

**Evaluation of the  
Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL)**

**Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) and  
The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)**

**Final Report**

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Evaluation Division (SIE)**

## List of Acronyms

CCIC	Canadian Council for International Co-operation
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
FAC	Foreign Affairs Canada
FOCAL	Canadian Foundation for the Americas
FTAA	Free Trade Agreement of the Americas
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LFA	Logical Framework Analysis
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NPSIA	Norman Paterson School of International Affairs
OAS	Organisation of American States
RBM	Results-based management
UQAM	Université de Québec a Montréal

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## Executive Summary

- i. This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL). The evaluation was completed between December 2003 and July 2004.
- ii. FOCAL was established in 1990 as an independent, non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to deepening and strengthening Canada's relations with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean through policy discussion and analysis.
- iii. Based in Ottawa, FOCAL carries out its work with a small professional staff under the guidance of a volunteer Board of Directors. FOCAL's principal objective is to act as a disseminator of key targeted information on Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) aimed at decision makers and to offer objective policy advice on the region. FOCAL also acts as an interlocutor between the public and the government in transmission of policy information and relevance of Canada's relationship with LAC countries.
- iv. Program activities are organized around two areas: communications and outreach; and policy advice and debate. Issues relating to Inter-American relations, governance and democratic development, economic development and trade integration, poverty and inequality and North American integration represent FOCAL's core policy concerns. Many of these issues are discussed at conferences, workshops and roundtables organized by FOCAL. The discussions lead to the development of policy options and papers that FOCAL brings to the attention of governments, international organizations, the private sector, the non-governmental community and the media.
- v. Since its founding, FAC and CIDA have been FOCAL's major funders. FAC's current agreement provides funding of \$150,000 in the first year and \$200,000 a year for the next two years, while CIDA provides \$1.95 million over 3 years (2002-2005). The organization has been evaluated twice by government departments in 1995 and 1999. Since the 1999 evaluation FOCAL has refocused its activities to become a Canada-based policy forum for the Americas. The new focus enabled FOCAL to play an active role in Canada's preparation for the Summit of the Americas meeting in Quebec City in 2001 and in subsequent follow-up work.
- vi. The focus of the evaluation was to assess the relevance, success and cost effectiveness of the organization, assess the strengths and weaknesses of FOCAL's new strategic directions and examine FOCAL's capacity to fulfill the Contribution agreements' objectives it has with CIDA and FAC. This report covers the contributions from the Government of Canada through FAC and CIDA over the four years since the last evaluation.
- vii. The evaluation approach required the completion of the following: a document and literature review, interviews with 58 stakeholders in Canada, the United States and the LAC region; focus groups with FAC and CIDA officials, a general evaluation survey of stakeholders and a website survey.

### **FINDINGS:**

#### **Relevance**

- viii. FOCAL is a credible provider of information and knowledge in Canada. A relatively large base of readers regularly consults its publications. FOCAL's coverage of issues and analysis is timely and is an effective means of bringing issues and problems to the forefront of public attention for discussion.

- ix. FOCAL actively contributes to the LAC region policy debate; however, FOCAL would benefit from a reassessment of its networking strategy and greater collaboration with Southern partners, as well as reconsidering whether the focus of its efforts should be country specific or regional..
- x. FOCAL effectively fills a strategic niche that is currently unoccupied by any other institution in Canada by providing an overview of hemispheric issues from a Canadian perspective and nourishing the policy debate.
- xi. FOCAL effectively addresses and supports the development work of Canadian government institutions but is only marginally able to support the development work of Canadian and LAC-based NGOs. While the FOCAL team has clearly occupied a critical role in working in collaboration with Canadian government agencies, international organizations and various LAC-based NGOs, their acceptance is limited among Canadian NGOs and various other LAC-based NGOS.

**Achievement of results:**

- xii. Although the findings are unclear as to FOCAL's ability to deepen and strengthen Canada's relations with LAC countries and regionally-based organizations through discussions and analysis, FOCAL's limited financial and physical resources, as well as the problems associated with contacting stakeholders, particularly in the LAC region, make it unlikely that FOCAL achieved this result to the full degree set out by its mandate.
- xiii. FOCAL has an effective approach towards tracking political, social, and economic developments in LAC and Canada.
- xiv. FOCAL contributes to providing an enlightened forum for debate and dialogue; however, it is unclear whether this forum always represents a wide variety of opinions and perspectives.
- xv. While FOCAL has an established network of contacts in high level positions and they have been asked to provide information about key issues, their ability to generate political will and promote policy development and implementation, particularly in the LAC region is limited to certain issues and is hampered by the lack of sustainable funding that would allow them to take a longer-term view of their role and contribution in supporting dialogue and promoting policy analysis.
- xvi. FOCAL has strong and productive partnership relationships with a small, yet strategic, number of agencies, organizations, and institutions.
- xvii. Gender equality issues have not yet been integrated into FOCAL's programming and reporting.

**Efficiency and Effectiveness:**

- xviii. The FAC and CIDA contribution agreements are not optimally coordinated with each other, and do not allow sufficient flexibility to make the most of what the government, as well as the majority of stakeholders would like to have FOCAL accomplish. Although there have been attempts made by the two departments to coordinate their efforts, the lack of regular and systematic consultation between FAC, CIDA and FOCAL still creates misunderstanding and inefficiency.
- xix. FOCAL's current staff is a highly dedicated and cohesive group that has the capacity to manage its current volume of activities. Over the longer term, FOCAL's effectiveness and efficiency could be

improved by permanent management positions independent of government funding and by a greater progression in the complement of staff positions.

- xx. While FOCAL has made concerted efforts to increase its fundraising, it is nevertheless important that they strive to further decrease their dependence on, and vulnerability with respect to having only two main sources for approximately 70% of their funding.
- xxi. FOCAL's ability to define, track, capture and report on results deserves more attention. Systematic capacity development in this regard would contribute to improving the existing monitoring and reporting activities.

## **CONCLUSION:**

- xxii. FOCAL remains a key organization by filling a niche in the Canadian advocacy and policy community with regard to LAC. It contributes to the strengthening of democracy by informing decision makers and the policy community on issues related to the Americas.
- xxiii. FOCAL's relevance as an institution is in its ability to support LAC policy debate and therefore contribute to a greater understanding of hemispheric issues. To comply with this mandate, FOCAL relies on a range of activities which, given its size and limited resources, should be reviewed to determine to what extent these activities capitalize on the organization's expertise, improve its credibility and increase its visibility.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that:

1. **FOCAL's current mission statement and objectives be re-examined to provide the organization with a more coherent and useful mandate. This exercise would involve: a review of its mission and objectives; a clear identification of hemispheric issues they want to cover; the type of activities they want to pursue; and, the mechanism to be used to strengthen Canadian and LAC partnerships, as well as the consultation process to increase the number and range of key stakeholders consulted.**
2. **FOCAL's staff integrate a gender focus or component into its programs and reporting.**
3. **CIDA, FAC and FOCAL formalize a consultative process in order to establish advanced planning milestones for work plans and new contribution agreements, review quarterly progress reports, discuss outstanding administrative problems, and generally ensure the smooth functioning of the relationship.**
4. **The Board consider moving to a more target-constituency-based representation including those from the LAC region, and to work on increasing means to interact and work with staff.**

# 1.0 Introduction and Context

## 1.1 Context

### 1.1.1 Canadian Interest in Latin America and the Caribbean

Canadian interest and involvement in Latin America and the Caribbean has increased significantly over the past decade. As the region evolved “from a situation of inefficient, state-run, protectionist economies towards greater economic and trade liberalization, more democratic governance and consistent economic growth”<sup>1</sup>, Canada has progressively established a greater network of contacts and partners and enlarged its role in the region. Decreases in military conflict and subsequent progress in political stability have further solidified and supported Canada’s role in the region and have helped create the necessary conditions for development progress. Despite these advances, considerable obstacles still exist. Progress in poverty reduction throughout the region is variable, and in many countries, democratic institutions are weak and gender discrimination is prevalent. Violence is on the rise and degradation of the natural environment persists. The gap between the rich and poor continues to widen, “and inequality threatens to undermine economic prospects and the still fragile democratization process.”<sup>2</sup>

Canada’s involvement in the region stems from its long-standing economic and security interests. As a member of the Organization of the American States (OAS) since 1990, Canada provides leadership on issues ranging from human rights and democratic governance, to narcotics trafficking and environmental protection. Canada is also deeply committed to the negotiation process for the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) by 2005, as well as developing mutually beneficial trade relationships and strengthening partnerships throughout the hemisphere.

### 1.1.2 FOCAL Profile and Activities

In October 1989, Cabinet approved a long-term strategy to strengthen Canada’s ties with Latin America. Part of the strategy called for support for the establishment of an organization dedicated to an enhanced capacity for research, training, public information and co-operative exchanges with the region. FOCAL was established in 1990 as an independent, non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to deepening and strengthening Canada’s relations with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean through policy discussion and analysis. Initially housed with the North South Institute, it gained institutional autonomy in 1993 and obtained its charitable status in 1997. To complement FAC’s annual core support that began with FOCAL’s establishment, CIDA entered into the first contribution agreement in October 1993, allowing FOCAL to carry out a wider range of activities focused on development issues in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In collaboration with experts, FOCAL monitors developments and analyses emerging issues in the Americas. Many of these issues are discussed at conferences and workshops organized by FOCAL. The expectation is that these discussions will eventually lead to the development of policy options and research papers that are brought to the attention of governments, international organizations, the private sector, the non-

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian International Development Agency. The Americas: Overview. <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/america-e.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Canadian International Development Agency. The Americas: Overview. <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/america-e.htm>

governmental community and the media. At present, FOCAL has a staff of 15 people and operates under the guidance of a 15-member<sup>3</sup> volunteer Board of Directors.

## **1.2 Evaluation Context and Objectives**

In December 2003, Le Groupe-conseil baastel ltée was mandated by Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to conduct an independent third party evaluation of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL). This evaluation is a required element under the Treasury Board of Canada's Transfer of Payments Policy.

The evaluation covered the programs funded by the Government of Canada through FAC and CIDA over the last four years (1999-2003), as well as a review of the institution as a whole. The specific objectives of the evaluation include the following:

- ❖ To determine the extent to which FOCAL's programs and policies are congruent with its mission, meets the needs of its partners, develops a greater understanding of important hemispheric issues and helps build a stronger community of the Americas.
- ❖ To assess FOCAL's achievement in meeting its program/project objectives and expected results as detailed in its contribution agreements with CIDA and FAC.
- ❖ To assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the management approach and program design for achieving the desired results.
- ❖ To determine lessons learned from the implementation of FOCAL's program and programs of a similar nature to help in future programming.

The main issues addressed by the evaluation exercise were *relevance*, *success* (in the achievement of expected results) and *cost-effectiveness*. Specific questions and sub-questions were devised in order to investigate these issues in the most complete and thorough manner possible.

## **2.0 Methodology**

### **2.1 Approach**

To the greatest extent possible, the evaluation team employed a participatory approach to this evaluation in order to ensure the meaningful involvement in the evaluation process of project partners (FOCAL, FAC and CIDA), as well as relevant partner organizations, stakeholders and other interested parties. The stakeholders involved in the evaluation occupied a critical role in the collection of data, the validation of findings, and the dissemination of results. The evaluators used the following multiple lines of evidence to identify findings, draw conclusions, and develop recommendations.

### **2.2 Document Review**

The evaluation team began this evaluation mandate by conducting a preliminary review of documentation provided by FOCAL, FAC and CIDA, followed by a more in-depth review of some of the relevant literature once the work plan was agreed upon. The evaluation team examined documents related to program design, planning and administration, as well as performance reports, financial reports, and past evaluations.

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<sup>3</sup> One Board of Directors position is currently vacant.



## **2.3 Literature Review**

To supplement the document review, the evaluation team also conducted a review of some of the literature related to the challenges pertaining to evaluating the impacts of policy institutions.

## **2.4 Meetings with stakeholders**

### **2.4.1 Initial meetings**

Initial meetings with the primary stakeholders (FOCAL, CIDA and FAC) were organized to define the parameters of the evaluation, to gather additional documentation and information, and to discuss the methodological approach to the evaluation. The purpose of these meetings was to better understand FAC, CIDA and FOCAL's specific needs, issues and concerns.

### **2.4.2 Interviews**

Based on the interview protocol devised at the outset of the mandate, the evaluation team created a series of questionnaires adapted to the specific knowledge base and focus of the various participant organizations, institutions or agencies.

Interviews were conducted both in-person and via telephone with 58 stakeholders in Canada, the United States and the LAC region. To ensure that a wide range of perceptions and opinions were incorporated into the evaluation process, the team interviewed individuals from each of the stakeholder groups: the Canadian government; Canadian NGOs, research organizations, and academia; Canadian and international embassies; American NGOs, research organizations and academia; international organizations; Latin American-based NGOs and research organizations.

### **2.4.3 Focus Groups**

Using a set of general discussion questions, focus group interviews were organized with stakeholders from FOCAL (Board and staff), FAC (management and staff), and CIDA (management and staff) to gather information about 1) the participants perceptions and opinions of FOCAL's performance and contributions as an independent NGO; 2) FOCAL's strengths and weaknesses, as well as its overall relevance as an organization and to its respective mandates; 3) FOCAL's ability to evolve and respond to changing international circumstances and needs; 4) its overall effectiveness and efficiency; and 5) FOCAL's governance and management.

## **2.5 Stakeholder Survey**

### **2.5.1 General Evaluation Survey**

The evaluation team devised a questionnaire to elicit critical information from identified stakeholders about FOCAL's outreach abilities and visibility in the LAC region, its ability to engage in policy dialogue and advocacy, its ability to address key hemispheric issues, the quality of its publications and knowledge events, its ability to collaborate and form partnerships with like-minded organizations, its relationship with media representatives and its overall strengths and weaknesses. Randomly selected from an initial random sample of 1112 representatives, a total of 755 individuals were invited by email to participate in the general survey. In

the email message, recipients were sent a link to the evaluator's website where they could anonymously access and answer the general survey questionnaire. Both the email invitation and the questionnaire were written in English, French and Spanish.

### **2.5.2 FOCAL Website Survey**

The website survey was specifically devised to elicit user's perceptions and opinions regarding the FOCAL website. This survey focused on the user's familiarity and satisfaction with the website, as well as the overall utility and user-friendliness of the site. A total of 357 individuals were contacted by email and asked to participate in the website survey. These individuals were randomly selected from the initial random sample of 1112 stakeholders. Similar to the procedure described above, the email message sent to recipients contained a direct link to the Baastel website where respondents could anonymously access and answer the survey questionnaire. The evaluation made every effort to facilitate the survey process by ensuring that all of the survey information, as well as the questionnaire itself, were available to respondents in English, French and Spanish.

## **2.6 Sampling**

FOCAL's partners, users and stakeholders include a wide range of individuals from academia, research institutions, international organizations, embassies, ministries, media, NGOs and governmental bodies in Canada, the United States, and the LAC region. For the purpose of the general and website surveys, the evaluation team employed a stratified sampling technique. Using this method, respondents were divided into 13 strata and a random sample of stakeholders was then selected from each stratum. A total of 1112 representatives from among each of the stakeholder groups in the three geographic areas were selected from FOCAL's database of over 6300 contacts. This specific technique was employed in order to ensure that each of the stakeholder groups was represented in the sample.

For the purpose of the individual interviews, 58<sup>4</sup> stakeholders were selected using a stratified sampling technique from a random list of 208 stakeholders provided by FOCAL. In addition, the evaluation team also contacted stakeholders identified by other stakeholders, including those suggested by FAC, CIDA and FOCAL management, for interviews. In keeping with the team's mission to gather as much information from as many stakeholders as possible, the team pursued these leads to develop a broad perspective of FOCAL and the issues facing the organization, as well as to strengthen findings. Graph 1 in Annex 1 illustrates the breakdown of the stakeholders interviewed individually by group.

The sampling technique for the focus group interviews involved contacting all of the selected stakeholders from CIDA's Americas Branch, FAC's Latin America and Caribbean Bureau and FOCAL. In total, 20 out of the 33 stakeholders invited to participate, contributed to the focus group interview process. Among those who did not participate, 3 stakeholders were interviewed on an individual basis.

## **2.7 Limitations of the Evaluation**

A number of potential limitations to the evaluation were identified and discussed at the outset of the evaluation process. These limitations, as well as additional challenges encountered throughout the evaluation process are summarized in the following 5 points:

1. *Relevance of an impact assessment:* As indicated in the Evaluation Work Plan, the team expressed reservations about the relevance of an impact assessment of FOCAL's activities given the following aspects:

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<sup>4</sup> This number includes 8 individuals working in the LAC region that asked not to be identified.

- ❖ the lack of baseline data,
- ❖ the lack of available field observation information,
- ❖ the relatively early stage of some of the projects under review, and
- ❖ the limited resources (time and financial) allocated to conduct an in-depth assessment of the issues and evaluation questions.

2. *Attribution:* Throughout the evaluation process, the team discovered additional challenges in assessing and attributing a causal relationship between FOCAL's activities and its impacts. Because FOCAL's efforts are dedicated to promoting ideas and building a stronger hemispheric community, and because the outcome of these activities is very hard to isolate and measure, these less tangible and less explicit results posed a challenge to the evaluation team. In every case, the team was careful to distinguish between results that are hard to measure and results that have yet to be achieved or were simply non-existent.
3. *Inaccurate contact information:* Another serious limitation of this evaluation was the quantity of inaccurate and outdated contact information provided to the team by FOCAL. Throughout the course of the survey and interview process, the team experienced great difficulty in contacting stakeholders and partners, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean because of incorrect information. In fact, 25% of the website surveys and 16% of the general surveys were returned due to errors in the addresses even though efforts are made within FOCAL to delete or update contact information whenever possible
4. *Partners:* The evaluation team was referred by FOCAL to a list of specific stakeholders or organizations because of their partnership and their potential to offer more in-depth information and details about FOCAL as an organization and as a collaborator. In some cases, individuals listed as 'partners' mentioned that they have only limited interaction with FOCAL and could not fully participate in an interview because of their limited knowledge of the organization
5. *Response rate:* An additional limitation to this evaluation was the overall very low response rate to the website and general survey among those individuals successfully contacted during the evaluation. Once it became apparent that stakeholders were not responding to the team's initial request to complete the online survey, the evaluation team attempted to increase survey participation and the response rate using alternate means. Instead of re-sending individual reminders, over 50 stakeholders were contacted in-person to encourage participation. Once they were contacted, stakeholders were asked to either complete the general survey online or to participate in an interview. The overall response rate for the general survey and the website survey was 5% and 3% respectively. While the information provided by those individuals who completed the surveys was informative, valid and useful, the low response rate limits the generalization of the information derived from the online surveys because it is not representative of a significant number of stakeholders, users or partner populations. Consequently, the information obtained via the general and website survey was not used in this evaluation report.

## 3.0 Main Findings of the Evaluation

### 3.1 Relevance of FOCAL's Programs and Policies

The purpose of this section is to explore the extent to which FOCAL's programs and policies:

- ❖ are congruent with its mission;
- ❖ improve the quality of policy debate and decision-making on hemispheric issues
- ❖ develop a greater understanding of important hemispheric issues; and
- ❖ meet the needs of its stakeholders in Canada and the Latin America and Caribbean region

#### 3.1.1 FOCAL's mission

FOCAL's mission is to develop a greater understanding of important hemispheric issues and to help build a stronger community of the Americas. Deliberately devised in broad terms, FOCAL's mission enables the organization to focus on the most relevant and timely issues facing the hemisphere. To make Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) better known to Canada and to raise awareness about Canada in LAC, FOCAL has to act on various fronts. Activities include:

- ❖ brokering information and ideas;
- ❖ organizing knowledge events and providing a forum for discussion;
- ❖ building a strong network of strategic partnerships with Canadian and LAC stakeholders;
- ❖ producing and disseminating quality publications; and,
- ❖ contributing to a better understanding of the Canadian perspective on LAC issues.

The majority of stakeholders interviewed agree that FOCAL effectively fills a strategic niche that is currently unoccupied by any other institution in Canada<sup>5</sup> by providing an overview of hemispheric issues from a Canadian perspective and by nourishing relevant debate on key issues.

Stakeholders' opinions regarding FOCAL's ability to effectively fulfill its mission and contribute to the policy debate on hemispheric issues is influenced by the level of awareness and exposure Canadian and LAC organizations have to FOCAL's activities. It also explains why stakeholders' views regarding FOCAL's mission are divergent. While governmental stakeholders are more familiar with FOCAL's outputs and activities, academic and NGO communities have a much more limited exposure. The majority of CIDA and FAC stakeholder's believe that FOCAL should maintain its focus on policy analysis and recommendations. Alternatively, stakeholders from the academic community believe that FOCAL could increase its relevance as an organization by collaborating to a greater extent with academics and researchers and producing more research.

The majority of stakeholders consulted throughout the course of the evaluation recognized FOCAL as an effective *idea and information broker*. FOCAL's innovative ideas and its ability to articulate the Canadian perspective on a broad range of issues and concerns were cited as its unique contribution and area of most value added.

Interviews also confirmed that FOCAL is a very good *organizer of knowledge events* and round tables and that by doing so, it fills a gap in the Canadian advocacy and policy debate with regards to Latin America. FOCAL's *knowledge events*, including *workshops, presentations* and *conferences* and its ability to provide a *forum for discussion* were also mentioned by the majority of stakeholders as FOCAL's most valuable activity. Stakeholders consistently

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<sup>5</sup> Especially since the Canadian Council for the Americas (CCA) disappeared.

acknowledged FOCAL's ability to feature experts on LAC issues and attract interesting speakers and influential senior government officials as reasons for attending and participating in these events. The majority of stakeholders from every sector also identified these events as valuable because they are an effective means of familiarizing Canadians with LAC issues. Stakeholders indicated that FOCAL should reinforce its role as a bridge between civil society, government and the private sector. Stakeholders confirmed that FOCAL has a critical voice in the political scene as it reflects on new current key issues and provides Canadian views and perspectives which are well received in the Americas. FOCAL's value resides in promoting good governance and democratic principles and supporting the commitment of civil society in the LAC countries and the hemisphere.

In addition, FOCAL was recognized by stakeholders for its ability to *disseminate accurate and quality information* across the hemisphere. FOCAL was commended by stakeholders for a number of its publications, in particular, *FOCALPOINT*. This newsletter was acknowledged by representatives of every sector for its wide range of articles dealing with relevant and timely issues.

FOCAL is a credible provider of information and knowledge in Canada. Its publications are regularly consulted by a wide range of stakeholders for a snapshot of the Canadian government's perspective on the LAC region. FOCAL's coverage of issues and analysis is timely and is an effective means of bringing issues and problems to the forefront of public attention, for discussion.

Stakeholders indicated that FOCAL could improve its effectiveness by *building stronger partnerships* and *forming a larger network of contacts*. Stakeholders claim FOCAL's potential to advance policy analysis and debate is limited because they lack strong visibility in the region and that by establishing a greater network of meaningful relationships, FOCAL could better disseminate its message and involve a greater number of stakeholders. Major development NGOs and networks may be able to provide lessons learned and assist with this process.

Stakeholders from almost every sector remarked that FOCAL could improve its value added, better meet the needs of LAC stakeholders and increase its readership by *producing more documentation in Spanish*. To improve its approach in the region, members of international organizations also suggested that FOCAL *assume a more proactive approach*, attending a greater number of regional events and developing its role as a civil society leader.

To contribute to a *better understanding of the Canadian perspectives on LAC issues*, and to raise awareness about Canada in LAC, FOCAL has to provide independent analysis, capture the perspective of civil society in policy debates, support democratic development, track LAC key political issues, assess their implications and make recommendations on Canadian foreign policy in the region. Based on the information gathered in the course of the evaluation FOCAL has a strong track record and is able to work on various fronts: FOCAL has adapted and responded well to the emerging socio-political and economic situation by having knowledgeable people assigned to tracking issues; it feeds the political debate around key issues in the hemisphere with analysis and policy papers and has the capacity to organize and participate in events and conferences to push the political agenda forward.

FOCAL actively contributes to the LAC region policy debate; however, FOCAL would benefit from a reassessment of its networking strategy and greater collaboration with Southern partners, as well as reconsidering whether the focus of its efforts should be country specific or regional.

## **Network of Partnerships with Canada and LAC stakeholders**

The evaluation team initially assumed that “partners” would be the stakeholder group with whom FOCAL would most likely work in close cooperation, to influence others. However, after the interviews, it became apparent that FOCAL had not clearly defined what they meant by a partnership. While in some cases FOCAL seems to have good partnership relationships, in many cases the “partnership” seemed to be more at the level of a contact. In this sense, FOCAL might benefit from a review of lessons learned from other models of partnerships, such as between development organizations and their southern counterparts.

Based on information provided by FOCAL, the following is a profile of their partnerships where active collaboration occurred over the past couple of years. This is at best, only an approximate list, given the challenges of differentiating between the definition of a contact and that of a collaborator/partner, as well as situating the collaborative relationship within a consistent timeframe for all partner categories.

- ❖ *Canadian Government:* Active collaboration and information exchange, the organization of events have generally been with a small number of officers from CIDA and FAC. Collaboration of a similar nature has also occurred with Justice Canada, Citizenship & Immigration Canada, the Privy Council Office and the Inter-Parliamentary Forum.
- ❖ *Canadian NGOs and Academic/Research institutions:* FOCAL partners with 18 universities, institutions, networks and NGOs, 15 of which have been involved in multiple activities. Collaboration includes attendance at or serving as resource people at each other’s events, FOCAL participation on taskforces, collaboration on training, reviewing draft articles or papers, joint application for funds and funding FOCAL activities.
- ❖ *American NGOs, Academic/Research institutes & Other:* FOCAL has partnerships with 8 universities and 6 other institutions. Collaboration ranges from writing articles or endorsement for FOCAL’s articles, serving as resource people at FOCAL events (particularly on Cuba), co-organizing events, and funding FOCAL activities.
- ❖ *International Organizations:* FOCAL has collaborated extensively with various units of the OAS, particularly with the implementation of the Summit Plan of Action. Contacts are also maintained with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB),<sup>6</sup> the World Bank, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Commonwealth Secretariat (through representation on FOCAL’s Board).
- ❖ *LAC Embassies in Ottawa:* FOCAL actively collaborates with numerous embassies, who exchange information with FOCAL and participate in FOCAL events.
- ❖ *Organizations in the LAC Region:* FOCAL identified 30 organizations which include 6 government ministries, 4 universities and 20 other institutions, NGOs and networks. A total of 17 cooperative ventures were one-time activities, including inviting participants or resource people to FOCAL sponsored events in Canada, intern placements, or articles written for FOCAL events. Four others involved 2 activities each with the remaining 9 involving much more extensive collaborative work. The latter includes participating in regional networks, joint organizing and co-hosting events, joint summit follow-up, joint articles, and joint preparation of funding applications.

From this list, it is apparent that FOCAL has almost as many partnerships in the USA as in Canada. While important leverage is derived from working with American organizations, such activities compete for

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<sup>6</sup> Particularly as it relates to the Bank’s increase recognition of the importance of Civil Society in both planning and operations.

resources that could be allocated to supporting greater collaboration with Canadian and/or LAC organizations.

FOCAL's definition of a 'partnership' relationship does not correspond to their supposed partners' definition.

### 3.1.2 FOCAL's ability to adapt its collective vision, niche and strategic focus based on evolving external conditions

FOCAL was recognized by the majority of stakeholders in every sector for its ability to respond quickly to evolving circumstances, despite the reactive, as opposed to anticipatory nature of the response. Stakeholders also commended the organization on its ability to carve out a region-specific niche for itself. In comparison to the North-South Institute, which conducts research on broader development issues, and other institutes that specialize in development issues (i.e. the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada). While there are differing perspectives and opinions about FOCAL's effectiveness as an independent, non-governmental organization, stakeholders recognize FOCAL's unique ability to provide an up-to-date snapshot of what is really happening on the ground. In terms of conducting research studies, government representatives confirmed that, while they consult universities or specialized research centres for their research needs, no other organization or university provides the overview or perspective offered by FOCAL.

FOCAL effectively fills a strategic niche that is currently unoccupied by any other institution in Canada by providing an overview of hemispheric issues from a Canadian perspective and nourishing the policy debate

### 3.1.3 Improvement in the quality of policy debate and decision-making on hemispheric issues

FOCAL's most important contribution is perhaps its ability to identify and frame policy issues. This process involves a series of key steps. FOCAL begins by identifying weaknesses in development knowledge and bringing these issues to the attention of government officials and stakeholders. Acting as a catalyst for policy discussion and debate, FOCAL then identifies key resources among their network of contacts and/or partnerships to advance issues within a specific country or region. FOCAL will then network and partner with strategic organizations in order to move the policy issue forward.

FOCAL involves itself in policy debates by disseminating policy papers and newsletter to policymakers, government officials and the general public, and by inviting civil servants and key government officials to participate in conference and workshops. In addition, depending on their area and level of expertise, FOCAL officers may be called upon to consult with government departments or to testify before a Parliamentary Committee. Providing testimony to a Parliamentary Committee is an important opportunity for FOCAL to convey recommendations to policy makers and to affirm the usefulness of FOCAL's input.

FOCAL's budget, which impacts on the number of FOCAL staff and their level of experience, may provide an explanation for FOCAL's limited visibility in the LAC region. With limited funding, FOCAL staff is not able to undertake long-range research projects or to organize regular conferences and seminars that could generate higher visibility for the organization. Although FOCAL is engaged in debate and dialogue with the policy community in Canada and throughout the Americas, interviews with several stakeholders indicated that FOCAL's analysis of LAC issues are not perceived as being as in-depth as other sources in North America.

FOCAL has brought some positive changes in process within the OAS, and has allowed a more meaningful dialogue with civil society (e.g. Meeting of Ministers).

Although references to FOCAL in the media provide minimal information about FOCAL's impact on shaping public opinion and stimulating and/or influencing policy debate, it does provide insights into which hemispheric issues FOCAL is pursuing. While the evaluation team was unable to assess FOCAL's impact at a particular stage of policy debate, stakeholder interviews confirmed that FOCAL plays an important role in providing information about emerging hemispheric issues and in informing their target audience, as well as the general public, on policy options.

FOCAL's potential to advance policy analysis and debate is evident although it is difficult to assess the level of influence that FOCAL's publications and activities have had on the actual advancement of policy. This is a challenge facing any policy institution.

### 3.1.4 The nature of FOCAL's relationship with the Canadian government and/or NGOs

According to the majority of stakeholders, there appears to be limited interaction between FOCAL and other Canadian organizations working on hemispheric issues. The evidence indicates that among organizations where strong similarities exist, intersections tend to occur with a small number of organizations, while minimal interaction or collaboration occurred with the majority of organizations, aside from ad hoc meetings at seminars and conferences. This latter group includes many of the international development and humanitarian NGOs, human rights groups, labour unions, research institutions, church and solidarity groups. While many of these groups have acknowledged the good work that FOCAL does in different sectors, this has been overshadowed by FOCAL's perceived lack of openness to discussion and debate on trade issues, particularly FTAA. Some had indicated that once their differing views are known by FOCAL, they are no longer invited to participate on FOCAL's panels or in other similar capacities. As a result of such missed opportunities, FOCAL limits its potential to capitalize on critical networking, information and partnership ventures, which in turn, weaken its relevance as an organization committed to deepening and strengthening Canada's relations with LAC countries.

Government representatives confirmed that there is a need for greater collaboration and informal contact between FOCAL and the government; but at the same time cautioned against FOCAL collaborating too closely with the government. This apprehension stems from the concern that FOCAL will be perceived as an extension of the government, as opposed to an independent NGO. Stakeholders from every sector and from the academic community in particular, indicated that FOCAL is already perceived as "the right arm of the government", echoing the perspective and beliefs of its funding bodies, rather than a truly independent, non-governmental organization. The reasons cited by stakeholders to support this observation include FOCAL's apparent lack of critical analysis of government policies and the presence of current and/or former FAC staff in FOCAL management positions and on its Board of Directors.

It was noted by FOCAL that since funding of certain politically sensitive issues can create problems for government, government should have the right to refuse such funding without being perceived as generally controlling the use of their funds. Furthermore, being independent from government, does not necessarily imply being critical of government policies. FOCAL management stated that where they have come to different conclusions than government, they have not shirked from stating them.

A greater openness to different perspectives, would significantly facilitate the perception of FOCAL as an independent and respected forum for policy discussion and development, and increase its opportunities for networking and forging new partnerships on strategic issues.



### 3.1.5 Better informing Canadians on LAC issues and their importance to and impact on Canada

FOCAL was commended by the majority of government management for its contributions towards exposing Canadians to key hemispheric issues and increasing knowledge and awareness through its publications, workshops and conferences. Stakeholders also found that FOCAL offered the Canadian public critical information and insight about the Summit of the Americas and Canada's role in the Summit process.

FOCAL's ability to effectively inform Canadians about LAC issues can be explained by 2 key factors. To begin with, FOCAL is composed of a group of very qualified and committed staff members. Ranging in areas of expertise, a number of stakeholders from a variety of sectors perceive FOCAL staff as providing reliable and timely information about a wide range of topics affecting the LAC region. Second, the current Executive Director is recognised by a number of stakeholders in a range of sectors as a "stabilizing presence" and a major asset to FOCAL in terms of his experience with LAC issues and his wide range of contacts throughout the region.

### 3.1.6 The ability of FOCAL's programs to meet stakeholder needs in LAC and Canada

According to FAC and CIDA management, FOCAL's programs respond effectively to stakeholders needs in both the LAC region and in Canada by serving as a platform for civil society. In contrast, among Canadian government agencies other than CIDA and FAC, FOCAL's programs were criticized in terms of their ability to respond effectively to stakeholders needs in the LAC region and in Canada. The majority of representatives from this sector described FOCAL's policy analysis as superficial, adding that FOCAL's insights and advice to policy makers are more of a synthesis of current thinking on policy issues, rather than real policy alternatives to current approaches.

FOCAL was also criticized by Canadian research institutions in terms of its ability to reach and inform Canadians, particularly in Quebec; the problem lies in FOCAL's outreach abilities and not the language of the documents per se. Consequently, efforts to increase the number of bilingual (French-English) publications would not improve the situation because most French-speaking individuals working on LAC issues in Quebec communicate out of necessity in English and Spanish. In contrast, among the majority of LAC-based organizations, including embassies, NGOs and universities, the language of FOCAL's publications is the crux of the problem. FOCAL's lack of documentation in Spanish was consistently cited as FOCAL's primary limitation in meeting the needs of stakeholders in the LAC region. Given that FOCAL produces about 20 publications a year (including FOCAL POINT) translation into Spanish would require additional efforts and financial resources.

The majority of stakeholders from the Canadian academic community indicated that FOCAL could better meet their needs by building partnerships with academics and by adopting more of a think-tank attitude. Researchers and academics voiced opinions about the need for FOCAL to improve its research capabilities and to develop a more systematized approach to developing links with individual academics and academic organizations. Academic and research organizations in the United States suggested that FOCAL could better meet the needs of its stakeholders by increasing its proactivity and assertiveness. They believe that the LAC region would benefit enormously from a closer association with Canada and that the Canadian government is not necessarily the best channel or mechanism to establish these closer ties. As an independent NGO, FOCAL could effectively respond to stakeholders at the international level, via bilateral and multilateral organizations, and at the municipal level by sharing Canadian expertise in dealing with complex issues, including ethnic minority issues, municipal capacity-building, environmental protection, and land management issues. Representatives of American-based institutions also recognized FOCAL's potential to

successfully respond to stakeholders needs throughout the hemisphere and effectively act as an interlocutor for increasing Canada's visibility in the LAC region.

FOCAL's ability to effectively respond to stakeholders' needs in LAC would gain by improving their outreach abilities, building and strengthening partnerships, and increasing the organization's capacity in terms of proactivity and assertiveness.

### 3.1.7 Supporting the development work of NGOs, institutions and governments in LAC and Canada

According to the FOCAL website and interviews conducted with FOCAL staff, FOCAL activities support the development work of NGOs, institutions and governments in LAC and Canada by addressing a full range of hemispheric development issues. In Canada, FOCAL works closely with FAC and CIDA, supporting their developmental goals by providing policy analysis and brokering information between the Canadian government, institutions and NGOs. For example, working as electoral observers during the 2003 Guatemala elections, FOCAL collaborated with FAC, the OAS, and Common Borders, Centro de Acción Legal de Derechos Humanos, Procuradoras de los Derechos and the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala to contribute to pro-democratic forces in the region and to build a strong stable democracy for the people of Guatemala.

In contrast, the majority of Canadian NGOs do not share the perception of FOCAL as actively supporting the development work of NGOs. The majority of stakeholders from this sector claim that FOCAL's reported disconnection from the greater part of Canadian NGOs poses an impediment to its ability to effectively support the development work of these organizations and to effectively represent civil society. This being said, FOCAL does not claim to represent civil society but is rather working to open spaces within the policy-making process in which civil society can represent itself in all of its diversity. As well, Canadian NGOs perceive FOCAL as relating better to more academic and/or middle class networks in the LAC region than campesinos, antipoverty groups or unions. FOCAL's absence from the community of campesinos, antipoverty groups and unions does not mean a lack of interest but is justified by, according to FOCAL, the fact that these issues are well covered by the work of other groups and entities. The majority of Canadian NGO stakeholders believe that FOCAL could better support Canadian NGO development work by broadening its perspective and embracing a more divergent range of views.

Stakeholders from LAC-based organizations and institutions indicated that the notable absence of Spanish on the website, as well as the limited availability of publications in Spanish, poses a constraint on the ability of unilingual Spanish speaking organizations and individuals to access and benefit from FOCAL's development efforts. In addition, FOCAL's transition over the past few years from printed publications to internet publications has also affected the ability of certain organizations and institutions in the region without an internet connection to access FOCAL's publications.

FOCAL effectively addresses and supports the development work of Canadian government institutions but is only marginally able to support the development work of Canadian and LAC-based NGOs. While the FOCAL team has clearly occupied a critical role in working in collaboration with Canadian government agencies, international organizations and various LAC-based NGOs, their acceptance is limited among Canadian NGOs and various other LAC-based NGOs.

The purpose of this section is to investigate the extent to which FOCAL has achieved its stated objectives. These objectives include the following:

- ❖ To develop a greater understanding of important hemispheric issues
- ❖ To contribute to building a stronger community of the Americas

### 3.2.1 Strengthening Canada's relations with the South

#### ***Results of FOCAL's programs in terms of deepening and strengthening Canada's relations with LAC countries and regionally-based organizations through discussions and analysis***

FOCAL's programs are generally aimed at addressing a range of issues facing the LAC region, including: democratic governance, trade and economic integration, and poverty and inequity. In addition, FOCAL's programs are also intended to strengthen inter-American relations by examining the trends and cultures of the region and its sub-regions, such as Central America, the Andean region and to a minor extent, the Caribbean. Using both bilateral and multilateral forums for outreach and discussion, FOCAL's programs are geared towards improving Canada's relations with key countries and regionally-based organizations, as well as advancing the Summit of the Americas process.

To determine the extent to which FOCAL's programs effectively deepen and strengthen Canada's relations with LAC countries and regionally-based organizations through discussions and analysis, the evaluation team used the following indicators as a measure of this expected result:

- ❖ Extent to which FOCAL is invited/requested to participate in high-level policy discussions
- ❖ Extent to which FOCAL is used to facilitate contacts
- ❖ Stakeholder perceptions of FOCAL's presence and involvement at hemispheric events

Throughout the 2002-2003<sup>7</sup> reporting period, there was a high level of interest from senior decision makers towards including FOCAL in senior-level meetings and reports concerning a wide range of issues. Evidence of these opportunities is apparent from the following examples, among others:

- ❖ Request for a policy paper on "North American Integration: Back to Basics", used by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (October-December 2002)
- ❖ Meeting requested by the Argentine Ambassador to the OAS regarding FOCAL's Policy Paper, "Argentina: Crisis of Governance" (January-March 2003)
- ❖ Invitation to present at the Canadian Government Inter-Departmental Meeting organized by FAC for planning on Canadian positions at the Special Summit of the Americas 2004 (July-September 2003)
- ❖ Invitation to participate in, and write a report on high level meetings on trade negotiations in agriculture and future common agenda for Canada-Brazil (July-September 2003)

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<sup>7</sup> Prior to 1999, FOCAL was using an Apple computer system; archives from the Apple system still exist and could be converted if required.

In addition to participating in high-level meetings and providing written reports on a range of pertinent issues, FOCAL's performance results also indicate that they receive regular requests from government and non-governmental officials, as well as academics to facilitate contacts between policy communities in Canada and organizations across the hemisphere. Examples of these requests include the following, among others:

- ❖ Request from the Canada-Argentina Centre regarding Canadian academics working on Argentina (October 2002-December 2002)
- ❖ Request from the Bolivian Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies to facilitate research links with Canadian organizations
- ❖ Request from Carleton Latin American and Caribbean Studies Committee to advertise an event (April-June 2003)
- ❖ Request from the OAS-UPD: Special Program on Conflict Resolution (July-August 2003)

According to some stakeholders, FOCAL's efforts towards deepening and strengthening Canada's relations with LAC countries and regionally-based organizations bolster the visibility of Canada's civil society organizations in regional affairs and as a result, deepen and strengthen Canada's relations with LAC countries. Overall, these stakeholders perceive FOCAL and its network of contacts in the LAC region as essential for increasing awareness of Canada throughout the hemisphere and encouraging a greater understanding of the LAC region within Canada.

Despite FOCAL's strong evidence supporting the positive results of its programs in terms of deepening and strengthening Canada's relations with LAC countries, many other stakeholders interviewed did not substantiate this finding. These stakeholders believe that FOCAL could improve relations between Canada and LAC countries and regionally-based organizations by increasing its awareness and understanding of stakeholders' needs in Canada and the LAC region. According to these stakeholders, FOCAL advocates positions that are not in line with their approach or perspective, thereby constraining their ability to benefit from FOCAL's efforts. They perceive FOCAL as overly aligned with Canadian government positions in terms of economic integration, and more specifically, the FTAA. Stakeholders regard FOCAL as unwilling to engage in an open debate and to discuss through their forums or papers, the positive and negative merits of economic integration. Rather, stakeholders allege that FOCAL limits their involvement to measures that address imbalances and improve benefits for LAC countries by supporting increased integration, despite the fact that LAC countries have serious reservations about economic integration. As a result of FOCAL's position, the organization has isolated itself from both stakeholders and LAC governments over this issue.

FOCAL's presence and visibility in the LAC region was also cited by stakeholders consulted throughout the interview process as a limitation to FOCAL's ability to enhance Canada's relations with this region and its organizations. FOCAL's internship program, however, has the potential to provide FOCAL with significant exposure in the LAC region which they appear not to be exploiting at present. Deployed to various LAC-based institutions, FOCAL interns are an effective means of publicizing the organization and informing LAC stakeholders about FOCAL's programs. FOCAL may want to consider its internship program as a means to capitalize on opportunities to increase the organization's presence and visibility in the region.

These factors, coupled with the large quantity of invalid contact information in FOCAL's database casts doubt on FOCAL's ability to effectively reach and contribute to a meaningful exchange with stakeholders in the LAC region. While it is quite apparent that FOCAL has neither the financial nor the physical resources to accomplish all of the tasks necessary to effectively deepen and strengthen Canadian-LAC relations, reviewing and updating the existing network of contacts by communicating with LAC stakeholders by email and telephone could be an effective first step towards initiating the process of deepening and strengthening

Canada-LAC relations and is within FOCAL's means. While FOCAL could be realistically expected to make contributions towards this goal, achievement of this result is dependent on a full gamut of factors, including a sufficient budget and appropriate mandate, among others.

Although the findings are unclear as to FOCAL's ability to deepen and strengthen Canada's relations with LAC countries and regionally-based organizations through discussions and analysis, FOCAL's limited financial and physical resources, as well as the problems associated with contacting stakeholders, particularly in the LAC region, make it unlikely that FOCAL achieved this result to the full extent set out by its mandate.

### **Results of FOCAL's effectiveness in tracking political, social and economic developments in LAC and Canada**

To assess the extent to which FOCAL has been effective in tracking political, social and economic developments in LAC and Canada, the evaluation team examined the following indicators:

- ❖ Number of issues identified, information and knowledge collected and analyzed
- ❖ Quality of dissemination of information and knowledge regarding key issues
- ❖ Stakeholders' level of satisfaction with information and analysis

FOCAL tracks political, social and economic developments in the LAC region and in Canada by consulting with its network of contacts from a variety of sectors across the hemisphere, by organizing, co-sponsoring and participating in knowledge events, and by systematically compiling the information into a variety of publication formats.

Table 1 in Annex I provides information on the type and number of issues identified, as well as information and knowledge collected and analyzed between October 2002-December 2003.

From this table, it is clear that FOCAL tracks a wide range of issues pertaining to CIDA's 3 designated themes: Governance and Civil Society, Trade and Economic Integration, and Poverty and Inequality. It is also apparent that in the last reporting period, FOCAL significantly increased the number of political, social and economic issues that it is capable of monitoring.

Throughout the course of the interview process, stakeholders stated that they regularly consult the FOCAL website to keep informed and that they peruse/read FOCAL publications and *FOCALPOINT* in particular, in order to develop an understanding of recent events and issues pertaining to the region. Stakeholders from every sector were very positive about FOCAL's ability to gather information and to organize the information in a clear and concise manner. They cited FOCAL's ability to identify the most salient and timely issues facing the region as their main reasons for consulting FOCAL for information about the LAC region.

FOCAL's has an effective approach towards tracking political, social, and economic developments in LAC and Canada.

### **Contributing to providing an informed forum for debate and dialogue**

In order to assess FOCAL's ability to provide an informed forum for debate and dialogue, the team examined the following indicators:

- ❖ Roundtables convened, providing open, interactive discussions, free flow of information and access to opinion leaders and policy makers throughout the region
- ❖ Workshop/Conferences convened where discussions are focused on key issues and include the participation of experts within Canada and throughout the region
- ❖ Stakeholders' feedback on FOCAL's events
- ❖ Degree to which various views are represented at neutral fora for debate and dialogue

Based on the documentation consulted in the course of the evaluation between September 1999 and December 2003, FOCAL has organized a total of 53 roundtables, workshops and conferences. (Please refer to Table 2 in Annex I. After September 2001, FOCAL changed the way in which it reported on the number of events, merging the number of roundtables and workshops/conferences together into a single figure.

As illustrated in Table 2, FOCAL has consistently increased the number of events that it organized between September 1999 – December 2003 and that, aside from a period where data on attendees' feedback was not collected, FOCAL received positive feedback about its organized events.

Overall, the majority of stakeholders interviewed throughout the evaluation process had favourable perceptions of FOCAL's events, including roundtables, workshops and conferences. FOCAL's organized knowledge events (i.e. visiting professionals or academics brought to Canada to raise awareness and knowledge about specific issues) were credited as extremely useful and beneficial by stakeholders, describing these events as "solid" and "influential".

While FOCAL is widely acknowledged by the majority of stakeholders for providing a forum for debate and dialogue, stakeholders questioned the legitimacy of the dialogue that transpires. FOCAL was criticized for conducting conferences and consultations that involve no real deliberations, particularly surrounding economic integration and the FTAA. According to this group of stakeholders, they perceive these conferences more as a formality than a constructive exchange of ideas, stating that these consultations are often held so that the government can claim that a debate occurred and that civil society was conferred with. Furthermore, several stakeholders indicated that groups with views contrary to FOCAL are excluded from the debate entirely, thereby resulting in conferences that neither make use of individuals with the most knowledge or expertise, nor present a wide range of perspectives. FOCAL claims to invite knowledgeable people to events and ensures that participants present a range of views. A review of FOCAL's documentation and reporting provides a different perspective and indicate that while FOCAL has participated in a number of FTAA-focused conferences and seminars, in fact the sole FTAA event in which FOCAL was a key component was the Organization of the Americas Trade and Sustainable Development Forum held in 2003. Again, for the forum held in 2003, FOCAL's efforts were directed to ensuring that civil society groups had an opportunity to speak directly to the assembled trade ministers on the same basis as the Americas Business Forum.

Although the majority of stakeholders who have attended a FOCAL roundtable, workshop or conference indicated that these knowledge events were stimulating and useful, the majority of these events are held in the North, which tends to limit the ability of the majority of Southern stakeholders to attend. Prior to 2002, FOCAL's ability to organize and host events in the LAC region was constrained by the limitations of its funding agreement, which only covered events in Canada. Although FOCAL makes a concerted effort to bring in LAC expertise to events in Canada and to organize and host events in the LAC region<sup>8</sup>, according to LAC representatives, stakeholders from the region simply do not benefit from the same opportunities as their

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<sup>8</sup> It should be pointed out that this year, the Andean Forum was held in Lima, Peru while the two previous versions of this annual event were held in Ottawa. Similarly, the Migration Seminar was held in Guatemala and FOCAL helped to organize the Academic Forum that took place on the fringes of the Special Summit of the Americas in Monterrey, Mexico.

Canadian and American counterparts. Both LAC stakeholders and FOCAL are constrained by the enormous financial cost of organizing and attending events beyond proximity.

FOCAL contributes to providing an informed forum for debate and dialogue; however, it is unclear whether this forum always represents a wide variety of opinions and perspectives.

The substantial financial cost associated with organizing events in the Southern part of the hemisphere constrains FOCAL's ability to host events in the LAC region and consequently, benefit from a strong LAC presence.

### 3.2.2 Informing decision makers

#### ***The effectiveness of FOCAL's approach in contributing towards generating the necessary political will to promote policy development and implementation***

To properly assess the extent to which FOCAL effectively contributes towards generating the necessary political will to promote policy development and implementation in selected priority areas, the following indicators were examined:

- ❖ Degree to which FOCAL's approach is adequate and appropriate in view of intended purposes
- ❖ Stakeholder's perceptions of FOCAL's approach
- ❖ Extent of FOCAL's proactive follow up on events, dialogues, etc., to further advocate their policy recommendations

In addition to these 3 indicators initially proposed in the evaluation matrix, Donald E. Abelson in his article "Public Visibility and Policy Relevance: Assessing the Impact and Influence of Canadian Policy Institutes", suggests that an organization's ability to influence policy and to produce impacts is dependent on an additional 3 factors:

- ❖ The extent to which it develops close working relationships with key senior people,
- ❖ The extent to which the organization is consulted for advice, and
- ❖ The organisation's ability to provide information to the appropriate people at the appropriate time.

To achieve this objective, FOCAL explores new ideas and concepts and identifies and presents policy issues relevant to the hemisphere to various stakeholders. Once the range of issues and concerns are determined, FOCAL consults with interest groups from within its network of contacts to gather information and support, and engages in a process of open dialogue with its major stakeholders, including policy practitioners, civil society members and government officials.

According to members of FOCAL's management, it is precisely this practice of establishing a mechanism for advancing policy agenda issues that enables FOCAL to effectively contribute to producing the necessary will to advance policy development and implementation. They believe that FOCAL's ability to act as a catalyst for collective action and its keen awareness of key players committed to similar priorities in the LAC region facilitates the process of collectively influencing policy development and implementation. To support this claim, FOCAL provided numerous examples of instances where they were invited by senior-level FAC staff, either in collaboration with a select group of NGOs or individually, to provide information or advice on a

range of issues affecting the LAC region. For instance, at the Quebec Summit, FOCAL was among the few NGOs that were inside the fence and had an official seat at the negotiation table. In addition, during the Monterey Summit, FOCAL representatives, as well as individuals from Rights and Democracy, The Centre for International Sustainable Development Law, University of Calgary, University of Laval and the Assembly of First Nations had the opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister<sup>9</sup> for a 30-minute wide-ranging discussion. FOCAL's concerted effort to feed ideas into the Summit of the Americas process and to mobilize its connections in Washington and across the hemisphere were recognized and substantiated by the majority of stakeholders in every sector.

FOCAL's performance measurement reports provide additional evidence of FOCAL's ability in this respect. The results demonstrate that there has been a consistently high level of interest from senior-decision makers in Canada and the LAC region in FOCAL's policy recommendations, particularly between October 2002 and September 2003. In addition, it is apparent that FOCAL was regularly included in high-level meetings and asked to participate in producing reports.

The effectiveness of FOCAL's approach was substantiated by stakeholders who cited FOCAL's involvement in Peru's 2000 Presidential Elections as evidence of its ability to generate political will and to promote policy dialogue, among other results. In this situation, FOCAL was responsible for bringing together Canadian academics, NGOs and Peruvian policy officials via conference calls, meetings and policy dialogue roundtables. From these discussions, participants formulated 29 key recommendations towards ensuring free and fair elections in the country. These recommendations were eventually included in the democracy clause of the Declaration and Plan of Action of the Quebec Summit of the Americas, as well as the Democratic Charter, one of the important outputs of the Summit.

The majority of stakeholders believe that in order to affect policy discussions and implementation, FOCAL needs to be more proactive in contacting, interacting and joining efforts with civil society groups, NGOs, and a broader range of government representatives, including Canadian parliamentarians via the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA)<sup>10</sup>, for example. These stakeholders overwhelmingly agreed that by developing greater contacts with policy makers in Canada and partnerships in the LAC region, FOCAL could strengthen its presence and visibility in the region, as well as its credibility as a policy advisor.

Stakeholders also maintained that FOCAL could enhance its performance in the field of policy development and implementation by inviting a broader range of participants and speakers to their knowledge events. They argued that by supporting a more diversified forum for discussion and consulting a broader base of experts, FOCAL could generate a greater variety of policy conclusions for the government. This approach would also effectively enhance FOCAL's credibility as an independent NGO that is capable of bringing constructive criticism of the government and its policies.

The evaluation team, perceived FOCAL's effectiveness in this role as constrained by 2 key factors: its limited capacity to follow up on issues as a result of constrained physical and financial resources and its limited focus on long-term goals and impacts. While FOCAL provides evidence of its efforts to follow up on events, it is not apparent how these activities in and of themselves produce the desired results.

As a broker of ideas and information, FOCAL is oriented towards uncovering current issues and trends facing the region and bringing them to the attention of the Canadian public and policymakers. At the same time, a review of FOCAL's quarterly reports suggests that there are substantive number of events sponsored and articles written where there is no follow-up or follow-on activities. While these are perceived to be valuable in their own right, there may have been missed opportunities for a much greater impact if FOCAL

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<sup>9</sup> It was FOCAL's network of contacts in FAC, PCO and the PMO that made this possible

<sup>10</sup> At its own request, FIPA was briefed by FOCAL on various occasions.



had continued to pursue them. This would suggest that FOCAL should develop a stronger strategic focus with perhaps fewer issues and a longer timeframe of involvement. Generating the necessary political will to influence policy development and implementation is by its very nature, long-term and requires strategic focus.

On other issues such as follow-up to the Summit of the Americas, FOCAL has taken a more strategic focus. FOCAL employed a wide variety of mechanisms (bilateral and multilateral) and approaches to bring informed opinion and analysis on a diversity of issues to move the Agenda forward. To comply with this responsibility, FOCAL has chosen the fields in which they have the capacity and resources to work and have had to take into consideration the budgetary and human resources constraints.

While FOCAL has an established network of contacts in high level positions and they have been asked to provide information about key issues, their ability to generate political will and promote policy development and implementation, particularly in the LAC region is limited to certain issues and is hampered by the lack of sustainable funding that would allow them to take a longer-term view of their role and contribution in supporting dialogue and promoting policy analysis.

### ***The extent of FOCAL's resource database enhancement and its ability to distribute and provide access to information and research***

To properly assess the extent to which FOCAL's information resource base has been enhanced and FOCAL's ability to distribute and provide access to information and research, the evaluation team examined the following indicators:

- ❖ Number and type of subscriptions to FOCAL materials
- ❖ Level and nature of distribution of FOCAL information and research
- ❖ Quality of internal resource database

According to FOCAL's performance results, between September 1999-June 2000, FOCAL circulated its newsletter to an average of 1082 subscribers per mailing. After June 2000, specific data regarding the number of *FOCALPOINT* subscribers ceased to be collected. FOCAL also has a set of subscribers who receive all of its publications, as well as another set of subscribers who receive select publications. In addition to the newsletter subscriptions, FOCAL distributes policy papers on a wide range of topics, by request via email or regular mail. Papers are also posted in PDF format on the website and can be downloaded at no charge.

Over the past few years, the quality of the resource database and the information generated from this source has declined. According to FOCAL, its ability to maintain the database decreased in August 2003 when, as a result of reductions in funding from FAC, FOCAL closed its database manager position. The absence of a staff person responsible for updating and maintaining the database has had serious impacts on the overall quality of the resource database and consequently, on the ability of FOCAL to disseminate information, build and maintain partnerships, and influence policy agendas and policymakers across the hemisphere.

As a result of the diminishing quality of the resource database over the past few years, FOCAL's ability to distribute and provide access to information has declined. It has also impeded FOCAL's ability to achieve other results included in its mandate.

### ***The extent to which decision makers, opinion leaders, experts and the policy community in Canada and in LAC are better informed and make use of the information provided***

The evaluation team examined the results from the following indicators to assess the extent to which specific stakeholders benefit from and use information provided by FOCAL:

- ❖ Number of discussion papers, background papers, policy analyses and newsletters requested and distributed/presented (electronic and hard copy) and utilized
- ❖ Degree to which key individuals are better informed about policy issues, exposed to different policy perspectives, more aware of options and better motivated to provoke policy changes as a result of FOCAL's work
- ❖ Degree to which stakeholders across the hemisphere make use of the information provided

As documented in FOCAL's performance results reporting, and illustrated in Table 3 (Annex 1) FOCAL has a relatively large base of readers who consults its publications. In fact the number of publications distributed increase from 871 (1999) to over 4000 in 2003. Table 3 presents some examples of the publications<sup>11</sup> as well as the number of publications distributed to stakeholders.

The majority of stakeholders, and LAC stakeholders in particular, commented that FOCAL's ability to better inform the policy community in the LAC region is limited as a result of the minimal number of publications available in Spanish, as well as the small number of activities actually conducted in the South. At the same time, FOCAL was positively acknowledged by a number of other respondents for providing thorough coverage of policy options relevant to the hemisphere.

Out of the 128 publications<sup>12</sup> currently posted on the website 75% are published in English only, 9% in Spanish and English, 6% in Spanish only, 8% in French and English and 2% in French only. The minimal availability of FOCAL documents in languages other than English poses a problem for users in Canada and more significantly in the LAC region. Although the majority of French-speaking individuals working on LAC development issues in Quebec conduct research in English or Spanish, a greater number of FOCAL's documents should be translated and made available in French. In addition, FOCAL's documents need to be translated into Spanish. Throughout the evaluation process, the majority of LAC stakeholders interviewed and surveyed indicated that they do not access FOCAL's website or its publications because they do not have a sufficient understanding of English or French. LAC stakeholders also indicated that in addition to a language barrier, they often experience difficulty accessing FOCAL publications online as a result of unstable internet connections or a lack of internet access altogether.<sup>13</sup>

Distribution and access to FOCAL information and research is somewhat problematic for FOCAL and its end-users, particularly in the LAC region. Although FOCAL ensures that current and relevant information is available on its website, the usefulness of this information is compromised when it is not available in Spanish. This communication issue also affects FOCAL's ability to engage stakeholders and form partnerships, as well as its ability to strengthen and deepen Canada's relations with LAC countries.

### 3.2.3 Increase awareness, interest and expertise in issues related to the Americas

#### ***The extent of FOCAL's success in developing meaningful and effective partnerships***

To assess the extent of FOCAL's success in developing meaningful and effective partnerships, the evaluation team examined the following indicators:

<sup>11</sup> The table represents only a selection of titles. All publications are found on the website.

<sup>12</sup> Publications include policy papers, Summit Follow-up Series, reports, comments and articles and are not graphed by year.

<sup>13</sup> FOCAL has moved most of its publications to an electronic format simply because of cost as well as to reach a much larger audience than is the case of hard copy publications.

- ❖ Number and general nature of these partnerships
- ❖ Number of events co-sponsored by FOCAL
- ❖ Frequency over time of partner requests for repeat events or to co-sponsor events
- ❖ Stakeholder perceptions of the quality of the partnerships

FOCAL defines a ‘partnership’ as a contractual agreement between itself and another organization, agency or institution to produce a publication, to organize an event, to participate in its internship program or to collaborate on longer-term projects.

Between Septembers 1999-2001, FOCAL focused its reporting on the number of partnerships per quarter identified, established or strengthened. This indicator was modified in subsequent years; by February 2002, FOCAL began to examine the frequency over time of partner requests for repeat events or to co-sponsor events, thereby shifting more towards assessing the nature of partnerships than the number of partnerships. FOCAL reports that it has consistently increased the number of partnerships from 22 in 1999 to 43 in 2003. Table 4 (Annex 1) is a summary of FOCAL’s performance results in terms of the number of events co-sponsored by FOCAL and the frequency of partner request for repeat events or to co-sponsor events, as well as examples of partner organizations or institutions that made the requests between October 2002 – October 2003.

From this table it is apparent that, while the number of events co-sponsored by FOCAL remained fairly constant until recently and that the actual frequency of partner requests for repeat events or to co-sponsor events decreased over time, the actual organizations and agencies requesting partnerships are important hemispheric players. In this sense, rather than focusing on the number of partnerships, it would be more useful to have information about the quality and duration of these partnerships, as well as the outputs and outcomes achieved as a result of collaboration.

Throughout the course of the evaluation process, the majority of partners in the LAC region that were identified by FOCAL and contacted for an interview revealed that they did not consider their relationship with FOCAL a ‘partnership’ either because their involvement with FOCAL had been marginal or their length of contact very brief. This is in addition to those ‘partners’ that the team could not reach as a result of inaccurate contact information.

Among those organizations where partnerships did and continue to exist, including the Esquel Foundation, Participa and Partners of America, FOCAL was commended for its role as a collaborator and for its commitment to the region. An overwhelming majority of organizations that have worked with FOCAL were satisfied with the experience and were very positive about the opportunity to partner with FOCAL again in the future.

FOCAL has strong and productive partnership relationships with a small, yet strategic, number of agencies, organizations, and institutions.

### ***The value of FOCAL publications to stakeholders***

To assess the relevance and value of FOCAL’s publications, the following indicators were examined:

- ❖ Number and timeliness of publications
- ❖ Stakeholders’ perceptions and level of satisfaction with the publications
- ❖ Stakeholders’ perceptions of the quality of policy recommendations

Table 5 in Annex 1 presents a summary of the number of publications completed between September 1999 – December 2003 according to FOCAL’s performance results.

From this chart it is apparent that FOCAL publishes a wide variety of publications<sup>14</sup>, including policy papers, newsletters, reports on conferences, workshops and roundtables as well as other documentation. The rate at which these documents are published appears to be consistent. The decrease in production of policy papers in 2002 can be explained by the launching of the FOCAL POINT 's newsletter feeding regular information on LAC issues

According to the information derived from stakeholder interviews, the majority of stakeholders outside of FAC and CIDA expressed concern about the quality of FOCAL's policy papers and the recommendations offered in those papers. These stakeholders claim that while the policy papers sometimes elicit provocative insights, they do not demonstrate much 'prospective' thinking and do not influence policy debates. The majority of stakeholders indicated that FOCAL's policy analysis is often more useful as an indication of current government views and attitudes towards the LAC region, than a critical analysis of the government's approach. In fact, only a small minority of stakeholders indicated that they regard FOCAL's policy papers as well-written and filled with valuable and policy relevant insights and commentaries.

A minority group of stakeholders mostly from the academic and research community indicated that for their purposes, FOCAL's research was not terribly useful and that other university centres and some NGO's serve this purpose better. In fact, the majority of stakeholders from the academic and research community felt strongly that FOCAL should develop stronger links with researchers and engage in more primary research in order to improve the credibility of its policy recommendations.

FOCAL's newsletter, *FOCALPOINT*, was consistently mentioned by the majority of stakeholders in every sector for providing an important overview of current issues. This publication was overwhelmingly acknowledged for offering a Canadian perspective of events in the LAC region as well as acting an important instrument for informing the Canadian public about LAC issues. The majority of stakeholders heralded the newsletter as one of FOCAL's most valuable contributions. Its coverage of hemispheric security issues and the socio-economic situation in Argentina were singled out among several stakeholders as examples of *FOCALPOINT*'s areas of excellence. FOCAL should ensure that it receives stable funding for this product.

### ***The effectiveness of FOCAL's information targeting and distribution via the website and publications***

For the purpose of this evaluation, the effectiveness of FOCAL's information targeting and distribution via the website and publications will be evaluated in terms of the following indicators:

- ❖ Level of targeting of individuals for distribution of information
- ❖ Breakdown of target audience in the database
- ❖ Level and quality of distribution, according to recipients
- ❖ Number, quality and nature of changes to website content and structure
- ❖ Changing frequency of website hits, requests for information and documents

In terms of targeting FOCAL's information to specific users, FOCAL increased the number of individuals and organizations receiving FOCAL communications from 1270 in September 1999 to 4547 by March 2001. While FOCAL ceased reporting on this data set, by 2003, the number of individuals and organizations regularly sent FOCAL publications appears to be around 4000. According to FOCAL's performance results, these individuals and organizations include government representatives, academic institutions, NGO, the private sector, and elected officials in Canada, the United States and the LAC region. While these numbers are significant and the individuals and organizations included in the target audience are strategic, the challenges

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<sup>14</sup> Numbers extracted from FOCAL website

related to contacting stakeholders by email likely reduces the actual segment of the population that receives the publications.

Table 6 in Annexe I provides a summary of FOCAL's performance results in terms of the number of visits to FOCAL's website, the average length of the session, the number of requests for information received through the website, and the number and quality of changes to the website between October 1999 – December 2003. Because FOCAL modified its reporting criteria during this period, as well as the manner in which it monitors and reports on the use of the website, information is not always available on a consecutive basis which limits the ability of the evaluation team to analyse findings and draw conclusions.

As indicated in Table 6, the number of visits to the FOCAL website has significantly increased on a consecutive basis since October 1999. In addition, the average length of time spent on the website per visit has also increased, albeit moderately. Over the course of the reporting periods, FOCAL made significant changes and updates to improve and to facilitate the use of their website including: managing the website in-house, adding a search engine, a hemispheric calendar and a revised links page; and ensuring that the most recent papers and presentations are available. This indicator provides enormous insight into the FOCAL's efforts to meet and respond to users and stakeholders needs and should be included in future performance measurement reporting exercises.

Overall, the majority of stakeholders have positive perceptions of the FOCAL website, citing access to current information about the LAC region and easy access to FOCAL publications as their preferred aspects. Stakeholders also indicated that they found the site user-friendly, easy to navigate and relevant to their work.

FOCAL's website meets the needs of its users by providing accurate and up-to-date information that is easily accessible. Changes to the website since October 1999 have improved FOCAL's ability to accomplish this task.

### ***The extent to which gender equality as a crosscutting issue has been integrated into programming and reporting***

According to the FAC Contribution Agreement, gender equality issues must be reflected in program planning, implementation and reporting. Under the CIDA Contribution Agreement, gender is a crosscutting theme that must be integrated into all activities.

While gender discrimination has been identified as a potential issue to be addressed by FOCAL as a program sub-theme, gender issues have neither been specifically mentioned or addressed by FOCAL in any of its papers, nor was gender identified as an issue of concern in the LAC region by any of the stakeholders, aside from the FOCAL staff.

Gender equality issues have not yet been integrated into FOCAL's programming and reporting.

### ***3.3 Efficiency and Effectiveness***

The purpose of this section is to explore the following aspects:

- ❖ The extent to which FOCAL has implemented cost-effective approaches/methods for achieving the desired results and
- ❖ Whether alternatives exist that would make FOCAL's programs more effective and efficient.

### 3.3.1 Management, Collaboration and Coordination

#### ***FAC Contribution Agreements***

Prior to FAC's 2003 Contribution Agreement, FOCAL was funded by FAC through core funding in the amount of \$200,000 per year. FOCAL's programs were predominantly compliant with their mission statement and objectives, although the agreements did not identify specific themes or subject areas.

The new 3 year Contribution Agreement commenced in August 2003 with an allocation of \$150,000 for the first year and \$200,000 for each of the subsequent two years. The Agreement identifies 3 key deliverables of 1) policy advice, 2) outreach and 3) fundraising. For each year of the Contribution Agreement FOCAL is to show a constant or increasing trend in each area. For the first year of the Agreement, FAC and FOCAL jointly developed a work plan consisting of 6 specific projects to be developed and implemented as follows:

- ❖ Civil Society Inclusion in Summitry
- ❖ Conflict Resolution and Security - Truth and Reconciliation
- ❖ Corporate Social Responsibility
- ❖ Guatemala 2003 Electoral Observation
- ❖ Economic Development of Migration Flows
- ❖ Speaker Series

#### ***CIDA Contribution Agreements***

Signed in September 1999, CIDA's Phase III Contribution Agreement in the amount of \$1.3 million covered its financial contribution up until March 2002. Its main purpose was to inform decision makers, opinion leaders and the policy community within Canadian civil society, the private sector and the government about key development issues in the LAC region and their relevance and importance to Canada. This Agreement was also devised to encourage FOCAL to diversify its funding base, thereby reducing its financial dependency on the Government of Canada and, in particular, on CIDA. The funds were provided for the purpose of the following activities: monitoring and analysis, policy dialogue and debate, and outreach/information dissemination.

Initiated in early 2002, CIDA's current project in the amount of \$1.95 million covers the period up until March 31, 2005. Entitled "Knowledge for Development", it is intended to focus on critical information, knowledge, intellectual leadership, and advocacy to promote policy development and implementation in selected priority areas in Latin America and the Caribbean. This represents a shift from the previous agreements' focus on informing the Canadian policy community about central development issues in the LAC region towards promoting policy development and implementation on priority themes in the region. The current agreement also supports CIDA's strategies identified in "Closing the Gap – A Strategy for CIDA in the Americas" and assists Canada in fulfilling its commitments identified in the Plan of Action from the Quebec City Summit. Within this framework, activities would be oriented towards the following themes:

- ❖ Poverty and Inequality
- ❖ Trade and Development
- ❖ Governance and Civil Society

In terms of themes and sub-themes, FOCAL undertook a set of five functional outputs and include: information gathering, validation, sharing information, formation of partnerships, and diffusion of knowledge and advocacy.

### ***The Nature of Collaboration between FOCAL, and CIDA and FAC***

The nature of the collaboration between FOCAL and FAC has changed significantly since the shift from core funding to a Contribution Agreement in August 2003. Defining a number of specific projects each year to be carried out and reviewing the results achieved, requires more consultations than was the case with core funding. While the FAC agreement does not have any defined coordination mechanism, consultations were held regarding both the previous and the current years' programs. In the first year of the Contribution Agreement the reporting arrangements were somewhat uneven, however there now seems to be a more straightforward reporting relationship worked out between FAC and FOCAL.

The terms of the CIDA agreement include a FOCAL-CIDA Project Steering Committee scheduled to meet annually to review progress, future directions and management issues, quarterly meetings between FOCAL, CIDA management and other Americas Branch personnel, and consultations with CIDA and FAC prior to FOCAL's production of their annual work plans. In practice, there has generally only been one meeting per year between CIDA and FOCAL to review the annual work plan. However, frequent phone and email contact between the CIDA manager and FOCAL, as well as the provision of detailed comments on some quarterly reports and other issues have occurred on several occasions.

Both CIDA and FAC Contribution Agreements stipulate that FOCAL must regularly submit quarterly reports. As the primary means of communicating the results of their work, FOCAL has undertaken measures to improve the reports. In the last quarter of 2003, these reports were combined into a single joint report to CIDA and FAC. They have also included a stronger narrative overview section, an improved mechanism for tracking results, and improved tracking and reporting on website usage. FAC has indicated that they would prefer a simpler reporting method, largely through an annual report that linked outputs to the required outcomes of the contribution agreement. FAC had prepared outcome statements and performance indicators for FOCAL's first set of work plans but have not yet received a report on this.

### ***Strengthening FOCAL's relationship with CIDA and FAC***

There is consensus among FOCAL, CIDA and FAC staff that FOCAL's relationship with its funders could be strengthened by improving co-operation between all three bodies. In addition, adjustments to the Contribution Agreements and increased flexibility would facilitate FOCAL's ability to program more coherently and effectively. The FAC initiative in launching a joint FAC-CIDA evaluation of FOCAL has been an important step in this direction.

While the overall management of the Contribution Agreements appears to operate in a satisfactory manner, challenges relating to funding do arise on occasion. The switch by FAC from core funding to a Contribution Agreement in August 2003 coupled with a reduction in current year funding has created a number of challenges for FOCAL. It has affected FOCAL's budget for its newsletter, FOCALPOINT, its database manager position and the planned purchase of new computers for staff. The current funding arrangements with both FAC and CIDA limits FOCAL's ability to translate more of its documents into Spanish and Portuguese and for travelling to and organizing events in the region. In addition, the CIDA agreement does not allow FOCAL to contract out for services and the preparation of papers.

There have been suggestions from all three organizations that a single Contribution Agreement, as opposed to two separate agreements, would simplify workloads, reduce confusion in specifying the source of funding for every activity, reduce disruption caused by differing directions from CIDA and FAC, and address gaps in funding to cover essential costs not addressed by either donor. Some positive steps have already been taken by having similar LFA's for the two organizations. While it may not be technically feasible to have one agreement shared by the two departments, the two organizations could certainly co-operate more closely so that in effect, they are operating as if it were one agreement with an agreed upon set of objectives and results.

The differing time frames of the two contribution agreements has in fact, facilitated the ongoing functioning of the organization through payments being made available from either CIDA or FAC, when payment discontinuities occur. The development of a joint agreement or harmonization of the agreement timeframes would have to include safeguards to ensure an ongoing flow of funds to FOCAL.

The FAC and CIDA contribution agreements are not optimally coordinated with each other, and do not allow sufficient flexibility to make the most of what the government, as well as the majority of stakeholders would like to have FOCAL accomplish. Although there have been attempts made by the two departments to coordinate their efforts, the lack of regular and systematic consultation between FAC, CIDA and FOCAL still creates misunderstanding and inefficiency.

### ***Effectiveness of FOCAL's stakeholder-selection strategy***

According to interviews with FOCAL staff and management, FOCAL does not appear to have a formal strategy for selecting specific stakeholders. Stakeholders are comprised of individuals self-identified through FOCAL organized activities (seminars, conferences, or workshops), as well as personal contacts of the Executive Director and staff.

FOCAL uses its database as its primary tool for targeting stakeholders and disseminating information and publications to them. At present, it consists of 6382 contacts across the hemisphere. The composition of the database is detailed in Table 7 in Annexe 1.

FOCAL staff regularly input into the database, the contact information of stakeholders with whom they have had contact and who have expressed interest in receiving FOCAL information or publications, or who have requested information. The database is primarily used to notify stakeholders of new publications that can be found on the FOCAL website and/or to distribute FOCAL's newsletter. The database is organized by geographic or sectoral sub-categories, in order to inform stakeholders of FOCAL events in their region or by sectoral interest.

The database is also designed to capture information about the sectoral expertise of its stakeholders; however, this category is rarely filled in. This is somewhat surprising given the assumed importance of keeping in touch with and/or drawing on expertise on a wide range of issues related to the LAC region. The validation of “information, knowledge, and policy and program recommendations through consultations” is defined in the CIDA Contribution Agreement as one of the 5 functional steps necessary in policy formation and information delivery. Instead of capitalizing on the wide range of expertise of its stakeholders as listed in its database, FOCAL appears to rely on a smaller range of experts, primarily composed of individuals with whom they have either previously worked or who they know personally. This approach's drawback is lost information as a result of staff turnover and the loss of corporate memory, as well as the failure to access a much larger pool of expertise.

### ***Effectiveness of FOCAL's Current Governance Structure***

FOCAL is a membership-based organization that elects 15 individuals to its Board of Directors, each for a term of 3 years. To qualify as a member, the person must be willing to fulfil the objectives of the corporation and his/her membership must be approved by the Board (in practice the only members of the organization are Board members). One-third of the members must be women and given FOCAL's status as a charitable organization, 51% of the Board members must be Canadian.



The Board places a premium on diversity within Canada, and has attempted to recruit members from all regions and to ensure linguistic diversity. The other key element is experience in or attraction to the Americas as a region. The current composition of the Board includes the following: academics (currently 3 university professors and an educator), diplomats (currently 3 former FAC/ CIDA officials plus the Ambassador to the OAS in an ex officio capacity), individuals with practitioner backgrounds (currently one OAS official and one senior official from the Commonwealth Secretariat) and private sector representatives (2 members from the private sector), with one position open. In addition, FOCAL has always ensured that the treasurer is a professional accountant and that one of the Board members is a practicing member of the legal profession.

FOCAL's Board of Directors meets twice a year and the Executive Committee of the Board meets approximately 4 times a year. One of the bi-annual meetings is a face-to-face meeting, while the second meeting is held via telephone conference for those who cannot attend in person.

The need to diversify the composition of the Board of Directors was echoed by the majority of stakeholders. Most CIDA staff felt that a greater number of candidates with development knowledge and experience should be considered. In addition, stakeholders believe that the predominance of former government officials on the Board contributes to its apparent pro-government stance on many issues and the subsequent perception of FOCAL as a quasi-government agency. By including prominent representatives from a variety of sectors (civil society, labour, academic and business) and in particular from the LAC region, FOCAL could enhance its visibility and increase its credibility across the region.

According to FOCAL management and staff, aside from an annual lunch meeting, there is little contact between the majority of Board members and FOCAL staff. Staff members do not attend Board meetings, while most Board members remain uninvolved in FOCAL's planning processes. Taken together, they divide FOCAL's Board and staff and have serious consequences for the synergy and cohesiveness of the organization.

At the same time, there was strong acknowledgement from FOCAL management regarding the positive roles that the Board occupies. In addition to the very active involvement of the Chair, significant pro-bono legal and accounting services are provided by Board Members. A number of members have connections to important networks in the United States and across the region that has the potential to enlarge FOCAL's existing network of stakeholders and partners. Furthermore, the presence of OAS representation on the Board has been instrumental in securing FOCAL participation in activities, such as the election-monitoring mission to Guatemala.

Many benefits could be derived from turning FOCAL into a more broadly-based membership organization with representation from a range of different ethnic, subject matter and interest group constituencies, and without modification to the current bylaws. This would overcome criticism of the board being self-selecting, and could create increased support for its work from participating constituencies. A broad-based membership would also help to address some of the issues set out in this evaluation regarding objectivity, constituency coverage, profile and issue balance.

Greater Board involvement with the program and with staff as well as greater staff awareness of the Board's role would create a better sense of unity, harmony, synergy and collective ownership within all parts of the organization. Such measures could include the creation of board-staff committees, an annual board-staff strategic planning session and staff attendance at board meetings.

The composition of the current Board of Directors is under-represented from user constituencies and from the LAC region. In addition, it not sufficiently engaged with FOCAL's staff or the program planning process.

### 3.3.2 Cost-Effectiveness

#### ***FOCAL's capacity to maintain and manage the current volume of activities***

According to discussions with FOCAL staff and Board, FOCAL appears to have the necessary capacity to maintain and manage their current volume of activities.

FOCAL has a total staff complement of 15 people, consisting of the Executive Director and Deputy Director; 10 policy staff (including 2 individuals responsible for the Cuba program and one individual responsible for coordinating events and the internship program) as well as 3 people managing FOCAL's finances and administration. From the interviews and focus group discussions, staff and management appear to operate in a very collegial and participatory manner. FOCAL's staff seems to be highly motivated, dedicated to the organization and their work, and operate harmoniously as a team.

At present, there are staff standing committees for the website and the database, and an editorial team for *FOCALPOINT*. The use of committees effectively expands the number of staff engaged in various functional tasks, reinforces a team approach to common needs of the organization as well as an enhanced sense of collective responsibility, and ensures that the corporate memory is shared.

Throughout the course of the evaluation interviews, a number of stakeholders, most notably from the Canadian academic and research community, questioned FOCAL's ability in recent years to generate quality policy research. Several of those interviewed commented on the change in orientation of FOCAL since 1999-2000, in terms of the shift from more experienced PhDs, academically and research-oriented analysts to generally younger staff with a mix of educational backgrounds. There was a general understanding from this change that the current staff complement was not in a position to produce original, extensively researched papers, but were better positioned to take existing research and ideas and provide analysis and recommendations oriented toward the formulation of government policy. Stakeholders generally perceived as a drawback, the more limited experience of a younger staff dealing with development issues and governments, international organizations and their respective forums. They suggested that FOCAL would be a healthier, more creative organization if it were staffed with individuals with a greater range of experience, from junior to mid-level to senior staff.

FOCAL staff felt they were adequately handling their current workload. FOCAL does not have the financial room to manoeuvre if they wished to create a more progressive set of staffing levels and/or retain staff over the longer term. However, many of those interviewed suggested that FOCAL should have more staff resources to provide a stronger presence and to further increase their profile on LAC issues.

Several of those interviewed felt that staffing FOCAL with former government officials was also a drawback. The individuals themselves quite naturally bring with them a government orientation to key issues. More importantly it brings the perception of FOCAL being a quasi-government agency and therefore not independent nor objective.

This would suggest that it may be advantageous for FOCAL's Executive Director to be a permanent employee of FOCAL and not seconded from Government. However, since the Executive Director's salary is an in-kind contribution from DFIAT, an independent position would place an increased financial burden on FOCAL.

<p>FOCAL's current staff are a highly dedicated and cohesive group that have the capacity to manage their current volume of activities. Over the longer term, FOCAL's effectiveness and efficiency could be improved by permanent management positions independent of government and by a greater progression in the complement of staff positions.</p>
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***The extent to which FOCAL has attracted interest, financial and otherwise from sources outside of CIDA and FAC***

A number of those interviewed stated that FOCAL should be more diversified in its funding, to give it more independence from government and more control over its mission and expected results. At the same time, many stakeholders recognized the extreme difficulties associated with raising private funds. Similar policy institutions reaffirmed the problem for organizations of this nature to raise private funds, given that their outputs are less tangible and their impacts are less visible. In most cases, funds from other sources are either on a contract basis in return for specific services or in grant form to carry out a specific program and agenda, such as the funding received from the Ford Foundation for FOCAL's Cuba program.

The FAC agreement states that FOCAL should "raise funds from outside the government in order to cover costs previously covered by FAC core funding". FOCAL management feel they should be allowed to count service contracts with government departments as outside sources of funding. Such sources reduce dependence on CIDA and FAC contribution agreement funding as much as contracts outside government and are more likely to cover some of the same elements as the previous core funding. Obtaining government service contracts requires the same entrepreneurial skills as the private sector and the market for FOCAL's products are much more likely to be with government departments than the private sector.

For the current year, FOCAL management claims they are exceeding the FAC funding targets. They have increased their allocation from the Ford Foundation by 25% over previous support levels and have obtained funds from the Inter-American Foundation valued at US \$73,000 per year for two years. In addition they have just concluded an agreement with the IDRC for \$150,000 per year for two years. These three sources, valued at \$270,000 represent 22 percent of 2003 total revenues.

FOCAL management have reported that fundraising remains a fixed item on the agenda of each Board meeting and that efforts in this regard are under the responsibility of a Fundraising Committee. As part of the Board's actions, efforts have been made to recruit to the Board more members from the private sector whose contacts would enable FOCAL to more effectively pursue private sector funding possibilities.

FOCAL has considered and abandoned such options as charging a database membership fee and charging for publications, because of the minimal return for the work involved. This is reinforced by the experience of some other policy institutions that show only minimal revenue from similar endeavours.

In order for FOCAL to reduce its vulnerability on its existing primary donors, stakeholders suggested that FOCAL partner more extensively with other Canadian institutions, such as the Université du Québec à Montreal (UQAM) and the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA). This approach could help rationalize FAC's continued support to FOCAL since they would be seen to be supporting LAC-related activities from a much broader Canadian institutional cooperation base. It was also suggested that FOCAL might be able to obtain funding from other bilateral and multilateral organizations. "International Idea" was mentioned as a similar organization that receives funding from multiple sources that FOCAL might wish to research.

While FOCAL has made concerted efforts to increase its fundraising, it is nevertheless important that they strive to further decrease their dependence on, and vulnerability with respect to having only two main sources for 70% to 80% of their revenue. It is therefore extremely important for FOCAL to continue its efforts to diversify its funding base.

***The extent to which procedural and administrative measures have been adapted to enhance efficiency and cost-effectiveness of FOCAL's activities and relationships***

The primary responsibility for producing quarterly reports for CIDA and FAC is rotated among teams of two FOCAL staff members. This approach is aimed at promoting a staff-wide understanding of the RBM approach and at increasing the likelihood that FOCAL staff will integrate this approach into their daily activities. This approach presents a shift from the previous reporting method, whereby a single individual prepared reports.

All publications are distributed electronically with the distribution of printed material limited to events and special requests. This is saving considerable money since FOCAL has never charged for their publications and had no cost recovery strategy.

Beginning with the third quarter of 2003, FOCAL started to produce a quarterly report for CIDA and FAC, which is a first step in both simplifying administration and making the complementarity of the two programs more visible.

***FOCAL's Performance and Results Based Reporting and Management Systems***

According to FOCAL's most recent Logical Framework Analysis with CIDA (2002-2004) and its most recent Logical Framework Analysis with FAC (2003-2006), its expected results include the following:

EXPECTED RESULTS		
OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Collection of relevant information, knowledge and analysis regarding key development and foreign policy issues (by theme and sub-theme)</li> <li>➤ Information, knowledge and policy and program recommendations validated through consultations</li> <li>➤ Information, knowledge and recommendations made available to interested groups and the general public</li> <li>➤ FOCAL knowledge for development partnerships maintained and expanded</li> <li>➤ Knowledge diffused, intellectual leadership provided and policy proposals advocated by FOCAL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Decision makers, opinion leaders, experts and the policy community will be better informed regarding the selected priority policy and programming issues, more aware of options, and more motivated to adopt and implement appropriate policies and programs</li> <li>➤ Some partners and interlocutors adopt FOCAL analysis and recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The Western Hemisphere will be more democratic, more prosperous, more just and more generous as a result of measures taken by governments, international and regional organizations, civil society and individuals</li> </ul>

Using the above LFA as an indication of FOCAL's general understanding and knowledge of RBM, it is apparent that there is some confusion regarding the definition of activities, outputs and outcomes. For example, in terms of expected outcomes, it is questionable whether FOCAL is in a position to follow up on whether partners and interlocutors have adopted FOCAL's analyses and recommendations. Given that FOCAL is responsible for its results at the output and outcome level, it is important to ensure that results at these levels are realistic and achievable.

While FOCAL staff demonstrates some familiarity with results-based management (RBM) tools, none of them have taken formal RBM training. FOCAL staff consistently use RBM tools to monitor results and complete reports, however, the extent to which the indicators are measurable and the expected results are realistic, is variable. FOCAL staff themselves developed a template for capturing results from activities they were involved in, which has given them greater consistency and depth in reporting results as well as helping them to more clearly see the end results they would like to achieve.

It is important that it be feasible for FOCAL staff to report on the indicators and expected results. In this sense, it is important that the design, management, implementation, monitoring and reporting of the project or program be conducted in a participatory manner, thereby encouraging the ownership of results and knowledge of achieved results.

With respect to other management systems, it may be useful for FOCAL to consider further training in project, program and contract management and proposal and work plan writing, as well as greater familiarity with the Government Financial Administration Act.

FOCAL's ability to define, track, capture and report on results deserves more attention. Systematic capacity development in this regard would contribute to improving the existing monitoring and reporting activities

## 4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Throughout the course of the evaluation process, stakeholders did not challenge the notion that FOCAL occupies a unique “institutional space” within the Canadian spectrum of institutions dealing with LAC issues. Although some stakeholders may challenge aspects relating to the effectiveness of the organization, the need for an organization with a mandate to monitor and engage in policy issues related to Canada and the LAC region remains uncontested. Many of those interviewed indicated that FOCAL’s existence is essential within the Canadian mosaic of institutions. FOCAL’s unique contributions include, among others, the following:

- ❖ Providing an overview of LAC issues for Canadian LAC professionals and the general public.
- ❖ Covering a range of LAC issues, unlike any other Canadian institution
- ❖ Providing a Canadian perspective on hemispheric issues.
- ❖ Maintaining a focus on LAC issues, at a time when there is declining Canadian interest in the LAC region.
- ❖ Occupying an important role in building bridges between stakeholders and institutions in the LAC region and Canada.

FOCAL is generally well respected for the quality of its work and activities focusing on LAC issues. The organization provides a unique space for reflections, policy debate and dialogue between Canadian and LAC organizations and contributes to an overall greater understanding of hemispheric issues.

### 4.1 Relevance

FOCAL is well recognized for its role as a Canadian based organization with a LAC geographic focus and knowledge that advises policy makers and stakeholders on key hemispheric issues as they relate to Canada. FOCAL’s relevance as an institution lies in its ability to act, not only as an information broker and knowledge event organizer, but as a forum for discussion on hemispheric issues.

Given its limited budget, the biggest challenge for FOCAL is to take a longer-term view of its role and contribution to supporting dialogue and promoting policy analysis on hemispheric issues. In keeping with its existing capacity FOCAL needs to explore to what extent they should be more directly engaged in LAC through networking, partnership, and coordination of events, advocacy and dissemination of information. In order for FOCAL to remain relevant and a valuable resource, the organization needs to better define its role, mission and objectives within the context in which it operates. In this sense, FOCAL should clearly articulate how it adds value to the policy debate.

We recommend that:

- **FOCAL’s current mission statement and objectives be re-examined to provide the organization with a more coherent and focused mandate. This exercise would involve: a review of its mission and objectives; a clear identification of hemispheric issues they want to cover; the type of activities they want to pursue; and, the mechanism to be used to strengthen Canadian and LAC partnerships as well as the consultation process to increase the number and range of key stakeholders consulted.**

#### FOCAL Response and Action Plan

FAC and CIDA have stated that they agree with this recommendation that is in accord with FOCAL’s views as well. Since it’s founding in 1990, FOCAL has had an ambitious mandate, dictated by a variety of stakeholder demands and interests. Initially housed within the North South Institute, FOCAL gained institutional autonomy in 1993. In April 1992, the FOCAL Management Committee approved a Strategic

Plan to guide FOCAL's programme for the forthcoming five-year period. This was updated in November 1992 and further updated in May 1993. The mission statement and objectives were approved by the Board of Directors in May 1994 and in the objects of the Corporation were revised through supplementary letters patent. The resulting mandate emphasizes educational purposes, interpreted widely. In September 1997, the Board engaged in a strategic planning exercise culminating in FOCAL's 1997 – 2002 Strategic Plan. A further Strategic Planning Retreat took place in August 1998 that included representatives of CIDA and, the then, DFAIT. Later that fall, a strategic vision was developed to address FOCAL's mandate which led FOCAL to further revisit its mission statement and objectives. As the 1999 institutional assessment of FOCAL noted, this led FOCAL to "clarify its target audience and messages". The Strategic Vision for FOCAL was circulated to the Board of Directors for their discussion on December 12, 2001. In November 2002, FOCAL submitted an updated strategic vision to DFAIT / LGD.

The current mission statement and objectives will next be addressed at the Board of Directors meeting scheduled for January 13, 2005.

FOCAL is working with both FAC and CIDA in order to hold another strategic planning meeting to review FOCAL's mission, our activities and our operations

### **FAC and CIDA Response and Action Plan**

FAC and CIDA agree with this recommendation of the Evaluation. A review of FOCAL's mission and objectives would be welcome in order to position FOCAL further as a cutting-edge organization in terms of policy developments pertaining to the region. While FOCAL has produced outputs under the rubric of development, few of these items are specifically relevant to CIDA's goals or corporate priorities.

## **4.2 Achievement of Results**

FOCAL's ability to achieve its expected results is significantly influenced by its awareness and understanding of the stakeholders' needs across the hemisphere, its ability to consider a wide variety of stakeholder opinions and perspectives, its ability to provide useful, relevant and timely information, its ability to develop high-quality and strategic partnerships, to target and disseminate information to key stakeholders and to integrate gender equality into programming and reporting. Some of FOCAL's achieved results are as follows:

- ❖ **Strengthens Canada's relations with the South:** FOCAL's limited resources and difficulties experienced with contacting some stakeholders in the LAC region limit the achievement of this result.
- ❖ **Effectively tracks political, social and economic developments in LAC and Canada:** FOCAL has demonstrated that it effectively tracks a wide range of issues, and that it has recently increased the number of political, social and economic issues that it is capable of monitoring. The extent to which issues are monitored should be looked at more closely.
- ❖ **Provides a forum for debate and dialogue:** FOCAL contributes to providing an informed forum for debate and dialogue; however, it is unclear whether this forum always represents a wide variety of opinions and perspectives. In addition FOCAL's presence in LAC is directly affected by the limited resources at hand to organize and host events in the South.
- ❖ **Informs decision makers, opinion leaders, experts and the policy community:** Despite the fact that FOCAL has developed a significant network of contacts, including high-level officials, the organization's capacity to generate political will and promote policy development and implementation is still somewhat

limited. The limited availability of Spanish material on the website affects the utility of the available information, as well as FOCAL's ability to attract potential stakeholders and form partnerships.

❖ **Produces quality publications, in particular FOCALPOINT**

To improve its ability to achieve results, FOCAL needs to address some underlying issues that appear to impede FOCAL's ability to effectively reach stakeholders and disseminate information, including the very limited number of publications available in Spanish, the lack of information available on the website in Spanish, outdated database information, its limited ability to effectively respond to some stakeholders needs in Canada and the LAC region, its ability to develop meaningful and effective partnerships and to integrate gender into FOCAL's programming and reporting. Once these issues are addressed and resolved, FOCAL's capacity to generate the necessary political will to promote policy development and implementation and to increase its visibility throughout the region will likely be positively impacted as well.

Therefore we recommend that:

- **The website and a greater number of publications be available in Spanish to increase the readership base of FOCAL**

**FOCAL Response and Action Plan**

We agree with this recommendation and have taken concrete measures to implement its fundamental points. Supported mostly by IDRC and the Ford Foundation, FOCAL has completely re-designed its Cuba-Source and main web sites. The redesigned Cuba-Source web site – available completely in both English and Spanish – was made live on the Internet some months ago. The new FOCAL web site will go live on the Internet at the end of January 2005. In addition, since the beginning of 2004 all publications have been issued in both English and Spanish and at least one Special Edition of FOCAL POINT was issued in English, French and Portuguese.

FOCAL is in the process of formalizing an agreement with University of Ottawa for them to supply us with Interns at the Master's level in the School of Languages in the translation division, to translate our products from English to French and Spanish.

While FOCAL fully agrees with the recommendation and has taken steps to address it, we also note that such steps go beyond the formal requirements of our respective contribution agreements with FAC and CIDA. FOCAL is optimistic that both FAC and CIDA will recognize the importance of such capacity and will provide enhanced financial support for its achievement.

- **The existing database of contacts be updated on a regular basis to properly capture the type of partnerships and/or collaborative efforts with existing and new partners**

**FOCAL Response and Action Plan**

FOCAL strongly agrees and supports this recommendation and has installed new web based software to accomplish precisely this. In addition, this objective is part of the job responsibilities of each staff member. In the absence of core funding however, we will explore ways we can bill individual projects for this requirement.



- **FOCAL staff integrate a gender focus or component into its programs and reporting.**

### **FOCAL Response and Action Plan**

FOCAL notes that FAC “has been active in promoting gender mainstreaming in all of our work relating to the hemisphere” and that “for more than two decades, CIDA has been committed to promoting the empowerment of women and equality between women and men”. Both the objectives and achievements realized by FAC and CIDA are commendable and fully supported by FOCAL. FOCAL notes that Annex A of its Contribution Agreement with CIDA lists “Social and economic inclusion / racial, indigenous and gender discrimination” as one of twenty-nine eligible sub-themes for programming purposes. Similarly clause 13 of the Contribution Agreement with FAC states: “The institution shall in its reports to DFAIT indicate the manner in which women will benefit from and participate in its development activities. The institution is required by DFAIT to reflect this concern in its planning and program implementation”.

Gender programs did not form part of FOCAL’s approved CIDA or FAC work plans. In our Speaker Series, FOCAL did write and deliver a dissertation on Gender Equity in Peru and the text of the dissertation was posted on the FOCAL web site.

FOCAL would like to point out, however, that the evaluation only covered the contribution agreements with CIDA and FAC and thus apparently missed much of the work that FOCAL does and has done in support of gender issues – but funded by other organizations. As an illustration, FOCAL delivers a program of Youth Internships that places young Canadian professionals in organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean for a period of 6 months. In 2004, we placed one intern with the Human Rights Commission of Belize who was working with women who have reported domestic violence. Another intern was placed with the Inter American Institute of Human Rights in Costa Rica working on labour rights of women. We also placed an intern in the Indigenous Peoples and Community Development Unit of the Inter American Development Bank where she dealt with women’s issues, in particular contributing to the development of the Bank’s “Strategic Framework on Indigenous Development and the Operations Policy on Indigenous Peoples. In 2003 and in 2002, FOCAL placed interns with the Inter American Commission for Women (CIM) in the Organization of American States.

### **FAC and CIDA Response and Action Plan**

FAC and CIDA fully agree with this recommendation of the Evaluation. Since the Summit of the Americas process began in 1994, FAC has been active in promoting gender mainstreaming in all of our work relation to the hemisphere. For more than two decades, CIDA has been committed to promoting the empowerment of women and equality between women and men. At its most basic level, gender analysis provides information to determine the most effective strategies in a particular context and to identify results that support gender equality. These broad corporate priorities have not been incorporated into FOCAL’s work plans nor have they been produced in a significant manner in FOCAL’s outputs.

## ***4.3 Effectiveness and Efficiency***

FOCAL’s current staff members constitute a highly dedicated and relatively young group of professionals and solid support staff that has the capacity to adequately manage the current volume of activities. .

More regular and systematic consultation among FAC, CIDA and FOCAL would reduce confusion, misunderstandings and inefficiencies. In particular, a mechanism should be developed to coordinate and facilitate a common approach to their respective contribution agreements.

While FOCAL has recently made progress in fundraising from sources other than CIDA and FAC, it nevertheless remains a major challenge. Increasing the number of service contracts from other government departments is an area with the greatest potential.

The composition of the current Board of Directors is perceived by stakeholders to be under-represented by user constituencies, people with development experience and representation from the LAC region. With some exceptions, it is also perceived to be insufficiently engaged with FOCAL's program or staff.

FOCAL's overall effectiveness and efficiency could be improved to some extent by a more thorough and systematic implementation of a RBM approach to program management, monitoring and reporting, as well as sufficient staff training in this regard.

We therefore recommend:

- **CIDA, FAC and FOCAL formalize a consultative process in order to establish advanced planning milestones for work plans and new contribution agreements, review quarterly progress reports, discuss outstanding administrative problems, and generally ensure the smooth functioning of the relationship.**

### **FOCAL Response and Action Plan**

FOCAL agrees with the recommendation and takes note of the FAC / CIDA response which noted that measures in this area had already been the subject of discussion and one preliminary meeting between the three parties. FOCAL also notes that some streamlining of reporting requirements has been achieved, particularly with respect to quarterly activity reports. FOCAL is unconvinced that annual reports necessarily have to be unique in order to demonstrate "value for money" but stands ready to work with CIDA and FAC to explore new and innovative ways in which further streamlining, and hence efficiency can be achieved. A meeting took place between the three organizations and this will take place on a regular basis to ensure continuity and the rapid exchange of information.

### **FAC and CIDA Response and Action Plan**

With the latest agreement between FAC and FOCAL in place since April 1, 2003, CIDA and FAC have been jointly investigating development of a cohesive approach and both Departments have already made progress on this issue. As a first step, FAC and CIDA meet at least quarterly to discuss FOCAL and coordination with respect to FOCAL so that messaging is coherent. We have now held one joint meeting with JFOCAL and are looking at optimal timeframes for holding regular meetings. Decisions in this respect will be made jointly at the next such tripartite meeting which we plan to hold in February 2005.

To date, CIDA and FAC have streamlined administrative practices and work plan content, for example, by instituting the use of the same formats for submissions of work plans. As per FOCAL's already established practice, both Departments are sent the same quarterly reports. With respect to annual reports, as the two Departments have two unique contribution agreements with the organization; both Departments do require annual reports to be distinct in order to show value for money. With the sun-setting of the current CIDA contribution agreement, and in the event that a subsequent phase is agreed-upon, an opportunity presents itself potentially to explore new approaches and further enhance this cohesive approach. Other approaches can include: 1) joint annual meetings for general planning and reporting purposes; 2) joint submissions of work plan theme suggestions to FOCAL in February of each year; 3) joint work plans per theme which would indicate deliverables for each Department when these themes are distinct; 4) well-targeted activities to streamline administrative practices. Should there be co-sponsors, both Departments would also welcome an indication on those work plans of the deliverables and financial contributions.

- **The Board consider moving to a more target-constituency based representation including those from the LAC region, and to structure increased means to interact and work with staff**

#### **FOCAL Response and Action Plan**

These objectives will be considered in relation to the FOCAL mandate as vacancies appear on the Board of Directors. FOCAL notes that the Board currently does have members from the Caribbean and Latin America such as Winston Cox, Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth Secretariat and Beatrice Rangel the President and CEO of AMLA Consulting. FOCAL also notes that the Canada Corporations Act prescribes the percentage of Board members that may be non-Canadian and that this fact may have eluded the evaluation team.

- **FOCAL search for other creative ways to reduce their vulnerability on government contribution agreements, such as entering into more Canadian partnership agreements and reviewing the funding base of other similar international organizations.**
- **FOCAL continue its efforts to diversify its funding base, both within and outside government.**

#### **FOCAL Response and Action Plan**

FOCAL agrees with these recommendations and has recently been successful in attracting funding commitments from a wider range of sources. FOCAL will also approach provincial and municipal governments as well as the private sector to develop funding from these sources. Although this will be difficult (as per a special study commissioned by FOCAL on fundraising) this is an important activity since it will ensure FOCAL will focus on new product lines and sources capable of attracting new funding. Nevertheless, FOCAL will continue to rely on support from the Federal Government in order to ensure that we are identified with Canada and Canadian based. By doing so, the Canadian federal government will be seen as a major supporter of efforts to pursue Canadian interests and values in the Hemisphere

- **FOCAL staff and management should undergo RBM and other training.**

#### **FOCAL Response and Action Plan**

FOCAL is in agreement with this recommendation and notes that the current contribution agreement with CIDA provided for the engagement of third party assistance to FOCAL in this regard however this had not taken place to date. FOCAL staff last underwent structured RBM training in 2000; however, given the normal turn over of staff it would be most opportune for all FOCAL members to undergo such training. FOCAL looks forward to setting a specific date for such training.

## 5.0 Lessons Learned

### **Evolving mission in an evolving environment**

The external environment of an organization evolves over time. In order to adjust to this evolving context, to ensure that the organisation's mission is in line with needs and requirements of their stakeholders, and to optimize the often limited resources at hand, an organisation such as FOCAL needs to revisit their mission and objectives statement on a regular basis (every 3-5 years).

### **The concept of partnership**

The notion of partnership has evolved over the past decade. Various NGOs have experienced and achieved significant results in their partnership arrangements. An organisation like FOCAL would benefit from exchanging ideas on experiences and knowledge acquired in the context of different partnership experiences.

### **Funding arrangement**

Organisations that have wide-ranging mission, multifaceted activities and the challenges related to measuring intangible results, would benefit from being provided with a funding arrangement that allows for greater flexibility in line with the nature and extent of the program which characterizes it.

### **Results-based management**

RBM is a very useful tool when applied in a simple and intelligent manner. It can be particularly significant to ensure that important stakeholders in a project/program achieve a better appropriation and knowledge of planned results, and are sensitized to the importance of reporting adequately on the latter.

### **Indicators demonstrating research/policy institution's presence in the policy-making environment**

Any attempt to conduct policy research should begin with an examination of the institution's mission and objectives and how these intentions relate to its activities. Indicators demonstrating the institution's presence in the policy-making environment should then be examined. These indicators might include:

- ❖ Length of time that senior officials repeatedly devote to the institution's activities;
- ❖ The number and importance of requests to address senior audiences and/or to prepare briefs for them (e.g. parliamentary committees, senior bureaucrats);
- ❖ Extent of opposition from decision-makers who feel threatened by different ways of approaching familiar problems; and
- ❖ Sustained willingness by new groups of stakeholders to engage in policy discussions facilitated by the institution.

As long as a policy institution produces quality research, such indicators will allow observers to understand the organization's contribution, and to infer its value added although they can never quantify it.

### **Success indicators for effective partnerships**

Possible indicators of whether partnerships or networks are achieving their intended purposes together could include:

- ❖ Quality of inter-institutional cooperation
- ❖ Extent and quality of the joint value creation process;
- ❖ Extent of capacity building

- ❖ Changes in institutional capacity
- ❖ Changes and quality of the list of stakeholders that the organization most wants to influence
- ❖ Extent of engagement with this target audience.

### **Attribution**

It is very difficult to isolate and capture the qualitative and quantitative information and data necessary to establish a causal link between research and policy advice, and policy decisions. The quantity of factors influencing policy decision is so diverse and vast that attribution is virtually impossible.

### **Role of research institute/network**

While it may be impossible to demonstrate a causal link between policy research and policy decisions, policy research continues to occupy a critical role. A research institute or network can play an “enlightenment” role by:

- ❖ Identifying and bringing new issues to the public’s attention;
- ❖ Reframing old issues in new ways;
- ❖ Including a variety of stakeholders in the search for solutions; and
- ❖ Demonstrating how other countries or agencies have addressed similar issues.

Successfully accomplishing this task means developing new information, refining existing data, reviewing ideas and proposals and bringing them together to address new concerns or concerns which have previously proved intractable. This function may be referred to as ‘problem definition’ and may be the most important role a policy organization can make.

### **Research/policy institution influence on policy decision**

Experience has proven that the influence of a research or policy institution is determined by several key factors:

- ❖ The quality of work produced by a policy institution. Consistently producing and disseminating high quality research, ideas and recommendations will significantly increase the likelihood of the institution being consulted by officials, invited to speak at events and sought after by the media.
- ❖ Building a solid relationship with a small number of influential officials, including the media has the potential for much stronger impacts than developing a long list of occasional contacts.
- ❖ Information does not leverage change per se. It is the relationship with policy makers that is important, as well as disseminating the right information to them at the right time.
- ❖ Working with partners or through networks can significantly facilitate the process of trying to influence policymakers. When policymakers hear the same message from at several different sources, they are more likely to consider the message.

## ANNEX I - Tables and Graphs

Graph 1

### Interviews by Stakeholder Groups

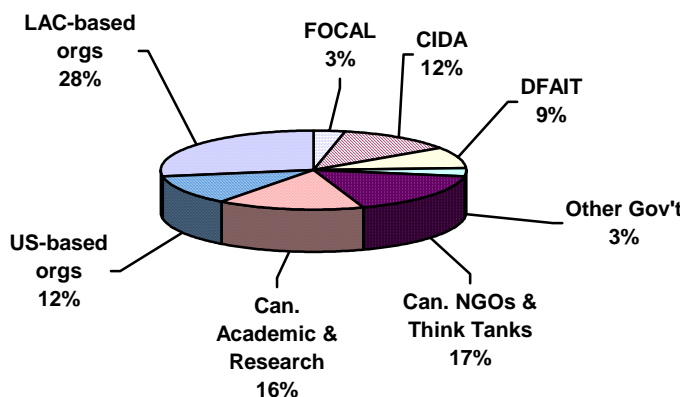


Table 1

Period	Issues identified/ Information and knowledge collected and analyzed	
	Number	Examples
October-December 2002	17	<u>Governance &amp; Civil Society</u> : Political representation and political party rebuilding <u>Trade &amp; Economic Integration</u> : Negative impact of free trade on small farmers in Mexico <u>Poverty &amp; Inequality</u> : Distinction between policies addressing poverty and those addressing inequality in development thinking
January-March 2003	17	<u>Governance &amp; Civil Society</u> : Small arms trafficking and organized crime in the Caribbean <u>Trade &amp; Economic Integration</u> : Implications of labour migration for policymakers <u>Poverty &amp; Inequality</u> : Innovative social policies for education and land reform
April-June 2003	15	<u>Governance &amp; Civil Society</u> : Conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Columbia <u>Trade &amp; Economic Integration</u> : Consequences of the New Left for the FTAA <u>Poverty &amp; Inequality</u> : Migration and remittances in development
July-September 2003	14	<u>Governance &amp; Civil Society</u> : Hemispheric security <u>Trade &amp; Economic Integration</u> : Transnationalism <u>Poverty &amp; Inequality</u> : Education and inequality in Latin America
October-December 2003	31	<u>Governance &amp; Civil Society</u> : Electoral observation <u>Trade &amp; Economic Integration</u> : Bilateral Investment Treaties <u>Poverty &amp; Inequality</u> : Development challenges in the Southern Cone
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	

**Table 2**

Period	Number of events		Comments
	Roundtables	Workshops/ Conferences	
September 1999 - September 2000	1	7	Attended by several partner organizations; Received very positive and constructive feedback
October 2000 – September 2001	2	7	A variety of partner organizations attended participated in the events and provided FOCAL with very positive and constructive feedback
February – June 2002 <sup>15</sup>	5		
October 2002 - September 2003	17		Positive verbal and post-event feedback
October 2003 – December 2003	14		Positive verbal and post-event feedback
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>		

**Table 3**

Period	Name of Publication	Number distributed
September – December 1999	Trade, Sustainability Development and Civil Society in the Free Trade Area of the Americas	871
January-March 2000	Peru's 2000 Presidential Election	1056 mailed + 2000 distributed by FAC
April – June 2000	La classe politique: Parties and Political Instability in Haiti	1250 mailed + 1000 distributed by FAC
July – September 2000	Clipping Fujimori's Wings	836
October – December 2000	Guatemala Under the FRG: Peace at a Crossroads	General distribution
January-March 2001	High Expectations for Mexico: Responding to the Priorities of a New Government	General distribution
April – June 2001	Central America: The Difficult Road Towards Integration and the Role of Canada	General distribution
July – September 2001	Including a Democracy Clause in the Free Trade Area of the Americas	General distribution
February – June 2002	Democratic Consolidation	N/A
October – December 2002	Post-Monterrey: Democracy and Development in Latin America	Approximately 4000 contacts
January – March 2003	The Impact of Migration in the Caribbean and Central American Region	Over 4000 contacts
April- June 2003	Redefining Hemispheric Security After September 11	Over 4000 contacts
July – September 2003	Report on Forum of Hemispheric Experts	Over 4000 contacts
October – December 2003	Two editions of <i>FOCALPOINT</i> : Spotlight on the Americas	Over 4000 contacts

<sup>15</sup> The evaluation team did not have access to performance measurement and evaluation documents between October 2001- January 2002 and June 2002-October 2002.

**Table 4**

Period	Number of events co-sponsored by FOCAL	Frequency over-time <sup>16</sup> of partner requests	Requests for partnering in events or research projects received from:
October – December 2002	2	17	Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, Instituto Inter Americana de Derechos Humanos, CERLAC
January – March 2003	2	8	Rights and Democracy, Universidad de Los Andes, North South Institute
April – June 2003	2	11	International Development Research Centre, Brazilian Embassy in Ottawa, FLACSO
July – September 2003	2	11	University of Buenos Aires, The Carter Centre, International Institute for Sustainable Development
October – December 2003	10	9	Partners of the Americas, Canadian Peacebuilding Coordinating Committee
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>56</b>	

**Table 5**

Period	Number of publications		
	Policy papers	FOCAL POINT <sup>17</sup>	Other
1999	12	3	1 conference report; 1 submission to the FTAA Mailbox; 2 working documents; 1 background paper; a commentary on the Mexican elections; 1999 Annual Report; 2 Summit Newsletters.
2000	12	1	Summit Newsletter in collaboration with the University of Miami; 2000 Annual Report
October – september 2001	15		Summit Newsletter; 2001 Annual report
2002	11	13	1 special edition of FOCALPOINT on the State of the Hemisphere; 2 Summit of the Americas Issue Updates; 4 reports; 1 roundtable report; 1 paper; 1 background briefing, and 1 Submission to approximately 4000 contacts composed of key policy makers, academics, NGOs and other contacts. 2002 Annual report
2003	7	3	1 Special edition <i>FOCALPOINT</i> edition on Haiti and 1 Migration; One report on the FOCAL; 2 reports on Electoral Observation mission to Guatemala; 2003 Annual report

<sup>16</sup> The complete heading for this indicator is “Frequency over-time of partner requests for repeat events or to co-sponsor events”

<sup>17</sup> FOCALPOINT, in its current form, was only launched in August 2002; prior to its conversion to a Newsletter, FOCAL POINT served to promote the organization rather than providing information or analysis.



Period	Number of publications		
	Policy papers	FOCAL POINT <sup>17</sup>	Other
2004	5		3 special reports, 1 conference report on the Andean Forum; 1 workshop report; 1 presentation to the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs
<b>Total</b>	62	20	

**Table 6**

Period	Use of communication technologies			
	Number of visits to FOCAL's website	Average length of session	Number of requests for information <sup>18</sup>	Number and quality of changes to FOCAL's website
October – December 1999	4162	N/A	100	Publication of complete redesign and new content and 3 updates
January – March 2000	6736	N/A	100	13 updates
April – June 2000	9148	N/A	60	26 updates; Website management was brought in-house; a hemispheric calendar of events and a revised/improved links page was added to the site; positive feedback received from users regarding updates
July – September 2000	8220	N/A	N/A	31 updates; continued development of hemispheric calendar and links page; regular updates on FOCAL activities; addition of a search engine to the site; posting of papers from partner organizations
October – December 2000	12,332	N/A	N/A	48 updates; continued development of hemispheric calendar and links page, regular updates of FOCAL activities; addition of search engine to site; expansion of FOCAL database capabilities; activation of FOCAL list-serve
January – March 2001	16,284	N/A	N/A	Continued development of hemispheric calendar and links page, regular updates of FOCAL activities; expansion of FOCAL database capabilities; addition of 7 new policy papers; updating of staff and Board information; registration procedure for FOCAL's forum on "Trade and Prosperity at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City" made available via the site
April – June 2001	23,387	N/A	N/A	Continued development of hemispheric calendar and links page, regular updates of FOCAL activities; expansion of FOCAL database capabilities; 5 new policy papers, 2 Summit Newsletters and 1 edition of <i>FOCALPOINT</i> made available on the site; updating of staff and Board information; advertising for recruiting for the 2001-2 Youth International Internship Program; documents related to the Summit made available on the site; access to presentations made at FOCAL Panel on Trade and Prosperity at the Conférence de Montréal made available on the site
July – September 2001	N/A	N/A	N/A	Continued development of hemispheric calendar and links page, regular updates of FOCAL activities; expansion of FOCAL database capabilities; updating of staff and Board information; new papers posted on the site
February – June 2002	Increase in website hits	N/A	Increase in requests for information	
October – December	44,593	N/A	N/A	

<sup>18</sup> The complete heading for this indicator is " Number of requests for information received through the website"

Period	Use of communication technologies			
	Number of visits to FOCAL's website	Average length of session	Number of requests for information <sup>18</sup>	Number and quality of changes to FOCAL's website
2002				
January – March 2003	368,453 <sup>19</sup>	J: 00:11:11 F: 00:15:20 M: 00:13:38	N/A	
April- June 2003	1,390,447	A: 00:13:03 M: 00:12:19 J: 00:14:59	N/A	
July – September 2003	939,557	J: 00:17:22 A: 00:19:03 S: 00:15:33	N/A	
October – December 2003	968,464	O: 00:16:03 N: 00:12:29 D: 00:14:33	N/A	

Table 7

Sector	Geographic Location			
	Canada	United States	LAC Region	Total
Government	1297	80	298	1657
Private Sector	379	77	199	655
Academic	690	110	218	1018
NGOs	188	166	265	619
Multilateral Organizations	3	117	72	192
List serve*				2223
<b>Total</b>	<b>2557</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>1052</b>	<b>6382</b>

\* The list consists of requests to receive FOCAL publications electronically

<sup>19</sup> At the beginning of 2003, FOCAL changed the way that it monitors and reports public use of its website to enable more accurate monitoring and analysis towards maximizing the website's potential. The apparent difference 'hits to the FOCAL website as compared to reports prior to January 2003 reflects this change of tracking software.

This statistical report is generated by Urchin software which defines a session as a series of hits from one visitor (as defined by the visitor's IP address) wherein no two hits are separated by more than 30 minutes. If there is a gap of 30 minutes or more from this visitor, an additional Session is counted. Prior to the implementation of Urchin our stats reports used to be generated by a program called LiveStats which used the term "visit" instead of session and a timeframe of 15 minutes to define a "visit". Thus, this would result in a higher visit/session count.