISERA's intervention in GREAT has not been successful and its institutional capacity remains low.	particularly through ROCAPE.	stakeholders and other relevant research institutions (particularly considering that this is a new area for them). More needs to be done to tighten its relationship with stakeholders, and other centres within and outside the SISERA network. Also, only partial assistance was received in terms of personnel support, accounting and financial controls and strategic planning. More needs to be done in these areas.
Are you satisfied with the assistance you have received from SISERA? (in terms of efficiency and flexibility,	In general, AIAE is satisfied with SISERA's assistance. And it is very satisfied with its adherence to	In general, NISER is very satisfied with SISERA's assistance and considers its responsiveness to their needs to be its major	According to NIEP, SISERA's adherence to timelines is unsatisfactory because it is	According to GREAT, SISERA's support is very satisfactory, particularly regarding its	In terms of responsiveness to their needs, adherence to timelines and accountability and	GESDRI is very satisfied with SISERA's support.

Centre	AIAE	NISER	NIEP	GREAT	CEPEC	GESDRI
efficacy, responsiveness to your needs, adherence to timeliness, and accountability and transparency)	timelines.	strength.	currently understaffed.	flexibility.	transparency, CEPC is satisfied with SISERA's services	
In what ways does the assistance provided by SISERA differ from that provided by other donors or funding institutions	In all cases, it considers its assistance as the same or better than that provided by others. It highlights that SISERA presents different avenues to suit their needs.	In all cases, it considers its assistance as the same or better than that provided by others	In all cases, except for its adherence to timelines, NIEP considers SISERA's assistance to be the as good as or better than that of provided by other donors. It also perceives SISERA as a more flexible donor.	It has raised concerns regarding SISERA's governance.	In general assistance (financial and non-financial) is mostly provided by ACBF and they remain as a priority.	It could be better in terms of accountability and transparency

7.3 Impact on policy making

[128] In this section we assess the perceived benefits of SISERA interventions from the viewpoint of government institutions and determine the value added of its activities to policy-making.

[129] Assessing the impact of research and analysis on policy is an inherently difficult exercise, and there are few if any quantitative studies which are in any way conclusive.

Table 4: Case Study – AIAE, A Rising Star in Nigeria

In a remarkably short time, the African Institute for Applied Economics (AIAE) has become a leading player in the economic policy environment in Nigeria. Although founded only in 2001, it is already involved in several significant partnerships and projects with the Nigerian government and other international development actors such as the World Bank and DFID. Its success relates to four key factors:

Training of research staff in econometrics and statistics in order to develop the research capacity.

Focused research on key policy issues areas such as trade, regional integration and competitiveness, macro modelling, public sector management, poverty, income distribution and labour market issues. This has allowed AIAE to play a key role in recent policy studies, such as one on the potential impact of a common external tariff in ECOWAS on Nigeria's balance of payments and real economy (funded by EU) and another on the evolution of the PRSP process in Nigeria (funded by UNECA).

Policy advocacy: The former Director and now economic advisor to the President, Charles Soludo, enjoys the reputation of having a strong and dynamic personality. This has been crucial in selling the image of AIAE and disseminating its research results. High profile researchers and fellows have given AIAE a strong reputation in both the research and policy making communities. It has also established an international presence, through the conferences and workshops it has organized, which have attracted the participation of eminent researchers such as Joseph Stiglitz. And, finally, it has given considerable emphasis to communications and dissemination, for example through its newly launched web page (www.aiae-nigeria.org).

Networking: AIAE has twelve staff, but has strengthened its human resources by creating a network of almost fifty fellows who are based in other institutions in Nigeria. This gives it a strong and wide base for policy research and advocacy.

Timing: AIAE was established at a particularly opportune time, after the new government had taken office and launched a wide ranging and comprehensive programme of reforms. Policy-makers were more receptive to research and new ideas, and the new sense of optimism encouraged researchers to believe their work might have some impact on the policy process.

AIAE is a SISERA Emerging Centre, receiving an institutional support grant and training for its researchers in 2002/3.

[130] Measuring the impact of investments in capacity building such as SISERA is therefore a considerable challenge: it can be done, but requires care and good judgement. The reason is simple: even when quantitative measures of desired (ultimate) impact are readily available, the chain of causal links between an intervention and a change in an impact measure can be long and complex, with the outcome affected by the actions of a large number of actors, and influenced by many elements in the surrounding environment. This is particularly true for 'upstream' interventions in capacity building, of which

SISERA and the centres in its network are an example. Assessing impact by associating a particular intervention with changes which take place ‘downstream’ in the causal chain needs to be undertaken with some care, particularly when a complex chain of causality is posited.

Table 5: Case Study – EPRC, Moving from Excellence in Poverty Research to Tackle a Broader Range of Issues

The Economic Policy Research Centre in Kampala was founded in 1994. Soon after assuming his post in 2000 the present Executive Director, John Okidi, quickly focused the Centre’s research programme more closely on poverty issues in Uganda. EPRC quickly established a reputation for expertise in poverty issues and now plays a key role in the PRSP process in Uganda.

For Okidi, SISERA provides only a small proportion of the support he receives, but its flexibility ensures that it is put to highly productive uses. Since SISERA’s assistance has been flexible, EPRC has been able to use it creatively to respond to its most important needs and priorities. EPRC, for instance, used some of SISERA’s financial assistance to improve its information and communication technologies and to hire a senior member of staff. Investment in technology and human resources can improve productivity directly.

For EPRC SISERA’s support complemented that of another and much larger significant donor; ACBF. The proper use of the funds and their efficient allocation depends on the flexibility of the assistance and of the capacity of the directors and managers to manage it. EPRC has proven to have a strong foundation in the latter and can be seen as an example of the importance of such capacities for other less experienced directors.

Flexibility in the use of the resources is also clear in EPRC’s choice of research areas. EPRC has established a strong position within Uganda as the most influential source of research on poverty issues. It has build on this strength, extending its research across a wider range of policy issues, including nutrition, food security, agriculture, microeconomic policies, tourism, competitiveness and trade and strengthening financial institutions. Where other centres have benefited from focusing on just a few policy issues, EPRC has had the human resources and institutional strength which enable it to expand beyond a poverty focus to tackle a wider range of issues.

EPRC is a SISERA Partner Institute, and received a connectivity grant in 1999/2000 and an institutional support grant in 2002/3.

[131] In order for impact assessments to be credible and convincing, our experience suggests it is useful to find measures of intermediate impact further up the causal chain, closer to point of the intervention itself. In the case of SISERA and the centres in its network, this would suggest examining not economic performance but the quality of the economic policies pursued in sub-Saharan Africa. If enhanced capacity leads to improved policy-making, we might assess the impact of SISERA and its partner institutes by examining the quality of the policies pursued in the countries concerned. This is a promising approach, but works best when an intervention focuses on a very specific area of policy, so that it is easy to construct a (formal or informal) measure of the quality of policy. It might be feasible, for example, for macroeconomic policy, where one could construct a policy index based on inflation and growth (and possibly their volatility), or in trade policy, where one often measures the ‘openness’ of trade policy, or its anti-export bias.¹⁷ This approach is more difficult for a capacity building intervention

¹⁷ This presumes, of course the existence of a consensus that low inflation and openness to trade represent ‘good policies’.

such as SISERA, which aims to strengthen institutional capacity which can be applied across the entire range of economic policy issues. One way of addressing this issue which has been used in other impact studies has been to construct an index of overall ‘policy quality’. This is feasible, but difficult to do on an objective basis.

- [132] Our approach here is somewhat different. We think it is possible to demonstrate impact on policy through case studies of how the activities of the partner institutes and emerging centres have come to play a role in their national policy processes, and we present four case studies in this section.
- [133] Overall, we would conclude that the impact on policy has been very mixed. Some policy research institutes in the SISERA network have been outstandingly successful in pursuing research programmes that have had a significant impact on policy discussions and dialogue within their country, and both government and civil society look to these institutes to take the lead in producing new and relevant research on certain key policy issues. Other institutes in the SISERA network, in contrast, have had little if any influence on policy.
- [134] Impact on the policy process remains an important goal of the programme, and so it is important for SISERA to understand why some of its partners have been so successful, and others have had so little impact, and how the lessons of the successes can be used to assist partners who are struggling to achieve an impact on policy.
- [135] Here, it is worth bearing in mind experience from other countries. Based on his experience in Indonesia, Peter Timmer argues, for example, that there are “... four factors that can make policy oriented research successful. First, the analyst should be involved with the same policy-makers or in the same policy setting for the long term. Second, there is a need to find a balance between keeping analysis and advice confidential and the ultimate publication of the key models and results. Third, the analysts should rely on the analytical paradigms of the mainstream of the economic profession even while examining deviations from their underlying assumptions. Lastly, there should be continuing demand from policy-makers for problem-oriented analysis.”¹⁸
- [136] Our interviews and discussions did not suggest that Timmer’s second and third conditions (confidentiality versus publication in the open scientific literature, and the degree of reliance on mainstream analytical paradigms) raised any particular issues in the context of SISERA’s partner institutes.
- [137] His fourth condition, that policy-makers must have a genuine demand for analytical work, does, however, seem to be an issue in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular the francophone countries, and this limits the potential impact of research on policy in a number of countries in which SISERA operates, or would wish to operate.

¹⁸ C. Peter Timmer, ‘Adding Value through Policy Oriented Research: Reflections of a Scholar-Practitioner,’ International Food Policy Research Institute: Impact Assessment Discussion Paper No. 4, October 1998

Table 6: Case Study – CREA and the Importance of Picking the Right Issue at the Right Time

The story of the Centre de Recherches Economiques Appliqués (CREA) in Senegal is one in which a dynamic leader, who picked the right research issue at the right time, played a key role in achieving policy impact.

When Abdoulaye Diagne was appointed Director of CREA in 1990, the institution had virtually no budget. Today, it hosts 25 active researchers and is widely recognised as a key source of research and publications in the region. It has been awarded dissemination, core and doctoral grants by SISERA and has played a key role in the SISERA network as an active participant in all meetings of the Partner Institutions.

Diagne from the first championed two very important strategies. At an early stage he recognised the importance of poverty as an emerging area of research, one in which there were few African researchers but where there was a rapidly growing demand from policy-makers for good, locally-based research. Capacity building to develop an active presence in poverty research came as a result of participation in networks, particularly through IDRC's MIMAP programme.

Only a few months after the institute began its research in this field, the Ministry of Economics and Finance involved them in the preparation of the first PRSP for Senegal. It is unusual for a policy research institute to establish itself as a key player so quickly – but CREA was in the right place at the right time, and seized this important opportunity. So this first step was opportune, but very important in establishing CREA as a key source of research and policy analysis on poverty, and helped ensure CREA's continued participation in research and the policy process. The institution has continued to focus and develop its expertise in poverty research, and now enjoys strong and durable partnerships with policy-makers in its government. Its research productivity, influence and impact on policy are widely recognized, both within Senegal and throughout the region.

CREA's experience highlights the importance of focusing on research which is relevant to emerging policy issues and is attuned to the demands of the users of research. Poverty, in this case, was a fast emerging issue in the African context and networks such as SISERA and MIMAP helped facilitate the transfer of knowledge and capacity building from the developed to the developing world.

CREA is a SISERA Partner Institution, and has received institutional support, training for its researchers and research project grants (through SAGA).

[138] The issue here may go beyond the government's appetite for ideas and research results. One must consider as well a government's 'absorptive capacity' – the ability of its policy analysts to understand the results of technical research and communicate the implications of this research to key policy-makers. Our discussions suggested that in many countries in which SISERA works, the demand side of the policy market is still very weak: many governments are unreceptive to new ideas and research findings, or if receptive, lack the staff with skills to understand technical research results well enough to identify the policy implications of the research. SISERA has certainly strengthened the supply side of the policy market, but in many countries the demand remains a significant obstacle to bridging the gap between research and policy.

[139] Whether SISERA could realistically extend its activities to strengthening analytical capacity within government is not at all clear, given SISERA's limited resources and the large number of countries in which it operates.

[140] Leaving aside these weaknesses on the demand side, Timmer's observations also help identify what may be the most important factor affecting whether SISERA's partner institutes have an impact on policy: sustained focus on a few key issues.

Table 7: Case Study - DPRU, ‘Breathing Space’ to help the Unit Refocus on Poverty and Labour Market Research

The Development Policy Research Unit at the University of Cape Town was founded in 1967, and played a key role during the apartheid era in supporting a broad range of independent research on social policy and labour issues. After the election of the first democratic government in 1994, many of the researchers in the Unit joined the government as key policy advisors. The Unit, however, lacked a clear focus on a manageable set of policy issues, since its work had grown to encompass a very wide range of issues, from social policy to regional integration.

Support from SISERA gave DPRU’s Director, Dr. Haroon Borhat, invaluable ‘breathing space’ which allowed him to refocus the Unit on a key issue facing post-apartheid South Africa: the endemic nature of poverty in South Africa, and its relationship to the country’s labour markets. SISERA’s financial support enabled the Unit to develop a longer term vision, allowed it to strengthen its human capital, pursue longer-term research initiatives and produce significant policy oriented research material on poverty and labour markets in South Africa.

This ‘breathing space’ proved crucial because it allowed DPRU to develop a new generation of researchers and a new portfolio of research on labour markets and poverty in South Africa. DPRU has been able to develop a research agenda which reflects the needs of policy-makers in South Africa. At the same time, it has consolidated its position as one of the strongest centres of research on poverty and labour markets in Africa, with key links to leading researchers internationally. DPRU collaborates with Cornell University, for example, in holding an annual conference on labour markets and poverty.

DPRU’s experience, Borhat suggests, may be useful for SISERA itself – the network’s expansion should proceed be followed through a careful selection of institutions and close monitoring. DPRU’s use of the ‘breathing space’ provided by SISERA emerges as a good lesson to be learned by the network. In its move to a new institutional home, SISERA might well pause and consider its present and future roles.

DPRU is a SISERA Partner Institute, and received institutional support grants in 2001/2 and 2002/3, and project support from SAGA in 2003/5.

[141] This condition is likely to prove the most important factor affecting policy impact. In order to achieve significant policy impact, initiatives typically have to be sustained for a significant period of time, so that the researchers involved are able to build strong relationships and establish trust with their counterparts in the government ministries. This is not an insurmountable obstacle for the institutes in the SISERA network, but it does require a sustained commitment over a long period of time. This would in turn entail a decision to focus on a specific and limited number of policy issues, since the resources available to these institutes are unlikely to be sufficient for long-term initiatives across a large number of policy areas. In order to be successful in policy outreach, then, SISERA’s partners may have to ‘place their bets’, focusing their efforts and resources on just a few key policy issues (and on the ministries and researchers likely to be involved in these issues), and sustain this focused commitment for over a period at least several years.

7.4 SISERA’s governance structure and staff composition

[142] This is addressed in more detail in Section 8. Two aspects of SISERA’s governance structure and staff composition are worth noting, however. First,

the present structure is very flat and simple. This is a distinct advantage for SISERA, since it facilitates the flow of information between the Steering Committee, the Staff and the Partner Institutions and in principle allows SISERA to act quickly and flexibly (provided, of course, the Secretariat is adequately staffed).

[143] Second, the Secretariat has seen considerable staff turnover since SISERA was launched. Despite this turnover, it has maintained a highly dedicated and professional work culture. The staff is involved in a large number and wide range of tasks and duties and, although this might result in overload, there was no evidence to suggest that these responsibilities, where properly assigned, have been neglected. In the cases where important tasks had not been carried out, it was clear that this was the result of a failure to assign the appropriate priority and clear responsibility for the task and to ensure that adequate resources are available. The most important example would seem to be responsibility for external representation, strengthening the visibility of SISERA and establishing a clear profile and brand, where it is clear that this was given too low a priority and assigned too few resources.

7.5 The relationship with other capacity building institutions in Africa

[144] Again, this relationship is assessed in Section 8. Our view is that although SISERA, AERC and ACBF have different institutional structures (SISERA is an IDRC Secretariat while the other two are independent institutions) they provide similar and in some cases competing assistance. Their strength, however, relies on their potential to provide complementary assistance.

8 AN INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

8.1 Assessment Framework

[145] In the discussion which follows, we will use an organizational assessment framework which has proved useful in the evaluation of capacity building initiatives:¹⁹

- i. Operational and adaptive capacities: does the organization possess adequate resources, knowledge and processes?
- ii. Organisational performance: is the organization capable of meeting its goals and achieving its mission?
- iii. External operating environment: what is the environment in which the organization carries out its activities?
- iv. Internal environment: what factors within the organization influence its direction and the emphasis given to its activities?

8.2 An Institutional Assessment of SISERA

8.2.1 Operational capacities

8.2.1.1 Personnel

[146] An important concern regarding operational capacity is the inability – since 2002 – to appoint a permanent Executive Director. This *has diminished the focus on the leadership of the Secretariat*. In addition and partly as a result of the lack of a permanent Executive Director, the workload on individual staff is far too high; the existing network includes over 20 economic research institutions in 18 countries, and in addition the Secretariat receives a steady stream of requests from new centres which wish to join the network, must deal with relationships with donors, and must function effectively in two working languages. It is abundantly clear that the Secretariat requires additional human resources in order to achieve its current objectives.

[147] The Secretariat acknowledges that in the future there will be a need to hire more staff, and do not foresee any problems in finding the right people for

¹⁹ Horton, Douglas, Anastasia Alexaki, et al. 2003. Evaluating Capacity Development: Experiences from Research and Development Organizations around the World. The Netherlands: ISNAR/ CTA; Canada: IDRC

the job; and it is certainly the case that so far they have been able to secure highly qualified personnel. At the same time, there is evidence that current staff numbers are too low: some centres in the network are visited only infrequently, and other centres are even difficult to contact by email or telephone. This suggests that there is insufficient staff to sustain regular contact with all the centres, and that additional staff, possibly based closer to these centres, are needed.

[148] The absence of a permanent Executive Director and more importantly, insufficient staff numbers seems also to have had an effect on the ‘orientation’ of SISERA. Current staff (e.g. financial assistant, program coordinator, program assistant and secretary) have quite understandably felt the need to focus on the internal organisation, process and activities, and so have paid less attention to outwardly oriented, ‘external’ activities such as raising the profile of SISERA among donors and the research community, establishing the SISERA ‘brand’ and participating in international conferences and workshops in order to gain exposure for SISERA.

[149] In terms of the training for staff, SISERA faces a challenge due to the heterogeneity of institutions and environments within which it works, which places a premium on having a skilled and well trained staff. Training may be constrained by budgetary resources, but we think it is more likely that the more important constraint is the pressure on staff time, which again is the result of insufficient staff numbers. Even if budgetary resources are not the principal constraint at present, it is important to note that if SISERA moves to a new institutional home in IDEP, proper provision for training is included in its annual budget, so that SISERA does not have to rely entirely on IDEP’s own training policies and provision.

8.2.1.2 Infrastructure, technology and financial resources

[150] Access to funding and funding sources has decreased in the recent past particularly due to the culmination of the funding cycle for some donors, which has resulted in gaps until the start of their next cycle. Initially SISERA received funding from IDRC, CIDA, USAID, Coopération Francaise, DGIS, the EU and the WBI. At present, only IDRC, Coopération Francaise and USAID (through the SAGA programme) are major donors, and changes in USAID policies give some concern regarding the longer term prospects for its support to SISERA. Recent developments have, however, been encouraging: SISERA has recently received a grant from AfDB and DGIS has approved one of CAD1.3 million over 4 years.

[151] Another problem experienced by SISERA has to do with timing of donor funding. The delay between the contract negotiation with donors and the signature of contracts has meant that on some occasions SISERA’s ability to provide support to the members of its network has been subject to delays, which frustrate the centres and reduce their loyalty to SISERA. In addition, the delays have meant that two donors finance the same line items in SISERA’s budget, which has created problems in financial accountability to donors. Exchange rate movements, and the fact that it works in eighteen countries with different exchange rates, has also had a significant negative

effect on SISERA's access to secure funding for its activities. This implies that technical support provided by SISERA has on occasion not been matched by the financial resources needed to support institutional strengthening.

[152] The Secretariat has determined that new sources of funding need to be secured for SISERA. An alternative approach, however, might be to develop (through technical assistance provided by SISERA) the research centres' own capacity to raise funds. This need has already been expressed by the directors of the partner institutions. While superficially attractive, this strategy poses a number of problems for SISERA, the most obvious one being the possibility of the 'disintermediation' of SISERA if donors find they are able to deal directly with research centres. In this case SISERA would have to offer competitive and attractive complimentary services to secure the continued 'loyalty' of centres that are successful in attracting such direct funding. It is also true that donors might not want to work with a diverse group of institutions. But on the other hand, this might give centres a broader range of possible donors or clients to work with; particularly in small projects for which it might be easier to obtain support.

[153] The availability of office space and technology will have to be re-evaluated if and when the move to IDEP takes place. The recruitment of a new Executive Director will lead to a need for more office space but this will ultimately depend on the role that IDEP plays in the functioning of SISERA and its future needs.

8.2.1.3 Strategic Leadership

[154] The inability to appoint a permanent Executive Director has created some difficulties for SISERA. Elias Ayuk has performed very well as Acting Executive Director. He has provided not only day-to-day leadership for the Secretariat but has also recently launched a valuable strategic planning exercise. Nevertheless, he has had to perform two demanding jobs, and the human resources of the Secretariat are stretched very thin indeed as a result. Centres in the SISERA network are clearly aware of this, and it has caused some concern among many of the centre directors and staff. It also seems to have contributed to SISERA's low profile and lack of 'brand recognition', since the Secretariat has not had the resources to devote to external representation and raising the profile of SISERA.

[155] SISERA recognises the need to develop strategic planning capacities among its own staff and has successfully launched a strategic planning exercise. Participatory methods are being used to ensure that the opinions of the partner institutions are taken into account in discussions of the network's strategic options. Final decisions are, however, made by the Steering Committee. Participation of the successful partners depends on SISERA's responsiveness to their concerns and expectations.

[156] A positive aspect of SISERA's organization is the simplicity of its governance structure. This facilitates communication between the Steering Committee and the research centres and is one of the sources of strength for SISERA. This communication is often indirect but now takes place more

directly through sessions attended by both the centre directors and the Steering Committee members.

8.2.1.4 Program and process management

[157] Timing is an important element of program and process management, and in this area, SISERA has experienced some difficulties. As in the case of funding, the hiatus between the approval of the work plan by the Steering Committee (SC) and the start of the financial year has made it necessary on occasion for the Secretariat to begin the implementation of an activity before it is approved by the SC. While this does not seem to have resulted in any serious difficulties, it is nevertheless an undesirable practice. Such difficulties could be overcome by a good information system so that the Steering Committee is aware of the work plan and the key implementation dates. Accountability and responsibility for the use of funds in these cases could be assigned to the research centres, reporting back to the Steering Committee.

[158] The simple and rather flat structure of SISERA and its governing body facilitates timely monitoring and evaluation of the performance of each staff member. The small size of the Secretariat also means that there are sometimes difficulties maintaining contact with individual centres, and there have been instances where the centres have not responded constructively to the Secretariat's suggestions. Similarly, the information submitted by the centres, both in terms of performance evaluation and in the case of the research proposals, is not always sufficient to allow SISERA to monitor the performance of the centres. Does this call for a uniform monitoring and evaluation system, which would require that each centre produce identical information, or should the monitoring and evaluation system continue to adapt to the capacities of each centre? Both options will require additional staff and closer monitoring of each institution, but the latter might make it difficult to compare performance across centres. On the other hand, a monitoring and evaluation system that gathered data on an ongoing basis would make it easier to assess the progress of the centres and would provide donors with more convincing evidence of SISERA's achievements.

8.2.1.5 Networks and linkages with other organisations and groups

[159] As shown in Figure 1, which depicts the SISERA network, the Secretariat acts as a hub connecting donors and the research centres. Networking and linking with stakeholders is therefore a crucial aspect of its capacities. SISERA has made this task easier by creating two sub-regional networks, SEAPREN and ROCAPE, but there is a risk that these might become more important to the centres, at SISERA's expense. To avoid this, SISERA should look for ways in which to integrate its activities with those of the sub-regional networks (which include institutes which are not members of the SISERA network).

[160] The Secretariat recognizes the need to increase its visibility among the donor community and to develop an outreach campaign to raise the profile of

SISERA and its activities. It is not clear, however, who will be responsible for this activity.

8.2.2 Adaptive capacities

8.2.2.1 Personnel

[161] The Secretariat's ability to adapt and respond to changes in the environment is significantly constrained by its current heavy workloads. The Programme Officers in particular need to keep abreast of issues such as emerging policy issues, donor priorities, as well as methodological advances and new research techniques. To do this they require time devoted to learning, reflection and innovation. This cannot be achieved with the current staff numbers and workloads.

8.2.2.2 Infrastructure, technology and financial resources

[162] SISERA is heavily dependent on IDRC and USAID for funding: such an undiversified portfolio of support not only carries significant risks in terms of financial vulnerability, but also constraints its ability to secure new donors. After the funding cycle of some of its initial donors has come to an end, SISERA now faces the challenge of finding new supporters, and new donors may be more interested in supporting other initiatives or only a subset of SISERA's activities. The current reliance on support from IDRC and USAID might therefore increase inflexibility rather than promote adaptability.

[163] As the network develops and acquires its own momentum, the centres will identify new needs and so are likely to make new demands on SISERA (particularly those which are more successful). Hence, SISERA needs to constantly improve its infrastructure and technological capacity to keep up with the evolving needs of its centres. For instance, although centres have requested online access to journals and other publications for use by their researchers, and this has been discussed at the Steering Committee, the request has not implemented.²⁰ If these demands remain unsatisfied, the sub-regional networks and other centre-to-centre links could develop outside the scope of the SISERA network and hence weaken it.

[164] The use of technology, among other issues, requires a more effective use of the internet. This could help SISERA overcome various difficulties such as communication problems, lack of transparent information among current and potential members, dissemination of work, difficulty in accessing research tools and services, etc.

8.2.2.2.1 SISERA's online presence

²⁰ Such a request may sound simple but in fact involved a complex process of negotiation; and meeting it is also expensive. SISERA has already received an offer of TEAL for a discount price of US\$20,000 per subscription.

- [165] The first point that needs to be made regarding SISERA's online presence is that its url is far from memorable, which discourages new users from accessing the site. In addition, SISERA appears within the IDRC website. This is perfectly appropriate, given SISERA's current status as an IDRC Secretariat, but it reinforces the close association of SISERA with IDRC, which has proved somewhat problematic, and makes it more difficult for SISERA to develop its own profile and identity. It would be preferable to register another url, such as www.sisera.org.sn.
- [166] The website could act either as a source of information for third parties (i.e. those outside Secretariat and the SISERA network) or as an 'intranet' for the network. The web page appears to be designed for the first purpose, i.e. to inform third parties, rather than to serve as an 'intranet' but in any event, it serves neither purpose well.
- [167] The web page provides basic information regarding the Secretariat and its activities but very little information (other than basic contact information) on the centres in the network. If the web page is designed to inform third parties of SISERA's success in building strong research centres, it does not achieve this objective. It lacks information about the centres themselves and about the specific projects or broader research topics in which they are engaged; these could be useful for other centres and third parties.
- [168] Nor does the website serve as an 'intranet' for the centres in the SISERA network. There is no secure intranet for members of the network and the information provided regarding procedures to access grants, technical support and training assistance is not detailed. Nor does the website provide access to reference libraries for use by researchers at the centres or show links to donors or end users.
- [169] The page displays only seven working papers produced by the centres in the network. This is a very small number, with no additions since 2002; and two of the seven papers share the same author. This is potentially very misleading, and might even lead a visitor to the site to think that the centres in the network have only produced seven papers since 1997! Our investigations revealed that the centres strongly prefer to publish their output in their own working paper series, which seldom acknowledge support from SISERA.
- [170] The current approach to working papers seems less than optimal. Instead of selecting only a small number of papers produced by the centres as 'SISERA output', it would seem far more sensible to insist, as a condition of institutional support, that SISERA support be acknowledged in *each and every piece of output* produced by the research centres. The SISERA website should then provide links to *all* the published output and activities of each of the centres in its network. It might even highlight especially interesting and important new publications or activities by the centres on the home page of the SISERA website, making it clear, of course, that these are activities of the Centres, not of SISERA. This would raise SISERA's profile as a disseminator of research and improve the visibility of the individual centres' working papers series.
- [171] The AERC and ACBF websites provide interesting contrasts with SISERA. They both have more accessible addresses (www.aercafrica.org and [66](http://www.acbf-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

pact.org) and provide much more information than SISERA. And although these are independent institutions (while SISERA is an IDRC secretariat) the higher visibility of AERC and ACBF was frequently raised in our interviews with researchers.

[172] AERC offers more information regarding its services and provides access to a well organised online library. It is possible to search through categories of research topics and types of documents. The library offers a small abstract of the document and the possibility to download an electronic version.

[173] AERC also provides access to an open discussion forum arranged by topics of interest. Another section provides links to regional institutions and centres with a small description of the organisation and the information and services available in their web pages. This page, as with the overall AERC web site, is interactive and allows the user to suggest new links (subject to approval).

[174] ACBF provides information on grants and guidelines for grant seekers. It offers links to information resources and websites, as well as access to related electronic journals through the ACBF Library and Information Centre.

[175] The ACBF web site also provides access to a complete list of projects with information on the institution, the budget and its main objectives and results. This is a very useful tool for other researchers, donor and en users.

[176] In conclusion, we recommend that SISERA should implement some basic changes to its online presence.

- i. Name: A more appropriate web address should be used. This will provide the Secretariat with another tool to raise the profile of the brand
- ii. Information resources: The SISERA web site should act as a portal for all stakeholders. Donors require more detailed information regarding the specific initiatives, the use of resources and the resulting products. Users need more access to final research, abstracts, presentations and user friendly tools they can use. Research centres need more access to supporting information, methodological tools, software, discussion forums, etc.
- iii. Interactivity: A good way to communicate with the Secretariat staff and Steering Committee and for them to constantly monitor the needs, concerns and perceptions of the member centres is to increase the ways through which they can interact within the SISERA web site. Contact information is not enough. Forms to suggest forums, discussions, literature, other networks' web sites, various links, improvements to the web site, follow up workshops, etc. could be easily included.
- iv. Differentiating the users: Because different users of the web site require different information it would be advisable to provide secure additional information through secure access for donors, centres and 'approved' users.

8.2.2.3 Strategic Leadership

[177] Although efforts have been made to develop the strategic focus and management of the secretariat, the severe time pressures on the staff limit the

time they have available for longer term planning. As a result, much of the reflection, organizational learning and innovation seem to be occasioned by external evaluations (see the evaluation by SYNAPSE in 2001). While these evaluations are needed to ensure accountability, the process of learning and adapting should be also conducted within the organization itself on an ongoing basis. This is important, not only for the effectiveness of SISERA, but for its ability to attract, motivate and retain good staff.

[178] As SISERA expands, governance will necessarily become more complex. Should the network expand, bringing in new members while retaining the current members, or should it replace existing members of the network, either at the top (the successful centres) or at the bottom (the unsuccessful centres)? It will need to manage not only the introduction of new members but the interaction of the network with the increasingly important sub-regional networks and other affiliated networks and institutions. How well prepared will it be to handle these changes as part of IDEP?

8.2.2.4 Programme and process management

[179] The Secretariat does not recognise any significant deficiencies in its adaptive capacities with respect to program and process management, and we agree with this assessment. The Secretariat does, however, acknowledge the need to monitor this issue as part of a move to IDEP. It is important to notice, however, that the evaluation has identified a problem in the timing of processes and SISERA's role as a hub between donors and centres. This is significant because it determines SISERA's ability to provide its members with timely assistance, which in turn requires quick access to funds.

[180] It has also been stated that the gap created by the failure to appoint a permanent Executive Director has filled, not only (and most importantly) by the Acting Executive Director, but also to a certain extent by the Steering Committee and IDRC's senior management. While expedient, it may be undesirable in the longer term: it tends to reinforce the perception of an overly strong link to IDRC and may even have made the need to appoint a permanent Executive Director seem less urgent. We view this as undesirable: a permanent appointment should be made without further delay.

8.2.2.4.1 Monitoring and Evaluation

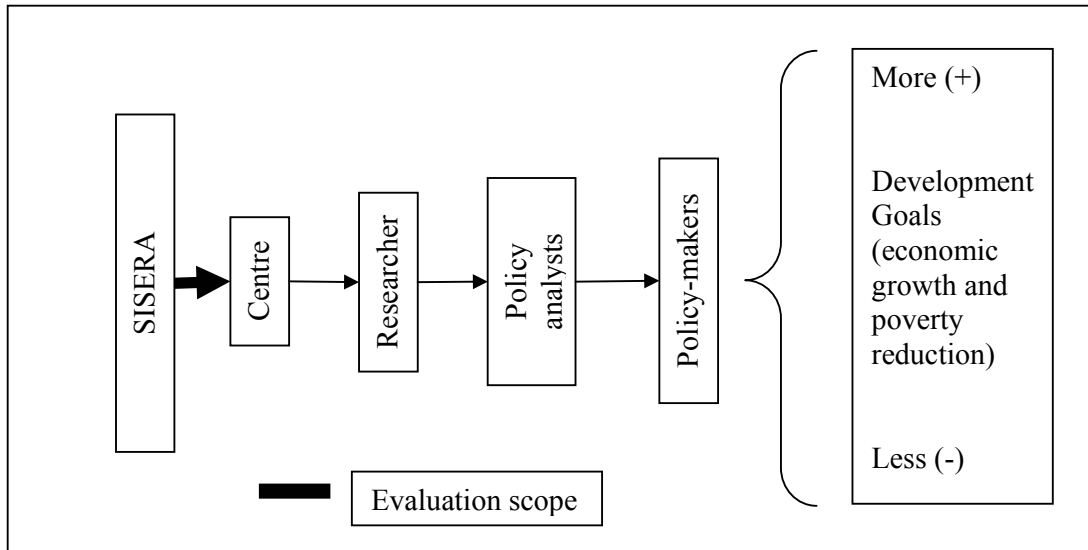
[181] Monitoring and evaluation is central to the development of adaptive capacities. SISERA's position in the very long chain of activities and behavioural changes that contribute to the ultimate goals of economic growth and poverty reduction in Africa makes monitoring and evaluation both more challenging and more important. It is difficult, to say the least, for SISERA to properly measure its success based on its own actions, because this success depends on the actions and behaviour of others; some of whom are only indirectly influenced by SISERA.

[182] SISERA's activities are, of course, ultimately focused on the institutions in its network. How can SISERA be sure that the changes it fosters in the centres' governance structures, facilities and procedures do have an impact on the attitudes and behaviour of the researchers and on the output of the

centres? And how can it know whether these changes in turn have any effect on policy-makers and policy analysts?

[183] Figure 4 shows a very simplified version of the causal chain that underlies SISERA’s mission and the current scope of its monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Figure 4: SISERA’s Influence and Its Approach to Evaluation



[184] Measuring the impact of policy research itself is widely regarded as a difficult and challenging exercise. Measuring the impact of initiatives to build capacity for policy research is harder still. Nevertheless, monitoring and evaluation of SISERA seems largely confined to some quantitative indicators of programme activities, with relatively few attempts to measure the impact of these activities on the behaviour of the centres in the SISERA network, and no systematic attempt to measure the impact of these centres on the policy process at the national level.

[185] The Progress Report by Activity for the SAGA Program is to some extent an exception, since it is based on the analysis of intermediate performance indicators. These indicators, however, only measure the extent to which SISERA carried out specific activities. They do not and are not designed to measure the achievement of its goals. This is something that requires a different approach, particularly in view of differences in the views expressed by the centres regarding SISERA’s performance and their perception of its impact on them. Clearer indicators will help build stronger support among its members and provide the Secretariat a better understanding of the obstacles which arise in meeting its goals.

[186] While acknowledging that this is a very difficult task, we would recommend that more systematic attempts be made in future to measure the impact of SISERA, in the first instance focusing on the institutions with which SISERA works directly – the centres in its network.

[187] We recommend the use of Outcome Mapping for this purpose. Outcome Mapping is designed to assist in the management, as well as the monitoring and evaluation, of development initiatives. It focuses not on the ultimate changes in the state of the world brought about by the initiative, but instead on the intended and actual changes in the behaviour of the initiative's 'boundary partners', those with whom it works directly. The focus is therefore on indicators which help reveal whether or not these programme's activities have had the intended effects on the behaviour of those targeted. A change in behaviour of 'boundary partners' is likely to be a more useful indicator of success or failure than the mere fact of completing a programme activity.

[188] This recommendation is further elaborated in Section 9.1.3 where SISERA's competitive advantages are discussed. An improved system for monitoring and evaluation will not only assist the staff in managing the network, but will also can provide SISERA with evidence of its (considerable) achievements, which will not only help raise the profile and visibility of the network, but also help convince donors to support SISERA.

8.2.2.5 Networks and linkages with other organisations and groups

[189] As it has been identified above, SISERA needs to engage with its counterpart organizations in the capacity building field in Africa. Rather than providing competing services or performing similar roles, these need to be coordinated. This coordination has been proved difficult to achieve in practice. The lack of a strong institutional brand that makes SISERA recognisable and appealing to successful centres in other networks or independent is also an obstacle that needs to be overcome.

8.2.3 Organizational performance

8.2.3.1 Relevance

[190] It is undeniable that the creation of SISERA responded to a real and important problem facing African countries. Economic research centres needed support to produce local research and bridge the gap between them and African policy-makers. In this sense the existence of SISERA and the strategies which it pursues were highly relevant in 1997 and remain just as relevant in 2004.

[191] The methods used by SISERA are well designed, since they effectively ensure continuous contact with the centres. This ensures that the staff, and through them the Steering Committee, are well aware of the changing internal and external conditions they have to face. For instance, visits to provide technical support and meetings with directors or financial officers provide SISERA staff with an opportunity to monitor the changing environments and capacities of the centres. The only difficulty at present is

the lack of human and financial resources, which make it difficult for SISERA to act on what it learns.

[192] The centres think that although SISERA does provide them with much appreciated support, more needs to be done to increase their communication with the Steering Committee. The request to have a rotating representative at the committee might respond to a perception that learning process by which SISERA keeps itself relevant to the needs of its members is perhaps too indirect.

[193] Innovation has suffered because of insufficient staff numbers and the disruption in funding due to the gap between the end of one cycle and the start of another. To be relevant, the Secretariat needs to adapt to the changing external environment. SISERA's success in capacity building of research institutions has, for example, created in some countries an imbalance with respect to the policy-making community. Politicians and government officials, as well as the private sector, have not developed the capacities needed to absorb the new knowledge produced by the centres. The interviews with directors of the centres and other individuals involved with SISERA point out at the need to address capacity building for this group.

8.2.3.2 Effectiveness

[194] While it is clear that SISERA has a clear mission, well known by its staff, it is not clear that this mission is known at all by all those affected by it. Not all staff at the partner institutes, for example, are aware of SISERA's support! In one case, a senior member of staff at a partner institution was not aware of SISERA, even though he was closely involved with the activities of SEAPREN! Although this may reflect individual idiosyncrasies, it is also true some responsibility rests with SISERA, whose profile is far too low. It is also not clear if SISERA has developed the right set of formal indicators to monitor the achievement of its goals. Instead, it relies heavily on activity indicators that do not adequately capture the extent of its influence.

[195] SISERA's annual reports are based on a qualitative analysis and narrative description of its activities, and present few if any quantitative indicators to measure the performance of the centres in its network, or of SISERA's contribution to the institutional strengthening process for these centres. Such indicators would be useful to guide the allocation of resources, to monitor individual centres and to raise awareness among the staff of the centres and others about SISERA's mission and its success in achieving this mission.

8.2.3.3 Efficiency

[196] In practice, SISERA has pursued what we describe as the '5 Ms' approach. The interviews showed that each director values the Ms in different ways. CEDRES's Director, for example, considers that Mentoring is invaluable for the reinforcement of capacities at the centre's level; CEPEC's director prefers Money as a means of acquiring equipment, which is desperately needed. For the head of DPRU also values Money, which he argues can buy 'breathing space' – time to think, plan ahead, identify new areas of research,

hire new staff, etc. Finally, Dr. Coulibaly (GREAT) regards Meetings as the most important component of the support provided by SISERA, since this provides researchers at his centre with new options and views; without these meetings, the researchers would remain isolated.

- [197] Although these are individual perceptions, they do suggest that not all are needed in equal measure by all centres. Hence SISERA must design more tailor-made interventions, considering the specific circumstances of the centres. Visits by SISERA Programme Officers to centres with highly experienced directors (e.g. DPRU, CREA, EPRC) or providing financial support to those with little absorptive capacity (e.g. GREAT) would not be an optimum use of financial and human resources. The examination of SISERA's activities does suggest that the weaker centres were given relatively more technical support and training of researchers.
- [198] Since the establishment of the governance structure, the SISERA network has grown in complexity. Its links with national, regional and international institutions has increased, two sub-regional networks have been created and, through them, new institutions have joined. And each centre now faces a different external environment with new internal capacities. This higher complexity means that the effective use of its limited financial and human resources is becoming increasingly important for SISERA.

8.2.3.4 Financial viability

- [199] SISERA has unfortunately become heavily dependent on IDRC and USAID, although other donors are in the process of renewing their support or are considering proposals put forward by the Secretariat. A significant portion (approximately 30%) of the resources necessary to fund the next phase of SISERA's activities has already been secured, but there is much still to be done.
- [200] Its training activities have also been curtailed by the withdrawal of the World Bank Institute (due to a change in its operating policies, not because of any dissatisfaction with SISERA) although the UNDP has emerged as a possible alternative. The current move to find a new institutional home at IDEP has been strongly influenced by this disruption and it is seen as a way of reversing it. SISERA needs to be more pro-active in this respect. Centre directors have acknowledged the need to build fundraising capabilities within their own institutions. SISERA must do the same. This does not imply that the Secretariat is failing in this area. It does, however, highlight the need to further expand the range of funding sources available to SISERA. If the Secretariat is to play the role as the hub of its network of centres, then it must respond more efficiently to the centres' funding needs. This may mean looking for smaller sources of funding for specific research projects, or supporting initiatives among one or two centres; a role more that more closely resembles a clearinghouse or broker.
- [201] Financial viability is hence strongly linked to SISERA's success or failure in promoting itself. So far, it is clear that its visibility is low relative to other competing institutions, such as ACBF, in the eyes of policy-makers and end users (e.g. Allechi M'Bet, Economic Advisor to the President of Cote

d'Ivoire). SISERA must embark on a marketing campaign to increase the visibility of its 'brand'. For this it must increase its staff numbers: without more staff, SISERA simply does not have the human resources to engage in a vigorous outreach programme.

[202] The financial viability of SISERA needs to be analysed in terms of what new challenges it will have to face in the future. It has been noted that a crucial area where intervention is needed is building absorptive capacity in the external environment, i.e. in the policy community.

8.2.4 External environment

[203] We have noted throughout this document that the external environment in which SISERA operates has changed; and these changes are due partly to SISERA's own actions.

[204] Two changes in SISERA's external environment are particularly important:

- The increased strength of some of SISERA's partner institutes, which now play an vital and dynamic role in the process of policy dialogue and design in their countries
- A dramatic shift in the way aid modalities, as donors move from project-oriented to programme-oriented support such as SWAPS and pooled funding, and from these modalities to general budget support. This shift will, over time, have profound implications for the policy research institutes in SISERA's network.

[205] Many of the partner institutes in SISERA's network are outstandingly successful, and play an important role in their country's policy process. As the suppliers of policy research grow in strength and sophistication (in some, but not all countries, of course) the constraints imposed by the demand side of the policy 'market' become increasingly important.

[206] It has become increasingly necessary to address the existing capacity of the users of the public good (knowledge) that the research centres produce. While SISERA has focused on the supply of policy research, less has been done regarding the demand for such research.

[207] It has been noted that SISERA's 'success stories' are associated with the adoption of a sustained commitment to a programme of research that focuses on a few key policy issues. This requires not only stability within the centres, but also on the part of governments and donors. Volatility of governmental policy and donor interests will discourage centres from devoting time and resources to a small number of topics over a lengthy period and will instead promote opportunism in designing research programmes and giving policy advice.

[208] Sustained focus on the part of the centres, then, needs to be accompanied by patience and sustained encouragement and support on the part of users and donors. SISERA already plays a role linking researchers with end users; it must also include the promotion longer-term planning in order to encourage

sustained focus, and must attempt to educate both policy makers and donors of the advantages of taking a longer term view.

[209] Francophone centres still report a sense of isolation from others in the region, particularly with respect to the Anglophone ones. This isolation is deepened by the strong hierarchical structures that govern social relations in general and those between researchers and policy-makers and other users, in particular. There is little demand for research and those that do demand it, undervalue it greatly.

[210] Economic research in Sub-Saharan Africa has to be unavoidably tied to the fight against poverty. Not surprisingly, the centre's directors have requested training in poverty reduction policies; and those focusing on poverty related research have been successful in reaching policy makers at their national governments and regional organisations. While there is an internal component in this, the external environment still to a large extent determines the demand for policy analysis. Policy-makers in some countries still have a 1990s mindset, looking primarily to the IFIs and the bilateral and multilateral donors for guidance on 'what policies matter'. In this sense, dependence persists, and a key challenge for SISERA and its partners is to make policy-makers more aware of local alternatives.

[211] More specifically for SISERA, uncertainties in the external environment have considerably complicated its funding strategy. Perceptions of its closeness to IDRC have complicated its relationships with some donors, and the move to IDEP has been extremely protracted, with no assurance of ultimate success. The relationship with this potential new host is uncertain. Given all these uncertainties, the dedication of the Secretariat are even more impressive.

[212] There are also changes underway in the external environment that are likely to have a profound impact over the longer term, not only on SISERA but also on policy research in developing countries more generally.

[213] The 'aid business' has undergone an important shift in the past five years, 'projects' to 'programmes'. Old style aid consisted largely of isolated projects, driven by donor imperatives and largely disconnected from the recipient country's own development plan. The new approaches are based around SWAPs (Sector Wide Approaches to Programming), pooled donor funding and general budgetary support.

[214] The idea behind SWAPS is simple: donor funding should focus not on projects, but on an entire sector, and all donor funding for a sector should support the government's own programme for that sector. The government, not the donors, should take the lead in formulating and implementing policies for the sector. This in itself is a big change from project-based aid, and beyond SWAPs lie even more radical changes. 'Pooled funding' is the next step, in which donors pool their money in an account earmarked for that sector. Beyond pooled funding is general budgetary support, in which donors provide assistance that is not earmarked for a specific sector, but supports the general expenditure policies of the government.

[215] This new style of development assistance is likely to have important impacts on the policy process in developing countries, with policy initiatives which

are larger, and sector wide, as well as a greater emphasis on the host country's ex ante ability to establish policy priorities and specify the desired impacts of its policies at sectoral and aggregate levels, and its ex post ability to monitor and measure policy impact (for its own purposes, and as part of accountability to the donors). Direct budget support in particular is likely to accelerate the trend toward host country project acquisition and contracting of development initiatives, with a consequent emphasis on local experts and expertise, as well as and a greater emphasis on financial management systems to reduce fiduciary risk faced by the donors.

[216] This trend has significant implications for policy research institutes:

- Direct budget support will accelerate the trend toward host country project acquisition and contracting and a more diverse group of clients;
- Decision-making will be decentralized, with donor agency field offices increasingly setting the agenda;
- Projects, where they still exist, will tend to be smaller and of shorter duration, with an increasing emphasis on local experts and expertise;
- Where large, sector-wide projects are tendered, they are likely to be much larger in scale than in the past and cut across different areas of expertise, not often covered by any one institution;
- Demand from donors at their headquarters level is likely to be for expertise which helps them to set the policy agenda for future assistance programmes, and to create mechanisms for channelling assistance to end users in ways which minimize the fiduciary risks to the donors and to monitor and evaluate the impact of these new funding modalities

[217] These changes present both opportunities and (in the longer term) threats to policy research institutes:

[218] The opportunities are clear – the shift to general budget support, devolved decision-making and local contracting should increase the demand for 'local' policy analysis on the part of developing country governments. This increased demand should widen the opportunities available to the policy research institutes already in the SISERA network and stimulate the emergence of new centres which can in time join the network.

[219] At the same, time, changes in aid modalities will pose serious problems for policy research institutes in developing countries (and not merely those in the SISERA network). At present policy research institutes in developing countries have a range of potential clients – bilateral and multilateral donors, the IFIs, their own government, international consulting firms, etc. If carried to its logical conclusion, the shift to general budget support will replace this range of clients with a single client – the country's own government.

[220] If there is a single purchaser in the market for policy research, this purchaser will have considerable market power, and this will have an important effect on the independence of policy research institutes, and possibly even on the quality of research they carry out. It will be difficult, for example, for any research institute to publish research critical of or embarrassing to the government when that government is the only purchaser of policy research.

[221] It might be argued, of course, that policy research institutes everywhere in the world face the same problem: the government (or the public sector) is very often a large, if not the largest client for policy research. Why isn't the independence of these institutes under threat?

[222] The difference is that policy research institutes in developed countries typically have a more diverse range of funders, which include the philanthropic sector (foundations and wealthy individuals) and the private sector (corporations). These serve to offset the importance of the government as a client.

[223] There does not exist, however, any tradition of support for policy research by the philanthropic sector or the private sector in developing countries, and it seems very unlikely that such a tradition will develop in the near future. As a result, it may be that donors may have to make commitments over the longer term to secure the independence of policy research institutes, and this may be one role that SISERA might play – as an efficient channel for such long term support.

8.2.5 Internal environment

[224] SISERA enjoys a productive internal environment. In its short history, it has created a strong governance structure. Its staff is highly motivated and dedicated to its work and is currently addressing the challenges it faces in dealing with changes in its external environment.

[225] The organisation's mission is clear to all those working in SISERA, and our investigations showed that policy-makers and practitioners involved with economic research and policy-making in the region are also well aware of SISERA and its approach to capacity building. Partner institutions, with some exceptions, agree with these methods and welcome the emphasis on institutional capacity building.

[226] The organisational structure of SISERA, as described throughout Section 8, is strong and simple. This allows the fast flow of information and the effective and efficient delivery of assistance to the research centres.

[227] SISERA does, however, have face difficulties with respect to the incentive and rewards systems available to its staff and member institutions. One possible reason for the long delay in appointing a permanent Executive Director may have been the inability to offer a competitive salary, which in turn was due to the need to consider relativities with respect to IDRC salary levels. Other factors may have played a role as well, of course, including the uncertainties resulting from the protracted move to IDEP.

[228] It has also some difficulties in the incentives and rewards faced by the centres. They need to be more proactive and rely less on SISERA's (admirable) persistence in encouraging the submission of funding proposals, and more on their own efforts to seek out alternative funding sources and strengthen their contacts with users of their research.

[229] In general, SISERA's internal environment is an institutional strength. It provides it with an important balance to the changing and volatile external environment.

9 CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES: OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

[230] In this section we discuss the challenges and risks facing SISERA in the context of its current objectives and identify new strategic opportunities.

[231] We believe that SISERA must address four strategic issues over the medium term:

- The Programme’s strategic directions, i.e. whether it should continue to focus on its current set of activities, or attempt to diversify its portfolio of activities.
- Whether SISERA can exist as a “stand alone” institution, or alternatively should seek another institutional home or a long-term, strategic partner – and if so, how this partner should be chosen. A number of institutional homes or partnerships are of course possible, but extensive and lengthy discussions have taken place over the past two years with a view to locating SISERA within the Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), a United Nations agency based in Dakar.
- Both the choice of strategic directions and the choice of an institutional home or long-term partner raise issues concerning SISERA’s management and governance.
- The need for a higher and more stable level of funding over the medium term, which is in turn linked to the perceptions of SISERA among donors and potential supporters of the programme; the need to establish a clear identity and a higher profile for SISERA among the donor community; and the impact on this identity and profile of SISERA’s current relationship with IDRC and its future relationship with IDEP and the UN System.

9.1 Strategic directions

[232] The choice of strategic directions for SISERA should take account of three key considerations:

- i. At what level should the programme target its interventions? Individual researchers, clusters of researchers, or economics faculties within the public university system?
- ii. Has the programme successfully addressed the barriers to the lack of good quality policy analysis by locally based researchers that were identified in 1997? If so, are there now different obstacles that the programme should tackle?

- iii. What is the competitive advantage of the programme vis à vis other capacity building initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa? That is, which of the six roles can SISERA play more effectively than its competitors?

9.1.1 The Level at Which Interventions take Place

[233] This is an important issue. Capacity building interventions can take place at a number of levels, and there are clear tradeoffs in choosing among the levels. This is very clearly set out in the Kennan Institute report on the humanities and social sciences in the former Soviet Union:

“... Given the enormity of the problems facing the region’s intelligentsia, where are the points of entry for Western organizations? Where can we get the most “bang for the buck,” and have the greatest impact? Where can our efforts best complement existing programs? The challenges are so large that programs must be targeted to address specific goals, and coordinated with other programs to maximize gain. Working with and supporting individual scholars is not sufficient, as those scholars must rely in the end on sustainable and collegial institutions. Working to reduce the impact of large, structural problems requires a scale of effort beyond the scope of any single Western institution as well as a long-term time horizon that is similarly unrealistic. Broad, systemic reform requires interaction with national bureaucratic and political institutions which, while not impossible, can diminish a program’s positive impact.”²¹

[234] As the Kennan Institute report makes clear, there are important tradeoffs involved in choosing the level of intervention. Intervention at the individual level has many attractions: it is easier to design incentives to encourage higher quality research, and to ensure accountability and transparency when one is dealing with individuals. AERC in sub-Saharan Africa, CEPR in Europe, NBER in North America – and the EERC Russia Programme – are clear testimonies to the advantages of interventions at the individual level.

[235] On the other hand, such interventions fail to acknowledge that individual researchers do rely on the existence of well functioning institutions through which they can pursue their professional careers. Such institutions are important not only because they provide a salary and an income, but also because they facilitate the sharing of knowledge, interaction with one’s peers and scrutiny of research that are important in ensuring that improvements in the quality of research can be sustained outside the activities of the networks to which individual researchers may belong. If such well functioning institutions do not exist, then individual economists, if they are well trained, will typically pursue a mixture of teaching activities (through a university)

²¹ Bronson, S., N. Popson, B. A. Ruble, ‘Sustaining Intellectual Communities: A Strategy for Rebuilding the Social Sciences and Humanities in the Former Soviet Union from Within’, in *The Humanities and Social Sciences in the Former Soviet Union: An Assessment of Need*: Washington: The Kennan Institute, 2000.

and consultancy (typically with donor or government clients). Consultancy, while financially remunerative for the individual researcher, is typically a 'bilateral' relationship between the consultant and the client, involving proprietary information that may not emerge in the public domain. As a result, there are relatively few spillovers from this work into the local research community, either in terms of spreading knowledge or improving research standards.

[236] Since there are clear difficulties and drawbacks to interventions at both the individual and the systemic levels, it is tempting to consider interventions at a point between these two levels, and the Kennan report advocates the pursuit of this strategy:

“As this report makes clear, we believe that steering a middle course between the large-scale programs, which seek to reform the system of higher education, and the small-scale programs, which seek to support scholars with individual grants, is the most sensible point of entry at this time. This middle ground can be viewed in a number of ways – rebuilding professional life, sustaining intellectual communities, building an infrastructure for the ‘invisible university’ – all capture to some extent the type of programming we believe can be most effective in addressing the problems at hand. The report will first set forth a review of the problems, then proceed to a discussion of existing models, and will conclude with a proposal for a comprehensive strategy for addressing what we view as ‘the missing middle.’ ”²²

[237] In retrospect, the initial decision to focus SISERA's efforts on building institutional capacity in policy research institutes roughly corresponds to the “missing middle” identified in the Kennan Institute Report. At present in SSA, AERC deals essentially with individual researchers through its grants competition and training activities. SISERA on the other hand has explicitly targeted its activities at policy research institutes. This reflected an explicit choice in the initial programme design and has proved, by and large to be successful, in the sense that it has built institutional capacity to carry out policy research, and a number of institutes which it has supported are now well managed, with highly qualified research staff and play a significant role in their country's policy process.

[238] SISERA does, of course, face competition in the institutional capacity building area from ACBF. It is noteworthy, however, that ACBF has to some extent reoriented its strategy recently, giving less emphasis to creating and strengthening institutions and more emphasis on “knowledge networking”. To the extent that this does represent a shift in direction for ACBF, it would suggest that the need for an institution such as SISERA will grow and not diminish, as the demand for local policy research capacity grows with

²² Bronson, S., N. Popson, B. A. Ruble, ‘Sustaining Intellectual Communities: A Strategy for Rebuilding the Social Sciences and Humanities in the Former Soviet Union from Within’, in *The Humanities and Social Sciences in the Former Soviet Union: An Assessment of Need*: Washington: The Kennan Institute, 2000.

changes in aid modalities, while there are less support for institutional strengthening.

[239] The decision to focus SISERA on institutional capacity building was, then, easy to justify both at the time and in retrospect. The need to strengthen policy research institutes will, if anything, increase over the medium term. We would not, therefore, recommend that SISERA change this core focus of its activities. Instead, the challenge is to secure the additional financial and human resources that will allow SISERA to pursue this core objective more effectively in future.

9.1.2 Obstacles to Improved Policy Analysis – Then and Now

[240] The initial programme design in 1997 identified weaknesses in the capacity of policy research institutes. The operating assumption which formed the basis of SISERA's initial strategy, and which has been maintained subsequently, is that there exists in most countries adequate individual capacity to carry out policy research and analysis, in the sense that there were a sufficient number of well trained researchers, and that if deficiencies in the number of well trained researchers exist, they can be addressed by AERC. The key obstacle to improved local policy research was identified as the lack of well functioning research institutions.

[241] Our evaluation of the programme suggests that this assumption was correct for some, but not all of the countries of the region, and that in some of the countries in which SISERA experienced difficulties, this may have been due to the scarcity of trained researchers. Some of SISERA's attempts to strengthen institutions have been unsuccessful in part because of the lack of good researchers to staff these institutions.

[242] There have, however, been significant changes in the research community and the policy-making environment since 1997, and the key question now facing the SISERA is how its strategy should be designed to respond to these changes.

[243] The key changes in the policy environment include:

- There is a growing sense of self confidence within Africa, as evidenced by NEPAD and other initiatives, and with it, a sense that western, donor-funded policy research is neither necessary nor sufficient in order to inform the policy process in Africa.
- There are now stronger linkages between policy research institutes and the policy community in some countries, but the demand for policy research and government's absorptive capacity remains an obstacle to bridging the gap between research and policy in many countries.

[244] The research environment has changed as well:

- A growing number of well run policy research institutes, producing high quality policy relevant research which has a significant impact on the policy process

- Collaborative research between scholars in North America and Europe, and those in Africa has emerged, and is now an important part of the work of both AERC and SISERA (through the SAGA project).

[245] There have also been shifts in some donor priorities, including

- Fatigue with capacity building
- Some impatience with the lack of a demonstrable impact of capacity building on policy-making

9.1.3 SISERA's Competitive Advantage

[246] Here it is useful to return to the roles played by networks, and SISERA's ability to play these roles.²³

[247] Broadly speaking, we can identify six possible roles which can be played by networks:

- Filter
- Amplifier
- Investor / Provider
- Facilitator
- Convenor
- Community builder

[248] How well placed is SISERA to play these roles? It is clear that the programme can and does act as an investor, through its grants and training activities, and this has formed a large part of its work. It has also acted as a facilitator through organizing training workshops, the publication of the SISERA Working Paper series, and other activities. It has not been particularly active as an amplifier, and currently does not devote significant resources to this role, but there is no reason to think it would not have the technical competence to play this role should it decide to do so. SISERA, through its programme of technical assistance, staff visits to centres, and meetings of centre directors has also helped build a sense of community among the directors and staff of the centres in its network.

[249] Assessing SISERA's ability to play the other two roles, of filter and convenor, is more complex. The programme has the technical and managerial capacity to play these roles, but one must first be clear whether SISERA is well placed to operate as an intermediary between research users (in the policy community) and research producers (based in the centres in its network), or whether its primary role is to act as an intermediary between donors and the research centres in its network.

[250] Our view is that the latter role is the one that SISERA can play more effectively. It should not seek to act as an intermediary between research

²³ Portes, R. and S. Yeo, *'Think-Net': The CEPR Model of a Research Network*
http://www.cepr.org/AboutCEPR/CEPR/CEPR_think.pdf

users and research producers, first, because it has no particular technical or informational advantage in doing so, and second, because this undermines the role and credibility of the research centres which it is trying to strengthen.

[251] It is clear that SISERA has no informational advantage in acting as a filter or convenor between research users and producers within a particular country. SISERA's partner institute in that country knows these users and producers much better than SISERA. There is little if any need for SISERA to act as a clearing house or filter for good research, since the research and policy communities are already well acquainted with each other at the national level. If SISERA is to play the role of a filter, it will only be through identifying, and linking good researchers outside the country with policy-makers who would not otherwise have knowledge of these researchers. To a certain extent the Programme does this already in an indirect fashion, through its workshops and website, but this does not seem to be either focused or effective.

[252] SISERA is better placed to perform the filtering and convening roles with respect to institutions based outside Africa (for example donors, international organizations, other research institutions, etc.). Such institutions, because they are based outside Africa, will have less knowledge of local researchers and institutions. In this case, SISERA can play an effective "brokering role" between local researchers and research institutes and the rest of the world. To some extent the programme has already begun to play this role with respect to the EAGER and SAGA projects, and has done this very effectively.

[253] To make use of its competitive advantage, SISERA has to:

- Make it an explicit part of its strategy;
- Devise ways of exploiting this advantage; and
- Make it visible.

[254] To make itself more visible, SISERA has to exploit as many mechanisms as possible. We have suggested a stronger online presence and a hands-on approach towards publications and dissemination of work. We have also emphasised the importance of introducing monitoring and evaluation systems that would allow SISERA to track its achievements and collect evidence to demonstrate its effectiveness.

[255] We noted above that although SISERA does currently monitor its activities with respect to the centres in its network, its monitoring and evaluation does not attempt to track in any detail (i) changes in behaviour of researchers, (ii) activities of the centres and (iii) changes in behaviour and activities of other stakeholders. Our suggestion is that the scope of SISERA's evaluations be extended to changes in behaviour of the centres, and that the centres are given the responsibility for evaluating their researchers and use to which their research is put.

[256] This is important because it was clear to us, based on the interviews, that not all centres or individual researchers used SISERA's assistance in the same way. Changes in attitude are not within the control of SISERA, and indeed are difficult to engineer. SISERA can, however, by augmenting its monitoring and evaluation process, help assess the extent to which its

activities have the effect of improving the research capacity of centres and researchers in Africa and the resulting change in quantity and quality of research output. It can also evaluate the way in which the network, as a whole, has an effect on policy makers and policy in the region.

[257] Each centre should then, in turn, be encouraged to track these effects on the boundary partners within their sphere of influence. Have policy makers changed their policies or views based on the research produced or consultancies offered? By mapping the direct outcomes of specific activities, SISERA can produce a clearer picture of the effectiveness of its assistance and the use that individual centres and researchers make of it.

9.2 The Need for an Institutional Home or Strategic Partnership

[258] Before considering possible institutional homes for SISERA, one should first ask whether the programme does indeed need a home, or whether it has a sustainable future as a free standing institution. Our view is that the programme might be organized as a free standing and autonomous institution. The experience of other research networks does, however, suggest that some practical difficulties are likely to arise from such an arrangement, which must be addressed carefully.

[259] Arguments in favour of merging SISERA with a partner or placing it within a host institution are based on:

- administrative and managerial economies of scale and scope
- the lack of critical mass within such an institution as small as SISERA (which is much smaller than AERC, for example)
- the current absence of any clear governance structure for the programme
- the potential intellectual and professional isolation of the person heading the programme, if the programme is located outside an academic institution or a policy research institute
- the difficulty of fundraising for a purely “virtual” institution such as SISERA

[260] None of these arguments are in principle compelling enough to make the case for or against an institutional home or long-term partnership. It is thus worthwhile considering the experience of other research networks.

9.2.1 A ‘Free Standing’ SISERA?

[261] In this respect it is useful to examine whether other networks are housed within larger institutions or have a long-term relationship with partner organizations. NBER is independent and free standing, but is situated near and has close links to the Harvard and MIT economics departments (which has caused it to be identified with the Harvard and MIT faculty and has

occasionally caused difficulties with the Bureau's relationship to other economics departments). CEPR is an independent institution, with no formal links to a university or other institution, but close working relationships with research centres in Brussels, Milan and elsewhere. AERC is also independent, but has close working relations with universities through its collaborative M.A and Ph.D programmes. The Economic Research Forum (ERF) in the Middle East is also independent of universities and other institutions. In this respect it is worth noting that AERC and ERF are entirely donor funded and each has a governance structure which is based around a board composed of donors, which deals with finance and management issues; and a scientific advisory committee, which is responsible for the research agenda and quality of the research output.

[262] CEPR and NBER are thus relatively free standing institutions, while AERC and ERF are independent, but closely linked to their donors. CEPR and NBER have dealt with the intellectual isolation issue in different ways: NBER through its close physical proximity to Harvard and MIT, and CEPR by appointing a distinguished researcher as its Research Director (who works closely with the Chief Executive Officer) and by organizing its activities into seven 'research programmes', each with two Programme Directors, who have considerable responsibility for providing intellectual leadership and quality control in their programme area. The Chief Executive Officer of CEPR thus has a sizeable group of academics with whom she works closely in selecting research priorities, raising funds for individual projects, appointing Research Fellows and Affiliates as members of its network. It is noteworthy that AERC has not chosen to organize its activities into programme areas in quite the same way, and does not have a senior academic to provide leadership and quality control in each of the sub-fields in which it is active.²⁴ It is noteworthy as well that AERC experienced some difficulties in the past in recruiting and retaining an Executive Director, and its research and policy outreach activities lost some momentum for a time as well. Its training programmes are, however, highly regarded, and it is interesting that the newly appointed Executive Director is the former head of its training programme.

[263] The experience of these networks also suggests that governance issues can and do arise, particularly with free standing networks. NBER is very much the creation of Martin Feldstein, who continues to run the Bureau, playing a much stronger role than the directors of its programmes. It is not clear how the governance structures of NBER operate, if at all, given the dominance of its founder. CEPR has undergone a succession from its founding Director to a Chief Executive Officer, which has been eased to a certain extent by the presence of a strong Research Director and a large number of active Programme Directors, who have provided continuity in its intellectual leadership. Since CEPR relies on a very diverse group of funders, an appropriate governance structure has been less obvious, and governance at the board level has proved more problematic for CEPR than has intellectual continuity in the research programme. AERC and ERF, being entirely donor funded, have a governance structure based on a donor consortium, with a

²⁴ Instead, its Advisory Committee and Resource Persons play this general role, but are more active during the biannual workshops than at other times.

scientific advisory committee responsible for the research agenda. Governance in these free standing networks has proved to be less of an issue, largely because of the dominant role played by a small set of donors. These networks have, however, been somewhat less successful in ensuring strong intellectual leadership for their activities, since the scientific advisory committees typically meet only once or twice a year and are relatively inactive at other times.

[264] One might conclude from these examples that a research network can in principle be autonomous and free standing, but that in practice intellectual isolation and governance can be issues. Intellectual isolation can be addressed either through a close association and physical proximity to a strong centre of research and teaching, or by creating a structure in which responsibility for the activities of the network is to some extent decentralized through the creation of programme areas which correspond to the sub-fields of the discipline.

[265] On balance, we believe that these arguments do suggest that SISERA would find it difficult to sustain itself as a free standing institution, unless it has strong links to a teaching / training and research institution, or adopts the CEPR model with programme areas directed by senior researchers from the sub-field (which seems less appropriate for SISERA, given its very broad remit for capacity building).

9.2.2 An Institutional Home or Strategic Partnership?

[266] If SISERA does need a home, the first point to note is that the appropriate choice of a home depends on what SISERA is and does. It is not sensible to select a new home for SISERA without first clarifying its future role and strategies. The choice of strategic directions is still under discussion, but the point to remember is any choice of strategic directions has implications for the choice of a partnership or a merger.

9.2.2.1 Symmetry or Asymmetry?

[267] The problems which the experience of other networks suggests are likely to arise in a free standing institution suggest that it might be advisable to locate SISERA programme within another institution. Such an arrangement could take one of two forms, symmetric or asymmetric:

- The programme might be “housed” within another economic policy research institute or university department of economics. In this arrangement there is symmetry between the partners, in the sense that both the programme and its partner are involved in teaching and/or research. Since the institutions have similar missions, maintaining distinct operating and governance structures is bound to seem artificial and unnecessary in the longer term, and so a symmetric arrangement seems likely to lead eventually to a full merger of the institutions involved.
- The alternative is one in which the programme is “hosted” by another institution which is not primarily or exclusively engaged in policy

research or capacity building in economics. This arrangement is asymmetric, in the sense that SISERA and its host would have somewhat different missions. Maintaining a distinct identity and mission for the programme seems more likely under an asymmetric arrangement, since the institutions involved are likely to have somewhat different missions, operating procedures and governance structure, and so merging these structures will be less natural and straightforward.

[268] Under an asymmetric arrangement, SISERA is likely to operate as a “project” or “secretariat” of the host institution. There are many precedents for such an arrangement, but typically these involve adopting the operational systems and procedures of the host institution, but maintaining a separate governance structure, usually in the form of a steering committee which focuses on strategic choices for programme activities and the recruitment of senior management. Financial administration and oversight (and often human resources management) are dealt with through the adoption of the host institution’s systems and procedures.

[269] This is in essence the situation since 1997: SISERA has existed as a Secretariat within IDRC – a much larger institution, with a broader mandate than SISERA. IDRC has long experience of this model, in which an initiative functions as a secretariat, typically housed within an IDRC regional office. IDRC secretariats use IDRC’s financial and accounting systems and follow its personnel procedures.²⁵ Responsibility for the substance of the secretariat’s activities lies with a Steering Committee, on which a range of stakeholders are represented, along with a senior IDRC official. Each secretariat is led by an Executive Director, who is responsible to an IDRC staff member on a day to day basis, but more broadly to the chair of the Steering Committee as well.

[270] The IDRC model has been extensively documented and codified and would seem to offer a useful blueprint for any ‘asymmetric’ relationship between SISERA and an institutional host.²⁶ Such an asymmetric arrangement will in many respects resemble the relationship between SISERA and IDRC, of course. If appropriately modified, there is no reason why such a relationship could not be successful with a different host, whether this is IDEP or another institution.

[271] The IDRC document identifies five issues which are essential for the success of the secretariat model:

- *strategic direction*, which involves the alignment of the secretariat’s vision, mission and core values with those of its host institution (in this case IDRC)
- *the need to develop a sound and realistic business plan* for the guidance of the secretariat’s management and for scrutiny by the secretariat’s steering committee and the host institution’s board; the business plan

²⁵ IDRC defines a secretariat as “a program unit which is legally part of IDRC, headed by an Executive Director, and funded and governed in partnership with others.” In the present context an institution hosting SISERA in the future would play a role similar to that played by IDRC since 1997.

²⁶ *The Strategic Framework for Secretariats at IDRC*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre

must address the issues of focus, capacity and the quality of the relationships with the host institutions

- *a systematic approach to performance management*, which addresses not only the implementation of the scientific program but also the general performance of the secretariat, using criteria which include relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and financial viability
- *an accountability framework*, which comprises the key accountability relationships; a description of the duties which are owed by those who are accountable; and the auditing approaches needed to exercise accountability, which take into account the dual accountability of a secretariat, to its host institution, and to its steering committee donors
- *operations and structure*, including human resources issues (the status of the secretariat's director within the host institution), and the accessibility of the administrative and support services provided by the host institution

[272] IDRC's experience in creating secretariats suggests the importance of giving careful attention to each of these issues *before* the decision is taken to create a secretariat within IDRC. Failure to address these issues has typically resulted in a lack of focus and unclear mandate for the secretariat, confusion and disagreements over accountability, and difficulty in attracting support from other donors.

[273] The IDRC experience suggests the importance of careful ex ante planning in designing the relationship between IDRC and one of its secretariats. The same issues will inevitably arise in selecting and negotiating with a potential host institution, for example in organizing SISERA's transition from its current status into a new status within, say, IDEP. It would therefore seem to be important that sufficient time is allowed not only to select the host institution, but also to ensure that each of the issues identified above are addressed clearly and explicitly in any agreement with the host institution.

9.2.2.2 IDEP as an institutional home

[274] A series of concerns regarding SISERA's current governance and functioning have been raised during the course of our evaluation. These concerns should be dealt with before the move to IDEP or at least be placed at the top of the agenda of IDEP's dealing with SISERA.

[275] Francophone centres suggested that SISERA has staff shortage and because of that it has been unable to adhere to deadlines. The Secretariat does not agree with this observation, and we are somewhat sceptical as well: it seems that many of the delays which were mentioned to us are the result of slow responses by the centres to requests by the Secretariat. But it is also evident that staff shortages mean that the Secretariat cannot always assess as fully as it might wish the environment in which potential members of the network operate before awarding them grants or technical support; even though this is obviously desirable.

[276] As SISERA moves to IDEP some staff members might be called to carry out other activities such as teaching, which will stretch its resources even more

thinly, and will require hiring additional staff. Before these decisions are made, SISERA needs to determine its future mission and objectives and so establish the appropriate level of staff resources needed to achieve its objectives.

[277] SISERA has functioned without a permanent Executive Director for over two years. This has had an effect on its relation to donors, users and research centres. More importantly, it has had a tendency to dampen SISERA's initial momentum and as a consequence SISERA has lost an opportunity to raise its profile and gain exposure among research community and policy circles at the national, regional and international levels.

[278] Diery Seck, the first Executive Director of SISERA and now the Director of IDEP, has argued that SISERA will be an asset for IDEP precisely to the extent that it retains its distinctive identity and successful activities. It is therefore in IDEP's interests to promote and strengthen SISERA, and to ensure this success, his intention is that SISERA will deal directly with him.

[279] This is both reassuring and a matter of some concern. On the one hand, the head of the host institution will be highly familiar with and sympathetic to SISERA's aims and objectives. This should bode well for a successful relationship. On the other hand, the head of the host institution is also the founding director of SISERA, with his own very strong views as about the future of the network – which may well differ from those held by the Executive Director or the Steering Committee. The relationship is therefore likely to be a delicate one, requiring considerable diplomacy and good will on the part of both parties.

[280] Issues of personality are likely to prove transitory, however. The key concern raised by a possible move to IDEP is SISERA's programmatic autonomy and the authority of its Steering Committee in establishing and monitoring this programme. It is our understanding that such autonomy and authority have been successfully embedded in a draft agreement with IDEP and ECA (to which IDEP is responsible). We are, however, sceptical that such autonomy will be accepted at other levels of the UN system, and would not be surprised if the current draft agreement was not called into question by UN headquarters in New York.

[281] Should this happen, and an agreement prove impossible to reach, then SISERA would be faced with some very difficult choices in terms of an institutional home. We understand that the Steering Committee has insisted upon retaining the current level of programmatic autonomy and authority, and we endorse this decision. We think it preferable that, should an agreement with IDEP not be possible, that a search for a new partner or host begin again, and that fresh consideration be given to establishing SISERA as a free standing institution, despite the problems of governance and professional isolation that this may entail.

9.2.3 Leadership and Governance

[282] As the discussion in the preceding sections has made clear, the choice of strategic directions and the choice of an institutional home or long-term partner are closely related to the management and governance of programme.

[283] To date, IDRC has been legally responsible for the programme, acting on behalf of a consortium of donors. These donors have been represented on the Steering Committee and have provided comment on and review of an annual report and participated in general discussions of operational and strategic issues. For some donors, the most important aspect of their involvement in and oversight over SISERA occurred through these meetings.

[284] It is our impression that the Steering Committee played an active role in SISERA initially, but that its involvement in the programme has diminished somewhat in recent years.

9.2.3.1 Leadership

[285] The post of Executive Director was filled by Diery Seck from 1997 to 2002, and by the Director of the IDRC Regional Office on a temporary basis in 2002. Elias Ayuk has served as Acting Executive Director since early 2003. During this period he has also continued to carry out the duties of one of the two programme officers in the Secretariat. During much of this period, Catherine Daffé, now the Coordinator for Programme and Operations has provided a vital degree of administrative continuity and institutional memory for the programme.

[286] Diery Seck provided very effective leadership during SISERA's launch phase, and played a key role in creating the institutional structures and securing the financial resources necessary to launch SISERA. He may, however, have been more interested in creating the network, and less interested in the task of running and extending the network once SISERA became better established. So a transition to a new Executive Director would have been entirely natural.

[287] The failure to ensure a smooth transition to a new (permanent) Executive Director is very unfortunate, and has been a major obstacle to the continued growth and success of SISERA. That the programme has achieved good results over the past two years is due, in our view, to three factors:

- The soundness of the initial conception of SISERA and the strategic directions it has pursued: SISERA is fundamentally a very good idea, and satisfies an important need in Africa
- The ability and dedication of the Secretariat's staff, in particular the Acting Executive Director and the Coordinator for Programme and Operations. The Acting Executive Director, for example, has not only filled an important gap in the organization's leadership, but has continued his work as a programme officer, working closely with centres in the SISERA network and helping to identify new members who might join the network. The other members of the Secretariat's staff, including the

Programme Officer, also display a very high degree of dedication and professionalism.

[288] SISERA has continued, if not to thrive, then at least to do valuable work in a very effective fashion, first because it is an excellent idea and responds to an important need in Africa, and second because it has been fortunate to have been able to rely on the loyalty, dedication and professionalism of its staff.

[289] In this respect, SISERA, and its Steering Committee have enjoyed good fortune, but it would be unwise and indeed irresponsible for the Steering Committee to let this situation continue. Uncertainty concerning SISERA's leadership compounds the uncertainty concerning its institutional home. In combination, they make it very difficult for the programme to sustain its momentum, make appropriate strategic choices, and secure the human and financial resources necessary to execute its strategy.

9.2.3.2 Planning Process

[290] The details of SISERA's governance structure will be heavily conditioned by its choice of an institutional home or long term strategic partnership (or its decision to pursue the 'stand alone' option). For this reason we think it premature to enter into a detailed discussion of alternative governance arrangements.

[291] One aspect does, however, merit discussion. Whatever the choice of institutional home and the details of the agreement with the host institution, more attention needs to be paid to the planning process in order to ensure that the Steering Committee retains effective authority over SISERA's programme so that SISERA retains its programmatic autonomy and institutional identity.

[292] As part of a strengthened governance procedure, the programme will need to engage in a fuller planning process, to ensure that all parties have the information they need to fulfil their roles. The Steering Committee will need financial and programmatic information more than annually to assess implementation of agreed plans and adjust where necessary. Management will need the formal guidance of a Steering Committee to assure that it is on the agreed path and will, ideally, benefit from the SC's contacts and complementary perspectives to make rigorous strategic decisions.

[293] A typical planning process would revolve around a multi-year plan that includes detailed activities for each year and periodic, perhaps quarterly SC monitoring of progress to plan. The business plan needs to start with the strategic context and decisions, and move from there to activities and their financial requirements.

[294] The SC should therefore require of management more detailed and formal planning. Currently, business plans are framed as requests for donor funds, rather than a full review of strategy and recommendations of actions following therewith. What is missing from the current planning process is an action plan, which is organisationally one level below the business plan, stipulating administrative steps to be taken to operationalise the business plan's objectives. The link in planning between strategy and actions is at

present only implicit, probably as a result of the more informal boundary between management and governance in the programme.

[295] Many donor-led projects succeed in a large part because of the diligence and good-will of the individuals involved, and SISERA is no exception. This informal approach can work well on smaller scales and over shorter periods of time. When creating an institution as complex as SISERA, a clear effective governance structure is essential to provide depth to management and to protect against many of the risks that the program faces. The size and complexity of the tasks that IDRC management and administration have in effect been carrying out should not be underestimated. Going forward, the tasks facing the SC and management of are at least as large and complex, and will require strong leadership on several levels.

10 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- [296] We reviewed the specific actions undertaken by SISERA to support African economic research centres under five categories: strengthening of institutional support, enhancement of managerial capacity of economic research centres, networking of African economic research centres, linking researchers and end users, and collaboration with other institutions.
- [297] Strengthening of institutional support was carried out through core grants, seed grants, technical support, training of researchers and measure to improve capacity utilization
- [298] Enhancement of managerial capacity of economic research centres was carried out through a ‘hands on’ approach. An important component of the Secretariat’s work was focused on key individuals with in each institution; e.g. directors and finance officers, who were reached through meetings, workshops, seminars and training; and mentoring.
- [299] SISERA also took action to improve the networking of African economic research centres, by launching two sub-regional networks.
- [300] Linking researchers and end-users was also viewed as important task for SISERA. In principle, this is the responsibility of the individual research centres and the sub-regional networks, and in practice, SISERA has not played a direct role in these linkages. Instead, it has focused on fostering linkages with regional and global actors such as the African Development Bank and the World Bank Institute.
- [301] A worrying issue is the imbalance between the work carried out to strengthen research centres’ institutional capacities and end users’ capacity to demand and use the research produced. Some centres report not being able to engage with policy makers in their countries because there is little interest in the ideas suggested by policy research. This suggests that SISERA should engage more actively in not only linking with but if possible strengthening end users’ capacity to demand and apply the knowledge produced at the centres in SISERA’s network.
- [302] Collaboration with the World Bank Institute was particularly successful and allows SISERA to organize training for researchers in the area of poverty reduction. The decision of the WBI to discontinue support for this training may have a significant effect on the members of the SISERA network and their ability to influence the policy process. The responses to our questionnaire and our interviews suggested that such training was one of the most popular activities initiated by SISERA, and research related to poverty reduction has been a common denominator among the most successful centres (EPRC, CREA, DPRU). This decision by the WBI is therefore highly unfortunate, and efforts to replace its support with that of UNDP are to be encouraged.
- [303] SISERA’s has much too low an institutional profile and ‘brand recognition’ in the development policy research community generally and among donors

(and potential supporters) in particular. Additional staff and a clearer strategic direction regarding these areas specifically are needed to enable SISERA to strengthen its profile and establish its 'brand' as a recognized centre of excellence in institutional capacity building.

[304] We assessed the perceived benefits of SISERA's interventions from the viewpoint of its partner institutions and determine the value-added of its activities for its research centres. The impact of SISERA interventions on its partner institutions varied considerably. While all directors interviewed consider their participation in the network as beneficial for their institutions, the services are valued in different ways by each director. A common perception, best articulated described by Haroon Bhorat of DPRU, is that the support provided by SISERA gives directors 'breathing space'. Financial support in particular, but also the technical assistance, training of researchers and other related activities, give directors time to reflect; resources to hire new researchers, the opportunity to explore new issues, etc.

[305] We also assessed the perceived benefits of SISERA interventions from the viewpoint of government institutions and determine the value-added of its activities to policy making.

[306] Assessing the impact of research and analysis on policy is an inherently difficult exercise, and there are few if any quantitative studies which are in any way conclusive. Measuring the impact of investments in capacity building such as SISERA is therefore a considerable challenge: it can be done, but requires care and good judgement. The reason is simple: even when quantitative measures of desired (ultimate) impact are readily available, the chain of causal links between an intervention and a change in an impact measure can be long and complex, with the outcome affected by the actions of a large number of actors, and influenced by many elements in the surrounding environment. This is particularly true for 'upstream' interventions in capacity building, of which SISERA and the centres in its network are an example. Assessing impact by associating a particular intervention with changes that take place 'downstream' in the causal chain needs to be undertaken with some care, particularly when a complex chain of causality is posited.

[307] Overall, we would conclude that the impact on policy has been mixed. Some policy research institutes in the SISERA network have been outstandingly successful in pursuing research programmes that have had a significant impact on policy discussions and dialogue within their country, and now both government and civil society look to these institutes to take a lead in producing new and relevant research on certain key policy issues. We give examples of these success stories in Table 4, Table 5, Table 6 and Table 7 in Section 7.3. Other institutes in the SISERA network, in contrast, have had little if any influence on policy.

[308] Impact on the policy process remains an important goal of the programme, and so it is important for SISERA to understand why some of its partners have been so successful, and others have had so little impact, and how the lessons of the successes can be used to assist partners who are struggling to achieve an impact on policy.

- [309] Based on his experience in Indonesia, Peter Timmer argues, for example, that there are:
“... four factors that can make policy oriented research successful. First, the analyst should be involved with the same policy-makers or in the same policy setting for the long term. Second, there is a need to find a balance between keeping analysis and advice confidential and the ultimate publication of the key models and results. Third, the analysts should rely on the analytical paradigms of the mainstream of the economic profession even while examining deviations from their underlying assumptions. Lastly, there should be continuing demand from policy-makers for problem-oriented analysis.”
- [310] Our interviews and discussions suggested that Timmer’s second and third conditions (confidentiality versus publication in the open scientific literature, and the degree of reliance on mainstream analytical paradigms) did not seem significant in the SISERA’s context.
- [311] His fourth condition, that policy-makers must have a genuine demand for analytical work, does, however, seem to be an issue in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular the francophone countries and this limits the impact of research on policy in a number of countries.
- [312] The issue here may go beyond the government’s appetite for ideas and research results. One must consider as well a government’s ‘absorptive capacity’ – the ability of its policy analysts to understand the results of technical research and communicate the implications of this research to key policy-makers. Our discussions suggested that in many countries in which SISERA works, the demand side of the policy market is still very weak: many governments are unreceptive to new ideas and research findings, or if receptive, lack the staff with skills to understand technical research results well enough to identify the policy implications of the research. SISERA has certainly strengthened the supply side of the policy market, but in many countries the demand side remains a significant obstacle to bridging the gap between research and policy.
- [313] Whether SISERA could realistically extend its activities to strengthening analytical capacity within government is not at all clear, given SISERA’s limited resources and the large number of countries in which it operates. Leaving aside these weaknesses on the demand side, Timmer’s observations also help identify what may be the most important factor affecting whether SISERA’s partner institutes have an impact on policy: sustained focus on a few key issues.
- [314] In order to achieve significant policy impact, initiatives have to be sustained for a significant period of time, so that the researchers involved are able to build strong relationships with their counterparts in the government ministries. This is not an insurmountable obstacle for the institutes in the SISERA network, but it requires a sustained commitment over a long period of time. This would in turn entail a decision to focus on a specific and limited number of policy issues, since the resources available to these institutes are unlikely to be sufficient for long-term initiatives across a large number of policy areas. In order to be successful in policy outreach, then, SISERA’s partners must ‘place their bets’, focusing their efforts and resources on just a

few key policy issues (and on the ministries and researchers likely to be involved in these issues), and sustain this focused commitment for over a period at least several years.

- [315] We also carried out an institutional assessment of SISERA.
- [316] We assessed first its operational capacities. The most important concern regarding operational capacity is the inability, since 2002, to appoint a permanent Executive Director. This has diminished the focus on the leadership of the Secretariat. In addition and partly as a result of the lack of an Executive Director, the workload on individual staff is far too high; the existing network includes over 20 economic research institutions in 18 countries, and in addition the Secretariat receives a steady stream of requests from new centres which wish to join the network, must deal with relationships with donors, and must function effectively in two working languages. It is abundantly clear that the Secretariat requires additional human resources.
- [317] The absence of an Executive Director and more importantly, insufficient staff numbers has also had an effect on the orientation of SISERA. Current staff (e.g. the financial assistant, program coordinator, program assistant and secretary) needs to focus on the internal organisation, process and activities, and so relatively less attention is paid to outwardly oriented, 'external' activities such as contact with donors, profile raising, attendance at international conferences and workshops.
- [318] Access to funding and funding sources has decreased in the recent past particularly due to the culmination of the funding cycle and a gap with the next one. Initially SISERA received funding from IDRC, CIDA, USAID, Coopération Francaise, DGIS, the EU and the AfDB. At present, only IDRC, Coopération Francaise and USAID (through the SAGA programme) are major donors, and changes in USAID policies give some concern regarding the longer term prospects for its support to SISERA. Recent developments have, however, been encouraging: SISERA has recently received a grant from AfDB and DGIS has approved one of CAD 1.3 million over 4 years.
- [319] Another problem experienced by SISERA has to do with timing of donor funding. The delay between the contract negotiation with donors and the signature of contracts has meant that on some occasions SISERA's ability to provide support to the members of its network has been subject to delays, which frustrate the centres and reduce their loyalty to SISERA.
- [320] The absence of a permanent Executive Director has created some difficulties for SISERA. Elias Ayuk has performed very well as Acting Executive Director. He has provided not only day to day leadership for the Secretariat but has also recently launched a very valuable strategic planning exercise. Nevertheless, he has had to perform in effect two jobs, and the human resources of the Secretariat are stretched very thin indeed as a result. Centres in the SISERA network are clearly aware of this, and it has caused concern among many of the centre directors and staff. It is evidenced as well by SISERA's low profile and lack of 'brand recognition'.
- [321] Timing is an important element of program and process management, and in this area, SISERA has experienced some difficulties. As in the case of

funding, the time gap between the approval of the work plan by the Steering Committee (SC) and the start of the financial year have made it necessary on occasion for the Secretariat to begin the implementation of an activity before it is approved by the SC. While this does not seem to have resulted in any serious difficulties, it is nevertheless an undesirable practice. Such difficulties could be overcome by a good information system so that the Steering Committee is aware of the work plan and the key implementation dates. Accountability and responsibility for the use of funds in these cases could be assigned to the research centres, reporting back to the Steering Committee.

[322] The simple and rather flat structure of SISERA and its governing body facilitates timely monitoring and evaluation of the performance of each staff member. The small size of the Secretariat's staff also means that their contact with individual centres cannot be sustained in some cases, and there have been instances where the centres have not responded in a timely manner to the Secretariat's suggestions and requests. Similarly, the information submitted by the centres, both in terms of performance evaluation and in the case of the research proposals, is not always sufficient to allow SISERA to monitor the performance of its centres. Does this call for a uniform monitoring and evaluation system, which would require that each centre produce identical information, or should the monitoring and evaluation system continue to adapt to the capacities of each centre? Both options will require additional staff and closer monitoring of each institution, but the latter might make it difficult to compare performance across centres. On the other hand, access to the inputs needed and the implementation of changes and recommendations from the monitoring and evaluation process should be easier.

[323] We also assessed SISERA's adaptive capacities.

[324] The ability of the staff to adapt and respond to changes in the environment is significantly hindered by their current workloads. Program officers need to keep up to date with issues such as the interests of donors, emerging policy issues, as well as methodological advances and new research techniques. To do this they require time dedicated to learn, reflect and innovate. This cannot be achieved with the current staff numbers and workloads.

[325] We examined SISERA's online presence. The url for the website is cumbersome, but more important, links to the IDRC website. While formally appropriate, this tends to reinforce perceptions of an excessively close relationship, which may, as remarked earlier, complicate funding from other donors. It would be far better to register another url, such as www.sisera.org.sn.

[326] The SISERA web page provides basic information regarding the Secretariat and its activities but almost none (besides contact information) on the centres in the network. This is important because the web page appears to be intended to inform third parties, rather than to serve as a tool or service provider for the research centres members of the network.

[327] Although considerable effort is focused on strategic management of the secretariat the severe time pressures on the staff limit the time they have available for longer term planning. As a result, much of the reflection and

organizational learning and innovation seem to be occasioned by external evaluations. This is undesirable: learning and adapting should, of course, take place within the organization, on an ongoing basis. This is important, not only for the effectiveness of SISERA, but for its ability to attract, motivate and retain good staff.

[328] Improved monitoring and evaluation is central to the strengthening of SISERA's adaptive capacities. Evaluation is inherently difficult for SISERA, because SISERA intervenes to build capacity far upstream in the policy analysis and dialogue process. It is difficult, to say the least, for SISERA to properly measure its success, because this success depends to a large extent on the actions and behaviour of the centres in the network, and their actions are only indirectly influenced by SISERA.

[329] Measuring the impact of policy research itself is widely regarded as a difficult and challenging exercise. Measuring the impact of initiatives to build capacity for policy research is harder still. Nevertheless, monitoring and evaluation of SISERA seems largely confined to some quantitative indicators of programme activities, with relatively few attempts to measure the impact of these activities on the behaviour of the centres in the SISERA network, and no systematic attempt to measure the impact of the Centres on the policy process at the national level. The Progress Report by Activity for the SAGA Program is to some extent an exception, since it is based on the analysis of intermediate performance indicators. These indicators, however, only measure the extent to which SISERA carried out specific activities.

[330] While acknowledging that this is a very difficult task, we recommend that more systematic attempts be made in future to measure the impact of SISERA on the institutions with which it works directly – the centres in its network.

[331] We recommend that SISERA do this by adopting an alternative approach, Outcome Mapping, which focuses on determining whether or not these activities are having an effect on the behaviour of those targeted. A change in behaviour of 'boundary partners', rather than the fact that particular activity has been completed, is likely to be a more accurate and useful indicator for both management and accountability purposes.

[332] To assess the performance of SISERA we studied its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and financial sustainability.

[333] It is undeniable that the creation of SISERA responded to a real and important problem facing African countries. This guarantees the institution's relevance from the start, but much needs to be done to maintain it. Its methods and initiatives are well designed and respond to the context in which they operate. There is continuous contact with the centres. This ensures that the staff, and through them the Steering Committee, are well aware of the changing internal and external conditions the centres have to face. For instance, visits to provide technical support and meetings with directors or financial officers provide SISERA staff with an opportunity to monitor the changing environments and capacities of the centres. A question, however, still lingers: How is SISERA using this information?

- [334] While it is clear that SISERA has a clear mission, well known by its staff, it is not clear that this mission is known at all by all those affected by it. This suggests that higher priority be given to raising SISERA's profile, not only among the wider development policy community, but also within its own network!
- [335] Its financial sustainability is seemingly secure but a serious problem arises due to the mismatch between the funding cycle and the project cycles of the secretariat and the centres. SISERA's efforts in this area should aim towards planning their funding cycles to guarantee a steady flow of resources from donors to institutions. It should also, through its mentoring and consultations, aim to foresee changes in the needs and capacities requirements of the centres.
- [336] An analysis of the external operating environment of SISERA clearly shows that this has changed. Most importantly it has done so partly due to the action of SISERA. We identified two main changes:
- The increased strength of some of SISERA's partner institutes, which now play an vital and dynamic role in the process of policy dialogue and design in their countries
 - A dramatic shift in the way aid modalities, as donors move from project-oriented to programme-oriented support, and from their to general budget support. This shift will, over time, have profound implications for the policy research institutes in SISERA's network.
- [337] It has become increasingly necessary to address the existing capacity of the users of the public good (knowledge) that the research centres produce. While SISERA has focused, quite successfully, on the supply of policy research, less has been done regarding the demand for such research.
- [338] SISERA's 'success stories' are associated with the adoption of a sustained commitment to a programme of research which focuses on a few key subjects. Besides a stable internal environment, such a long term commitment requires an external stability as well. Volatility of governmental policy and donor interests do not create the incentives necessary for centres to dedicate time and resources over long periods of time. Instead, they promote opportunism in conducting research and giving advice.
- [339] Changes in the external environment present both opportunities and (in the longer term) serious threats to policy research institutes:
- [340] The opportunities are clear – the shift to general budget support, devolved decision-making and local contracting should increase the demand for policy analysis on the part of developing country governments. This increased demand should widen the opportunities available to the policy research institutes already in the SISERA network and stimulate the emergence of new centres that can in time join the network.
- [341] The threats are less obvious, but changes in aid modalities are likely to pose serious problems for policy research institutes in developing countries. At present policy research institutes in developing countries have a range of potential clients. A shift to general budget support will replace this range of clients with a single client – the country's own government. It could become

difficult, for instance, for any research institute to publish research critical of, or embarrassing to the government when that government is the only purchaser of policy research.

[342] Without a tradition of support for policy research by the philanthropic sector or the private sector in Africa, this threat is a serious one. As a result, it may be that donors have to make commitments over the longer term to secure the independence of policy research institutes, and this may be one role which SISERA might play, as an efficient channel for such support.

[343] Our study shows us that SISERA must address four strategic issues over the medium term:

- The Programme's strategic directions, i.e. whether it should continue to focus on its current set of activities, or attempt to diversify its portfolio of activities.
- Whether SISERA can exist as a "stand alone" institution, or alternatively should seek another institutional home or a long-term, strategic partner – and if so, how this partner should be chosen.
- Both the choice of strategic directions and the choice of an institutional home or long-term partner raise issues concerning SISERA's management and governance.
- The need for a higher and more stable level of funding over the medium term, which is in turn linked to the perception of SISERA among donors and potential supporters of the programme; the need to establish a clear identity and a higher profile for SISERA among the donor community and impact on this identity and profile of SISERA's current relationship with IDRC and its future relationship with IDEP and the UN system.

[344] The Programme's strategic directions must take into consideration SISERA's competitive advantages. Here it was useful to return to the roles played by networks, and SISERA's ability to play these roles.

[345] Broadly speaking, we have identified six possible roles which can be played by networks:

- Filter
- Amplifier
- Investor / Provider
- Facilitator
- Convenor
- Community builder

[346] It is clear that the programme can and does act as an investor through its grants and training activities, and this has formed a large part of its work. It has also acted as a facilitator through organizing training workshops, the publication of the SISERA Working Paper series, and other activities. It has not been particularly active as an amplifier, and currently does not devote significant resources to this role, but there is no reason to think it would not have the technical competence to play this role should it decide to do so. In

addition SISERA, through its programme of technical assistance, staff visits to centres, and meetings of centre directors has also helped build a sense of community among the directors and staff of the centres in its network.

[347] Assessing SISERA's ability to play the other two roles, of filter and convenor, was more complex. Our view is that SISERA should not seek to act as an intermediary between research users and research producers, first, because it has no particular technical or informational advantage in doing so, and second, because this undermines the role and position of the research centres which it is trying to strengthen.

[348] It is possible, however, for SISERA to perform the filtering and convening roles with respect to institutions based outside Africa (for example donors, international organizations, other research institutions, etc.). In this case, SISERA can play an effective "brokering role" between local researchers and research institutes and the rest of the world. To some extent the programme has already begun to play this role with respect to the EAGER and SAGA projects, and has done this very effectively.

[349] Before considering possible institutional homes for SISERA, we ask whether the programme does indeed need a home, or whether it has a sustainable future as a free standing institution. Our view is that the programme might be organized as a free standing and autonomous institution (even when experiences from other networks suggest some difficulties with such arrangements).

[350] Arguments in favour of merging SISERA with a partner or placing it within a host institution are based on:

- Administrative and managerial economies of scale and scope
- The lack of critical mass within such an institution as small as SISERA (which is much smaller than AERC, for example)
- The current absence of any clear governance structure for the programme
- The potential intellectual and professional isolation of the person heading the programme if the programme is located outside an academic institution or a policy research institute
- The difficulty of fundraising for a purely "virtual" institution such as SISERA

[351] On balance, we think the issues of intellectual isolation and the lack of critical mass point in the direction of basing SISERA within a host institution, but it is difficult to reach a definite conclusion on this issue.

[352] Nonetheless, if SISERA does need a home, the first point to note is that the appropriate choice of a home depends on what SISERA is and does. The choice of strategic directions for is still subject to discussion, but the point to remember is any choice of strategic directions has implications for the choice of a partnership or a merger.

[353] If SISERA was located within another institution, such an arrangement could take one of two forms:

- The programme might be “housed” within another policy research or teaching institution. In this arrangement there is symmetry between the partners, in the sense that both the programme and its partner are involved in economic policy or teaching.
- The alternative is one in which the programme is “hosted” by another institution which is not primarily engaged in economic policy research or capacity building. This arrangement is asymmetric, in the sense that SISERA and its host have different missions. Maintaining a distinct identity and mission for the programme seems more likely under an asymmetric arrangement, since the institutions involved are likely to have somewhat different missions, operating procedures and governance structure, and so merging these structures will be less natural and straightforward. This is in essence the situation since 1997: SISERA has existed as a Secretariat within IDRC – a much larger institution, with a broader mandate than SISERA.

[354] The proposed move to IDEP would represent an asymmetric arrangement, and the key concern raised by a possible move to IDEP is SISERA’s programmatic autonomy and the authority of its Steering Committee in establishing and monitoring this programme. It is our understanding that such autonomy and authority have been successfully embedded in a draft agreement with IDEP and ECA (to which IDEP is responsible). We are, however, sceptical that such autonomy will be accepted at other levels of the UN system, and would not be surprised if the current draft agreement was not called into question by UN headquarters in New York.

[355] Should an agreement with IDEP not be possible, we recommend that the search for an appropriate partner or host begin again immediately. The selection of such a partner should be guided by the same set of considerations outlined in IDRC’s own guidance document for the establishment of secretariats. These include:

- strategic direction
- the need to develop a sound and realistic business plan
- a systematic approach to performance management
- an accountability framework
- operational and structural issues

[356] At the same time as the search for a new host takes place, and in parallel with this search, we strongly recommend that fresh consideration be given to the alternative of establishing SISERA as a free standing institution, despite the problems of governance and professional isolation that this may entail.

[357] Two final points should be made about the governance of SISERA. First, the failure to ensure a smooth transition to a new Executive Director is very unfortunate, and has been a major obstacle to the continued growth and success of SISERA. That the programme has achieved good results over the past two years is due, in our view, to two factors:

- The soundness of the initial conception of SISERA and the strategic directions it has pursued: SISERA is fundamentally a very good idea, and satisfies an important need in Africa
- The ability and dedication of the Secretariat's staff, in particular the Acting Executive Director and the Coordinator for Programme and Operations. The Acting Executive Director, for example, has not only filled an important gap in the organization's leadership, but has continued his work as the senior programme officer, working closely with centres in the SISERA network and helping to identify new members who might join the network. The other members of the Secretariat's staff, including the Programme Officer, also display a very high degree of dedication and professionalism.

[358] There is a need to strengthen SISERA's governance structures. As part of this strengthening, SISERA will need to engage in a fuller planning process, to ensure that all parties have the information they need to fulfil their roles. The Steering Committee will need financial and programmatic information more than annually to assess implementation of agreed plans and adjust where necessary. Management will need the formal guidance of a Steering Committee to assure that it is on the agreed path and will, ideally, benefit from the SC's contacts and complementary perspectives to make rigorous strategic decisions.

11 GLOSSARY

Table 8: List of Acronyms

AAU	Association of African Universities
ACBF	African Capacity Building Foundation
ACEG	African Centre for Economic Growth
AfDB	African Development Bank
AERC	African Economic Research Consortium
AIAE	African Institute for Applied Economics
BCEAO	Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest
BEAC	Banque des Etats de l'Afrique Centrale
BIDPA	Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis
CCCO	Campus de Cours Communs à Option
CEDRES	Centre d'Etudes et de Documentation de Recherche Economique et Sociale
Cellule d'Etude de Politique Economique	CEPEC
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CIRES	Centre Ivoirien de Recherche Economique et Sociale
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
CREA	Centre de Recherches Economiques Appliquées
CTC	Consultancy Training Centre, University of Swaziland
DFID	Department for International Development
DGIS	Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
DPRU	Development Policy Research Unit
EC	Emerging Centre
EU	European Union
EPRC	Economic Policy Research Centre
ESRF	Economic and Social Research Foundation
FSEG	Faculté des Sciences Economiques et de Gestion, Yaoundé II
GREAT	Groupe de Recherche en Economie Appliquée et Théorique
GESDRI	Gambian Economic, Social and Development Research Institute
IDEP	Institute for Economic Development and Planning
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
INESOR	Institute of Economic and Social Research
IPAR	Institute for Policy Analysis and Research
ISSER	Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research
LEA	Laboratoire d'Economie Appliquée
MIMAP	Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic and Adjustment Policies
NEPRU	Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit
NIEP	National Institute of Economic Policy
NISER	Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PI	Partner Institution
PRI	Policy Research Institute

PTCI	Programme de Troisième Cycle Inter Universitaire
SAGA	Strategies and Analyses for Growth and Access
SEAPREN	Southern and Eastern Africa Policy Research Network
SC	(SISERA) Steering Committee
SISERA	Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa
TIPS	Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WBI	World Bank Institute
WECAPREN	West and Central Africa Policy Research Network

12 ANNEX: LIST OF THOSE INTERVIEWED

Table 9: List of Those Interviewed

Individual	Institutional Affiliation	Telephone Number	Email Address
Adeboye Adeyemo	Programme Administrator, African Capacity Building Foundation	+263 4 702 931	a.adeyemo@acbf-pact.org
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John Ashipala	Senior Researcher, NEPRU	+264 61 277500	johna@nepru.org.na
Melvin Ayogu	University of Cape Town; also Convenor, AERC Ph. D Programme in Economics	+27 21 650 2763	mayogu@commerce.uct.ac.za
Elias Ayuk	Senior Program Specialist and Acting Executive, SISERA	+221 864 00 00 ext 2233	eayuk@idrc.org.sn
Jean-Paul Azam	Université de Toulouse; referee for SAGA project proposals	+33 561 128 535	jean-paul.azam@univ-tlse1.fr
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Evaluation of SISERA
Questionnaire for the Partner Institutions
November 2003

SISERA's goal is to build the capacity of local research institutions and networks in sub-Saharan Africa, to enable them to produce high quality, policy relevant research and to assist them in communicate their research to policy-makers in their country. The ultimate aim is to improve the quality of policy-making in sub-Saharan Africa.

This short questionnaire, which should take no more than 30 minutes to complete, is divided into six sections:

- i. *How has SISERA assisted your institution?* In what ways has SISERA strengthened your institution's internal capacity to carry out its mission? These questions focus on the difficulties you experienced as an organization before the SISERA intervention, whether the assistance from SISERA was well targeted, i.e. did it address the most important difficulties you faced; and the extent to which the SISERA assistance has enabled you to overcome these difficulties.
- ii. *What has been the impact of SISERA's assistance on your activities and outputs?* These questions focus on changes in the nature of the research you have carried out, workshops and conferences you have organized, and the publications you have issued to communicate your research results to policy-makers.
- iii. *Has SISERA's assistance increased your impact on the policy process in your country?* It is difficult to trace the impact of research on policy choices: there are many reasons why policy has been chosen. These questions focus instead on 'intermediate' indicators: whether you met more often with policy-makers to discuss your research, whether they cited your research in their public statements or background papers on policy issues, and whether your research was used in the media or in public debates over policy issues.
- iv. *In what ways has SISERA strengthened your institution's internal capacity to carry out its mission?* These questions focus on the difficulties you experienced as an organization before the SISERA intervention, whether the assistance from SISERA was well targeted, i.e. did it address the most important difficulties you faced; and the extent to which the SISERA assistance has enabled you to overcome these difficulties.
- v. *Are you satisfied with the assistance you have received from SISERA?* These questions focus on whether the assistance from SISERA has been of your satisfaction and has dealt with your needs.
- vi. *In what ways does the assistance provided by SISERA differ from that provided by other donors or funding institutions?* These questions focus on whether SISERA assistance is more timely, efficient, well-targeted or more flexible than other assistance you have received.

Notes:

We encourage you to respond to the questions in your own way. In some cases the answers may be simply “Yes” or “No”, but we encourage you to respond to the questions by adding additional details or your own comments.

When we refer to “policy-makers” in this questionnaire, we mean primarily policy-makers in your country’s government, but this also includes bilateral or multilateral donors in your country, regional institutions. By “stakeholders” we mean policy-makers, civil society organizations, etc. but each institution will have its own set of stakeholders.

When we refer to “you” we mean not only you as an individual, but your institution and the researchers working in it.

Please return this completed questionnaire

- by email to enrique_mendizabal@bannock.co.uk
- by fax to +44 20 7535 0201

If you experience any difficulty in completing this questionnaire, please contact Enrique Mendizabal at Bannock Consulting.

His email address is
enrique_mendizabal@bannock.co.uk

His telephone number is
+44 20 75350248

We would be very grateful if you could provide your name and contact details below, in case we need to contact you to clarify your responses to the questions.

Thank you for taking the time to respond!

Completed by	
Name	
Position	
Telephone number	
Fax number	
Email address	

How has SISERA assisted your institution?

What kind(s) of assistance has SISERA provided to your institution?

Table 1: Financial Assistance Provided by SISERA

Type of support	Amount (in Canadian \$)	Details
Core funding support		
Financial Support for specific research projects		
Support for electronic connectivity		
Support for sabbaticals and internships		
Support for organizing conferences and workshops		
Support for strengthening links with the users of research		

Is the size of SISERA's support for core funding realistic, in the sense that it covers a reasonable proportion of the essential costs of the running your institution?

Is the size of SISERA's support for research projects realistic, in the sense that it provides the resources necessary to achieve the stated objectives of the research proposal?

SISERA may also have provided non-financial assistance – for example, the services of specialists to provide advice on enhancing managerial capacity. Please describe such non-financial assistance, in particular the form it took and if possible the quantity of such assistance you received (in man-months, for example)

How did the idea of assistance from SISERA arise? Did your institution approach SISERA, or SISERA approach you?

Note: we understand that you might not have been in your current position at the time the SISERA assistance was negotiated. We would be grateful if you could indicate if this is the case, and if the information has been obtained from a member of your staff who was involved in the negotiations.

How long did it take to conclude discussions and negotiations with the SISERA secretariat?

Did the initial ideas for assistance from SISERA change or evolve during the discussions and negotiations? If so, in what ways?

Do you think that, in retrospect, these changes to your proposal resulted in assistance from SISERA which was more effective than might have been the case with the initial ideas?

What has been the effect of SISERA's assistance on your organization's activities and outputs?

How did the assistance from SISERA affect the research you carried out?

Did your discussions with the SISERA secretariat lead to new ideas for research topics? That is, did it influence your choice of research topics, by suggesting new topics which you might pursue?

Did SISERA's assistance provide you with additional financial resources which allowed you to carry out research on new topics?

Did discussion with the SISERA secretariat lead to changes in the methodology or approach you took to the research? Did this lead to more rigorous methodology?

Did the assistance from SISERA lead to changes in (you are free to choose your own indicators for quantity and quality in the questions below, but please indicate in your response what indicator you are using):

- i.* the *quantity* of policy relevant research carried out in your institution (such as the number of researchers working on policy relevant research or the number of research papers produced). Please give a numerical estimate of the change in the quantity if possible, otherwise answer yes or no.
- ii.* the *quality* of the research (as measured by the rigour of the methodology used or the number of publications in scientific journals which result)
- iii.* the composition of your research portfolio, with more research being done on some topics and less on others.

Did the assistance from SISERA allow you to hold more meetings, such as workshops, and international conferences?

Were these meetings mainly meetings involving researchers, to discuss work in progress, meetings between researchers and policy-makers?

Did the assistance from SISERA lead you to disseminate your research through different channels? If yes, which new channels have you used?

Has SISERA's assistance increased your impact on the policy process in your country?

After you received assistance from SISERA, did you meet more often with policy-makers to discuss the research you were carrying out? If so, please give details of how SISERA's assistance helped you to strengthen your links with policy-makers.

Did policy-makers cite your research in their public statements or in background papers on particular policy issues? If so, please give examples.

Has your research been cited in the media or in public debates over policy issues? If so, please give examples.

Has the assistance from SISERA led to your being consulted more frequently on other issues by policy-makers? (For example, you might have been named to a committee of experts on related policy issues, or employed by policy-makers to carry out other pieces of research in related areas)

After you received assistance from SISERA, has the way in which you involve policy-makers in your research changed? For example, do you now involve policy-makers in discussions of research priorities, in the design of the terms of reference for research projects, or in discussions of research in progress?

Please list the *key users* with whom you have interacted in the past three to five years (for instance, policy makers in national governments, regional and international development agencies and civil society). Please indicate whether and how your relationship with each these policy-makers changed as a result of SISERA assistance.

Please list the *key policy issues and policy processes* where you believe you had interacted with users and have made a significant contribution in the past three to five years. Please indicate whether and how your impact on these policy issues and processes changed as a result of SISERA assistance.

In what ways has SISERA strengthened your institution’s internal capacity to carry out its mission?

These questions focus on five aspects of your institution’s organizational capacity:

- Personnel
- Infrastructure, technology and financial resources
- Strategic leadership
- Programme and process management
- Networking and linking to stakeholders
- Networking and linking to other research organizations

Table 2 below is designed to explore, in each of these areas, the difficulties you experienced as an organization before the SISERA intervention, whether the assistance from SISERA was well targeted, i.e. did it address these difficulties; and the extent to which the SISERA assistance has enabled you to overcome these difficulties. If you can enter this information in the table below, this would greatly assist us in collating the results of the questionnaire. If, on the other hand, you wish to respond in a freer format, please do so, but we would ask you to respond using the same aspects of organizational capacity as in columns 1 and 2 of the table. You can find a list of these aspects in Annex 1 at the end of this document.

Table 2: Organizational Capacity

Capacity area	Capacity	Difficulties in this area before SISERA assistance? If yes, please give details.	Did SISERA assistance attempt to address this difficulty? If so, how?	Was SISERA assistance effective in resolving the difficulties?	Do you receive assistance from other institutions to address this difficulty? If so, briefly describe.	Do difficulties remain in this area? If so, please give details.
Personnel (staff refers to both research and support staff)	Number of staff					
	Qualifications of staff (degrees, etc.)					
	Staff training (short courses, etc.)					
	Recruitment procedures					
	Performance appraisal systems					
Infrastructure, technology and financial resources	Financial resources					
	Accounting and financial controls					
	Facilities					
	Availability of technology					
	Planning and management of infrastructure, technology and financial resources					
Strategic leadership	Strategic planning					
	Identifying new ideas					

Capacity area	Capacity	Difficulties in this area before SISERA assistance? If yes, please give details.	Did SISERA assistance attempt to address this difficulty? If so, how?	Was SISERA assistance effective in resolving the difficulties?	Do you receive assistance from other institutions to address this difficulty? If so, briefly describe.	Do difficulties remain in this area? If so, please give details.
	and opportunities for research					
	Performance oriented polices and procedures					
	Guidelines and incentives for performance in relation to the organization's objectives					
Governance	Governance structures					
	Clear division of roles, responsibilities and authority					
Programme and process management	Programme planning and formulation					
	Monitoring and evaluation					
	Reporting					
	Communications					
Networking and linking to stakeholders	Identifying stakeholders					
	Communicating and building relationships with stakeholders					
Networking and linking to other	Identifying other relevant research					

Capacity area	Capacity	Difficulties in this area before SISERA assistance? If yes, please give details.	Did SISERA assistance attempt to address this difficulty? If so, how?	Was SISERA assistance effective in resolving the difficulties?	Do you receive assistance from other institutions to address this difficulty? If so, briefly describe.	Do difficulties remain in this area? If so, please give details.
research organizations (for example as potential research partners)	organizations					
	Communicating and building relationships with other research organizations					
	Communicating and building strong relationships with organisations which belong to the SISERA family of networks					

Are you satisfied with the assistance you have received from SISERA?

Please feel free to answer these questions in whatever format and at whatever length you prefer.

In relation to Question 1 above:

- a) Do you consider that the size of the grants you receive from SISERA is appropriate in relation to your needs?
- b) What would you have done in the absence of assistance from SISERA? (e.g. apply for similar grants from other organisations, develop partnerships, nothing)

In reference to your experience working with SISERA, please indicate your level of satisfaction with the services provided by SISERA, using the criteria in Table 3

What are the most important difficulties facing your organization which SISERA's assistance has *already* enabled you to tackle?

What are the most important difficulties which *still* face your organization where assistance from SISERA (or other donors) is still needed?

How does SISERA's assistance compare to that provided by other donors?

In Table 2 above you have indicated those specific aspects of your organization's capacity that have been strengthened by assistance from SISERA and from other donors. We also need to determine how the general characteristics of SISERA's assistance compare to other donors. Table 3 (comparison to other donors) allows not only you assess the quality of SISERA's services, but also to compare SISERA's services to those provided by other donors, in terms of efficiency, flexibility, efficacy and adherence to timeliness.

More generally, does the relationship with SISERA bring benefits which are not available from other donors and sources of funding?

Table 3: Levels of Satisfaction with Services Provided by SISERA

	Question 25 (please tick the appropriate level of satisfaction)			Question 28	
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Comparison to other donors (e.g. better, worse, the same)	Details
Efficiency and Flexibility: Whether SISERA provides goods and services with low administrative, procedural, evaluation or monitoring costs.					
Efficacy: Whether or not SISERA achieved its goals within their original parameters with reference to your institution. For instance, are there any outstanding goals that have not been met by SISERA or required extra resources to be met?					
Responsiveness to your needs: Whether or not SISERA is quick to identify and respond to your institutions needs by providing appropriate solutions					
Adherence to timelines: Whether SISERA fulfils its commitments to your institution within the agreed timelines					
Accountability and transparency: Whether you feel that SISERA shares information with your organisation and encourages and takes into consideration your critiques and recommendations?					

Annex 1

This series of questions is an alternative to Table 2, should you find this table difficult to complete. You do not need to complete this section if you have already filled in Table 2.

For each of the aspects of organizational capacity listed below, please describe the difficulties you experienced as an organization before the SISERA intervention, whether the assistance from SISERA addresses these difficulties, and the extent to which the SISERA assistance has enabled you to overcome these difficulties.

Personnel

- Staffing levels
- Staff training
- Recruitment procedures
- Performance appraisal systems

Infrastructure, technology and financial resources

- Financial resources
- Accounting and financial controls
- Facilities
- Availability of technology
- Planning and management of infrastructure, technology and financial resources

Strategic leadership

- Strategic planning
- Identifying new ideas and opportunities for research
- Performance oriented policies and procedures
- Guidelines and incentives for performance in relation to the organization's objectives

Governance

- Governance structures
- Clear division of roles, responsibilities and authority

Programme and process management

- Programme planning and formulation
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Reporting
- Communications

Networking and linking to stakeholders

- Identifying stakeholders
- Communicating and building relationships with stakeholders

Networking and linking to other research organizations (for example as potential research partners)

- Identifying other relevant research organizations
- Communicating and building relationships with other research organizations
- Communicating and building strong relationships with organisations which belong to the SISERA family of networks



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