

# PI External Reviews: Summary of Report PAN Americas Corporate Project

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## PI Aims

- 1 PAN Americas' mission as set out in its 2001 Prospectus is, "strengthening research on Information and Communications for Development (ICT4D) in the Americas". The mission is expanded to that of helping "...diverse stakeholders in civil society, business and government sectors to make meaningful use of ICTs for development ...with emphasis on strengthening the capacity of researchers in civil society organizations...".
- 2 PAN Americas's objectives for the 2001-2004 period were defined as:
  - Learning and evaluation: to support the collective development and the use of methods, tools, and frameworks to document lessons learned and to analyze the results and outcomes of ICTs for development initiatives in the region;
  - Internet policy: to support research that informs and influences policy-making, fostering a more meaningful use of ICTs to promote human development; and,
  - Dissemination and utilization of results: to explore effective and innovative ways to use ICTs and other means to disseminate, exchange and use research results.
- 3 The PAN Americas Corporate Project was initiated in the ICT4D program area as an off-spring of PAN Asia in 1997. By the end of 2000, PAN Americas was well established as a Corporate Project with regional identity and regional positioning. In its prospectus, full recognition was given to the previous phases during which Pan Americas managed to build its "strongest asset: ...a vibrant community that shares a common interest and enthusiasm for the use of ICTs for human development...". PAN Americas focuses on Latin America and the Caribbean region, but also seeks to become integrated within other ICT4D global initiatives, such as BELLANET and telecentre.org as well as IDRC's programs in Africa and Asia.
- 4 PAN Americas' target groups were identified in the prospectus by:
  - Geography: Central America, Andean Countries, Caribbean, Brazil, Southern Cone and Mexico.
  - Type of Stakeholders: Civil society, business and government.
  - Type of beneficiaries: Women, youth, rural and urban poor, and indigenous populations.

## Review Methodology

- 5 Data and evidence were collected by the reviewers through a 3 pronged strategy:
  1. an extensive review and analysis of program and project documentation from IDRC and partners;
  2. a set of interviews and consultations, face-to-face or online, with ICT4D and Pan Americas staff, ICT4D, and partners;
  3. indepth case-studies of 9 emblematic PAN Americas projects.<sup>1</sup>
- 6 A deliberate sampling exercise was conducted in order to choose a meaningful and significant number of projects from PAN Americas' current project portfolio. Projects chosen had to meet certain criteria: a substantial IDRC investments in funds and/or time; an innovative character; representing a type of program strategy, project model, or host organization; or be situated in a relevant sector or territory and promising an interesting influence therein. Taken together, they represent the variety and quality of PAN Americas' project portfolio during the period under analysis.
- 7 The 9 project case-studies (along with their antecedents where appropriate), were exhaustively studied through documents, materials, and field interview with their main actors (103 people were met and consulted, 61 organizations contacted, and 11 cities in 8 countries visited). Some other projects received intermediate consideration, including field visits, while the rest of the portfolio (past and present) was only subject to documentary review.

## Review Findings

- 8 IDRC as a whole values persistency, flexibility, and innovation to tackle research in, and for, development, as well as learning and leadership, with steadfastness towards development objectives and the capacity building of research partners. Our review shows that PAN Americas' Corporate Project officials have been constant and consistent in adhering to the above principles.
- 9 The interpretation of review findings required an understanding of the organizational context in which Pan Americas operated between 2001-2004. Three periods can be identified:
  1. 2001-2002 when Pan Americas staff generated most of the projects considered in the review and it was the only IDRC ICT4D initiative in LAC;
  2. 2003 as a transitional phase when a new team took over Pan Americas and the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (ICA) emerged;
  3. 2004 – present when PAN Americas' staff consolidated, ICA gained further presence in LAC, and a third ICT4D related initiative in LAC was promoted by IDRC - the Knowledge Economy Initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> "Emblematic" projects are considered to be those that are: socially relevant, innovative (in terms of conceptual design and methodological approach), anticipatory, and potentially replicable in different LAC communities or regions.

- 10 In this evolving environment, the reviewers were able to see a number of quite impressive achievements by PAN Americas during 2001-2004. Emblematic projects were designed, initiated, well monitored and impeccably closed. Moreover, relevance, appropriateness, intellectual quality and sound practicality were present.
- 11 **PAN Americas built a geographically balanced portfolio.** They were active in each of the sub-regions identified in the prospectus. Engagement in the non-Spanish speaking Caribbean countries was weaker and engagement in Central America and the Andean region was limited to one country (Costa Rica and Ecuador respectively).
- 12 **The research themes prioritized in the 2001-2004 prospectus received substantial attention by PAN Americas** (poverty reduction, partnerships, networks, people development, social and economic opportunities, learning and development). These themes served as guidelines in its programming. A wealth of applied knowledge that may leverage further research inquiries was identified for 4 of the research themes: partnerships, networks, people development, and learning and development. Poverty reduction was touched upon indirectly through projects such as ICT-IMPACT and GEM-LAC and social opportunities received greater attention than economic opportunities.
- 13 PAN Americas has **met most of the three broad objectives (at times in exciting ways)** set out in its prospectus.
  - 13.1 The “learning and evaluation” objective was accomplished as new methods, tools, and frameworks to assess results and outcomes of ICTs for development initiatives in LAC were successfully developed and employed by many of the emblematic projects examined.
  - 13.2 As far as the “internet policy” objective is concerned, action research seeking a more meaningful use of ICTs to promote human development was designed and successfully carried out on different policy-making issues. Moreover, some of the examined projects had remarkably favourable international repercussions. Yet, discussions and advocacy efforts by PAN Americas’ partners were insufficient to penetrate state or governmental actors and political processes, in order to change their understanding of the role of ICTs in development and not quite able to “listen attentively” to political priorities and sensitivities associated with ICTs.
  - 13.3 In terms of the “dissemination and utilization of results” objective, many projects produced books, publications, and abundant web-based resources. These helped produce in PAN Americas staff, IDRC’s ICT4D program area and LAC stakeholders an enhanced understanding of ICTs’ contribution to development and policy development obstacles and opportunities. Also, conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches reflecting new modes of thinking and innovative approaches have been taken up in LAC.
- 14 The reviewers **did not detect any marked evolution in program objectives.** Most of the projects initiated in the early period (2001-2002) created mutually reinforcing actions that helped Pan Americas reach its objectives. In 2003-2004, most of these projects were fully and successfully executed, some extended and supplemented, and new projects were kept roughly along the same strategic lines.

- 15 Some of PAN Americas’ outputs have been of noteworthy quality.** As examples:
- The “Heredia Rules” on information access and privacy rights contributed by the JUDICIARY project (101107) is a cutting edge initiative emerging from the LAC region. This output, made public in various print media and on the Internet, can be seen as an historic milestone in the quest for efficient legal frameworks to regulate information-related rights in the internet era, both in LAC countries and abroad.
  - In methodological terms, the ICT-IMPACT project and the gender evaluation methodology developed under GEM LAC project made innovative contributions in LAC with the potential of extending their influence beyond the region.
  - The ICT-POLICY project in Central America produced provoking conceptual frameworks, and opened grounds for new research and for unconventional actions by public policy makers acting in ICT4D borderline areas such as the modernization of country states, democratic participatory development and media transparency, among others.
- 16 PAN Americas in general performed quite well in terms of reach.** Most of its endeavours between 2001-2004 focused on civil society stakeholders. The dominant partners were ICT4D researchers, yet an active role was played by opinion leaders, policy makers, educators, and social communicators. Grassroot activists in gender, youth and environmental issues were brought in as well. The Regional Fund for Digital Innovation (FRIDA), a regional and global partnership jointly sponsored by PAN Americas and ICA, has gradually created cooperation with other social actors such as business, universities, and governments. In terms of socially vulnerable groups most of the emblematic projects were not targeted to specific populations or communities, with the exception of those focused on gender issues specifically.
- 17 PAN Americas’ outcomes covered a wide spectrum. Influencing LAC and global research and policy agendas on legal information access and privacy issues** and on policies towards ICTs in general was one outcome area to which projects like JUDICIARY, MISTICA and RITS contributed. The JUDICIARY project, for example, is an initiative promoted by a civil society, non-profit, research and advocacy organization called the Instituto de Investigaciones sobre la Justicia (IIJ) (Justice Research Institute). It undertook research on the feasibility of attaining a socially desirable equilibrium between access to information, privacy, and other human rights issues associated with information resources and ICTs. The outcomes were abundant. The agendas of many organizations changed; they now include discussions on the Heredia rules and related subjects. Many Web sites external to IIJ posted the Heredia Rules. Even a few provincial judicial courts enthusiastically adopted the rules.

- 18** Another outcome of Pan Americas' work includes **encouraging new or improved partnerships and networks**. Some important LAC networks led by partner organizations were strengthened such as MISTICA and RITS, while others were practically created by project design (for instance the REDAL network). For example, MISTICA is a bold experiment to create and consolidate a virtual community of ICT4D specialists, researchers, and other concerned practitioners and advocates. Total yearly page-views were over half a million in 2000, and peaked at 1.8 million in 2003. There are over 400 current members in the virtual community. Of these, 42% are women, 79% come from the LAC region, though quite unevenly distributed. As far as contributions to the virtual community, (February 1999 to July 2004), MISTICA reports some 6 000 messages, from 230 individuals. On a yearly basis, messages average over 1 000 and contributors over 100, both peaking in 2003. The major outcome — an autonomous, inclusive and self-sustaining quality, on-line ICT4D community — is still under construction: it is a long and fragile process, as other fleeting or struggling networks in the region and elsewhere can attest. Careful nurturing is still needed, but solid foundations for an on-line community methodology were built.
- 19** **Increased intensity of information flow on LAC and global ICT4D issues** was another of PAN Americas' outcomes. A RITS website, for example, reached an impressive number of hits per day due to RITS' hosting of the Porto Alegre Social Forum. RITS' website continue to be the reference points for civil society organizations and digital inclusion in Brazil.
- 20** Pan Americas' **capacity-building projects were all bold attempts at penetrating new areas, tackling new ICT4D problems, and testing new methodologies**. As an example, the REDAL project is unique in that it seriously addresses, through solid and innovative qualitative research, pertinent and ongoing issues in the integration of ICTs into schools and educational environments. It was conducted with partner organizations in 7 different country sites. Project leadership was housed at Fundación Evolución (FE), a small but prestigious Argentinean NGO, active in school networking, teacher training, and collaborative projects. FE and its own TELAR network, however, had no substantial research experience or expertise of its own. Through IDRC's support, they have proactively and very competently developed such abilities in-house, as well as with its virtual partners in the network.
- 21** **Gender analysis** was present in projects such as GEM-LAC and RITS, while the INTERNET- POLICY project worked openly with activists and opinion leaders from the women's movement. Yet, there was potential to do much more. Gender analysis could have been promoted in other portfolio projects, such as REDAL.

- 22 The **Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM)** was a global, long-range action research initiative promoted by the Women's Network Support Program (WNSP) of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC). (100994). GEM refers to the step-by-step elaboration and testing of a set of guidelines and tools — conceptual and operational — for explicitly including gender dimensions into the assessment and evaluation of ICTs for development projects. GEM has found important uses as a sensitization tool, not only as a gender evaluation tool, because gender considerations have been absent from the mindset of project planners, and perhaps invisible to entities and participants. The GEM toolset forces the integration of such gender concerns into ICT4D interventions. GEM reached a wide-ranging set of policymakers and influential people globally at presentations and key events and while consulting for UN bodies. The GEM Web site is widely known to ICT4D and gender specialized agencies and entities, though additional work is needed to enhance policy guidelines and action.
- 23 In regard to ethical issues, **the reviewers found no research ethics problems** in any of the projects reviewed. On the contrary, great opportunities were detected for using Pan Americas' knowledge on ethics issues. For example, the JUDICIARY's results on information access and information privacy rights may usefully be tested in other projects.
- 24 Continuous innovation in project management and organization was carried out. The reviewers were nicely surprised by Pan Americas' experimentation with different project structures and mechanisms such as networking vertical communities of researchers and a small-grants model where project selection and monitoring was delegated by IDRC to a third organization with presence in LAC.
- 25 PAN Americas' activities and projects faced various external facilitating and constraining factors. In general, PAN Americas project portfolio 2001-2004 and particularly the 9 emblematic projects sampled, **performed quite well at taking advantage of external facilitating factors and offsetting constraining factors.**
- 26 The partner organizations selected by Pan Americas were appropriate. Most organizations had prestige, enjoyed a committed top organizational leadership, offered a competent project management structure, operated according to a collaborative and networking work culture and possessed an organizational culture compatible with the values sustaining the project idea. The project ideas also responded to a clearly expressed and widely accepted social need. These features represent an ideal profile for an IDRC-ICT4D partner.
- 27 Pan Americas has to be commended for its adoption of a balanced risk-taking approach, with some projects being more conservative and others having some appropriate degree of boldness.
- 28 Some of the constraining factors encountered and managed by Pan Americas include: civil society organizations in LAC being overextended and lacking contingency funds; project ideas that were too novel and not widely accepted by conventional wisdom; the desired objectives being too complex to be attained; the partners' organizational culture unprepared to implement the projects; and, Spanish-Portuguese language barriers.

- 29 PAN Americas' activities and projects have faced both internal facilitating and constraining factors. Among the internal facilitating factors, a good organizational climate has been observed within ICT4D, where cordial relationships are dominant. Also, global initiatives such as BELLANET and the new Global Telecenter Network may offer a wide spectrum of opportunities for the furtherance of PAN Americas in LAC. Yet, other initiatives focusing on ICT4D issues, originating in the ICT4D Program Area and focused on LAC, may transform themselves into constraining factors for Pan Americas if insufficiently monitored and acted upon. These include ICA, FRIDA and the recently launched Knowledge Economy Initiative.
- 30 ICA is primarily interested in testing, demonstrating and promoting the diffusion of proven ICTs into multiple stakeholder environments, including with high ranking decision-makers in governments and business. In contrast, PAN Americas focuses its "empowerment through knowledge" action primarily in civil society organizations. Urgencies, approaches, and the working culture are different in the two initiatives. Yet, both ICA and PAN Americas cover the same LAC territories although ICA also incorporates Canada and the USA. And ICA enjoys almost three times the resources available to PAN Americas. It is these reviewers' impression that **ICA and PAN Americas in spite of sporadic signs of convergence have on the whole marched as independent entities**. They are also not clearly distinguished from one another by outside audiences. Thus, optimized synergies between Pan Americas and ICA and the working out of a coherent pattern of services to be delivered to the region is an urgent, short term problem for IDRC.
- 31 Great confusion exists amongst past and emerging IDRC-ICT4D partners in LAC countries over parallel, undifferentiated, and perceived as highly overlapping initiatives and programs. Distinctions between PAN Americas, ICA, FRIDA, and the recent Knowledge Economy Initiative, *do* exist but they require lengthy and complex explanations, not always convincing to the audience.
- 32 PAN Americas staff involved before and after 2001, must be praised for their dedicated work. The perception of its partner organizations about the support and empathy received from them is excellent. That is, PAN Americas staff is appreciated because they do care about the fate of projects they have helped to initiate. The principles of "open and trustworthy partnerships" and of a "common" relation is one of IDRC's historical dimensions most valued and praised by LAC organizations and key players. And this has been a permanent cultural feature of PAN Americas.
- 33 Pan Americas has done **a remarkable job systematizing most portfolio and project documentation and providing digital full text formats on its website**. This has created an environment of public transparency and has opened a wider space for sharing and learning. Yet, PAN Americas has also opted for a rather low-profile communications and marketing style with the consequence being a rather weak positioning in the "minds" and "hearts" of its stakeholders. The once "vibrant" LAC network of ICT4D researchers was not sufficiently activated during 2001-2004 and many people involved in Pan Americas' projects and activities appeared to be unclear about the present PAN Americas' mission and accomplishments.

- 34 Pan Americas should be **praised for its evaluation and learning culture**. PAN Americas has been rigorous in using formal procedures suggested by IDRC's Evaluation Unit and is evidenced in the minutes of staff meetings, project approval documents (PADs), and project completion reports (PCRs). Pan Americas' staff is quite familiar with the outcome mapping concepts and terminology although a more systematic transfer of this approach and methodology to partner organizations has yet to take place. PAN Americas' project partners consistently valued IDRC's and PAN Americas' approaches, openness and attitudes, and the organization's willingness to stop, listen and learn, and move forward.
- 35 Pan Americas experienced substantial **staff turnover**. Nonetheless, the team should be congratulated in that **they managed the transitions smoothly** -- projects were monitored, supported, satisfactorily closed and judiciously extended to allow greater impact. But, this almost "heroic" effort should not hide the chronic challenge PAN Americas has faced: a small staff vis-a-vis growing demands from a rapidly evolving region and a dynamic environment of global initiatives.

### **Issues for Consideration**

- 36 A challenge for PAN Americas will be to assess the evolution and prospects of its still biggest asset: the network of organizations and key policy makers and specialists interested and committed to ICT4D research in LAC. The vast network building effort carried out during previous PAN Americas programming cycles was a well grounded, long-term investment. It is to be expected that this network might have changed in composition and size since then and the question as to how this once "vibrant community" can be, recovered, strengthened, updated, supported and expanded remains. The unprecedented demand for ICT4D research grants witnessed recently by FRIDA's second call for proposals and the open disengagement of traditional donors from ICT4D issues in LAC is creating a real opportunity for the furtherance of PAN Americas.