Evaluation Findings

PI External Reviews: Summary of Report Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (ICA) Corporate Project

Report to IDRC Board of Governors
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Aims of the Corporate Project

1 In April 2001, the Government of Canada launched the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (ICA) at the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec City. ICA was established as a corporate project in the ICT4D program area of IDRC. With an initial Canadian contribution of CAD $20 million, the Institute was given the mandate to support the Summit themes of strengthening democracy, creating prosperity, and realizing human potential through the use of ICT. This mandate, due to end in 2005/2006, was subsequently extended until 2006/2007 without requirement of additional funds.

2 ICA's mission is to promote and implement innovative use of ICT for development in the Americas. The Institute identified three general categories for its projects: innovation and demonstration, knowledge networks and exchange, and e-strategies. In addition, the documents that established ICA identified four thematic foci for its programming that include: bringing ICT skills, experiences and networking exchanges to youth, assisting communities and regions seeking to overcome digital divide issues, linking institutions within the hemisphere that are addressing these issues, and accelerating e-governance initiatives.

3 Several Canadian government stakeholders were involved in shaping the idea of ICA and in helping to subsequently translate it into practice. In addition to IDRC, these include the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC), and Industry Canada. These founding Canadian government partners make up the Working Group, or steering committee, for ICA. A Hemispheric Advisory Board (HAB) was also created, drawing its regional membership from government, civil society, academia, and the private sector.

Review Methodology

4 Information for the external review was obtained through document review, case studies, and face-to-face or phone interviews with stakeholders in Canada and in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), as well as with multilateral organizations involved in ICT4D. Overall,

more than 70 people were consulted during the review process. This information was gathered between October 2004 and April 2005.

Review Findings
ICA objectives and results

5   The external review finds that ICA has **made tangible progress towards its mission of promoting and implementing ICTs** for development in the Americas. Although projects are in early stages of implementation, their outputs are already contributing to change the actions, behaviours and relationships of the program partners. The changes or outcomes are generally occurring among intermediary organizations.

6   **Development of networks and new partnerships.** ICA projects have fostered new relationships among government actors, between government actors and civil society, and among a broader set of partner groups.

- The e-Government network is active and brings together the right target audience - the top government officials in charge of e-government programs/strategy in each country of the region. It has also generated opportunities for horizontal cooperation across countries, as seen in the exchanges between Chile and Uruguay around the "Chile Compras" [Procurement] program.

- ICA's consultation/roundtable in the Caribbean provided an opportunity, where, for the first time, ICT regulators were in the same forum with civil society groups and started to see who these groups were, how they thought, and what they wanted. The CIVIC virtual community, which grew out of the consultation, is recognized for offering a platform where ICT4D activists and practitioners continue to come together.

- ICA has brought together partners to implement the Wi-Fi pilot networks. New relationships between different levels of government (Panama), between universities and community telecentres (Brazil), and between communities, NGOs, private companies and Canada's missions abroad (Ecuador) are a few examples of partnership models emerging.

- Another example of the new relationships prompted by ICA outputs comes from the Computers for Schools (CFS) project, where new alliances bring together civil society, government, and sometimes the private sector.

7   **Broadened policy horizons and new policy regimes.** There also are examples of how ICA projects have influenced policymakers and how they in turn have contributed to policy change.Policy makers in e-government have been able to look and learn from experiences that are closer to their political and economic reality. Better and more efficient e-government plans are being drafted and implemented. RedGEALC has served both the more developed countries in the region, that are now seeking to further develop e-government in specific themes (such as procurement), as well as the countries that are still in early stages of designing an overall strategy. Through the tools provided by the network (such as benchmarking studies), countries are able to shape their vision for e-government and design the programs that will then

- be implemented with other resources, either from country budgets or multilateral organizations.

- In some of the countries that participated in the CFS project, there are signs of change in the policy and institutional framework that will enable computer refurbishing initiatives. Brazil, Guatemala, and Panama are three examples of countries that have taken steps towards a CFS program and were able to jump-start their initiatives following their participation in the initiative. Brazil, for example, moved very quickly to change legislation, locate space and consolidate partnerships.

- An example from Central America illustrates how an ICA project helps to fill a vacuum of information (in this case on the state of MSME e-readiness) and to make the case among policy makers on the need for supporting MSME in the adoption and use of ICT in their business strategies. The project has contributed, among other factors, to the formation of an an Ad-hoc Committee of the Vice Ministers in charge of MSME policies in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, which is intended as a forum where they share their vision on how to promote competitiveness among MSME.

8 **Increased community access to low-cost and better quality ICT.** Although most of the changes noted above are in intermediary organizations, ICA is also contributing to changes in targeted communities.

- This is evident in the Wi-Fi pilot projects that provide low-cost access to ICT for poor communities. In the Maré favelain Rio de Janeiro, for example, there is now increased demand and interest from the community for the training programs in informatics and citizenship that is offered by the telecentre (Escola de Informática e Cidadania). Furthermore, the introduction of broadband services increased the quality of the access to the Internet at the centre, which led to an increase in the number of users and forced the centre to upgrade its computer equipment. Stakeholders from El Chaco, Ecuador have also reported improvements in the quality of life of the community as a result of how local institutions have integrated Wi-Fi technology. In rural areas, where broadband infrastructure is still largely unavailable, the main effect has been on improved connectivity within the local area.

9 The thematic foci originally established for ICA have for the most part been evident in ICA programming, with the possible exception of an emphasis on youth. The projects that the team reviewed illustrated ways of linking communities, institutions, and accelerating e-government. Some examples of these can be found in the Wi-Fi pilot projects that bring a network to a community, the Education portal that brings together ministries of education, and the e-government network.

10 The ICA has developed as a Canadian initiative, which operates in and serves the region, rather than an independent hemispheric institution, as was originally envisioned in its founding documents. This change in direction was communicated by IDRC to the Treasury

Board Secretariat in 2004, with the advice and consent of the Working Group, who shared an interest in keeping ICA as a Canadian initiative. At the same time, institutional funding from external sources (e.g. multilateral development banks, foundations)—crucial for spinning

11 ICA off as a hemispheric entity--was not forthcoming and the only source of funding at the program level has continued to be Canadian. ICA has also retained a regional character, as evidenced in its recent incorporation as a regional partner of the Summit of the Americas process.

12 ICA was conceived as an initiative that would build on the success and experience of Canada. The review finds that ICA has followed through with this intention. Most ICA projects under review integrate Canadian experience or include a "bounce back" to Canada by: sharing Canadian models and experiences (from the Connecting Canadians strategy); providing Canadian expert advice; using Canadian technology; and facilitating exchanges of the Canadian and Latin American experience.

13 Larning has been integrated in ICA's work through the use of consultations, on-line discussions, feedback mechanisms, such as the Hemispheric Advisory Board, and more informal channels. Due to the short time of operation, and the fact that the average longevity of a project is 2 years, few ICA projects have been evaluated. As a result, evaluation has not been widely used to inform program development and learning; evaluation is identified as one of the areas that should be strengthened in a second phase of ICA.

14 The review recognizes the time, effort, and resources required to take ICA from a concept to its operations on the ground, which contemplated a regional consultation process and the establishment of advisory bodies to the Institute, among other set-up tasks. ICA began funding projects in July 2002, even though the full staff complement was not achieved until 2003. Over the past three years, it responded with over 60 initiatives throughout the region, ranging from consultations to case studies, and from on-line fora to broadband Internet access to be provided by E-Link Americas. The investments vary from less than $10,000 to support events or activities such as an e-remesas [e-remittances] panel presentation in Honduras to the more than $3 million committed to E-Link Americas.

15 **ICA outputs are generally valued for their technical quality and relevance to stakeholders.** A sample of projects and their achievements illustrates the kinds of tools that ICA uses to influence its partners.
   - **Case studies**. The majority of ICA's case studies are linked to broader initiatives that can help ensure their use by target audiences. In particular, case studies and reports are used to put forward examples, issues, problems, and potential solutions that feed into larger ICA projects that are active today, such as the Wi-Fi pilots, E-Link Americas, Computers for Schools, the network of educational portals, and the development of E-Governance in LAC, among others.

   - **On-line information resources**. The "LAC ICT Project Database" and the connectivity map have been among the most visited pages on the Institute's web site. Many of ICA's stakeholders in Canada, pointed to these outputs as being representative of the niche that ICA was intended to fill – that of a clearinghouse and broker of better information resources.
   - **Networks that support e-strategies**. The project "Supporting e-Government Development in Latin America and the Caribbean" has provided e-Government strategy makers and program managers in the region with well-structured opportunities to exchange ideas, information and knowledge. ICA has made a small, but important, contribution of resources that is valued by stakeholders.

- The project illustrates how ICA fills gaps by facilitating the coordination, collaboration, and sharing of efforts across countries.

- **Sector-specific E-readiness assessments**. The ICA has supported "ICT for competitiveness of MSME in Central America", which has almost completed an assessment of the e-readiness of MSMEs as its first component. The results are contributing to the development of a regional agenda on how to improve the use of digital technologies for SME business skills development. At this stage of implementation, the team considers that the project is filling an important void, and offers the potential for knowledge generation, capacity building, and motivating a convergence of key governmental actors in support of the increased competitiveness of MSME.

- **Mechanisms for sharing models**. The Computer for Schools project, implemented with Industry Canada and the OAS, has provided practitioners from Latin America and the Caribbean with an overview of key CFS components and assisted them in developing business plans to establish national programs. Within less than a year, the project outputs (workshops and on-line forums) have provided a foundation for further progress in many of the participating countries. The project is beginning to confirm the hypothesis reflected in the announcement of the Institute, which suggests that the lessons learned in Canada's Connecting Canadians programs could allow countries to develop and implement these programs more quickly. The project also illustrates how ICA can build bridges between its Canadian constituencies and its regional mandate.

- **Demonstration projects.** The Wi-Fi pilots are implementing local wireless networks using Wi-Fi technology in a number of communities. This technology expands the services from a single access point to a larger area, benefiting a larger group of users from the same connection without additional recurring costs. ICA´s main contribution has been to identify and draw attention to the potential of Wi-Fi technology for expanding connectivity and reducing the digital divide throughout the region.

  E-link Americas, which aims to provide broadband Internet access for social development on a regional scale at low cost, has generated high expectations among stakeholders in LAC and is widely cited as a legacy project of this first phase of ICA. It is being run as a non-for-profit Canadian corporation and will reportedly connect the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network by the fall of 2005.

  @Campus Mexico offers capacity development for Mexican Federal public employees through the use of different electronic media and is an illustration of how ICTs can support a government's civil service reform effort and, more specifically, how e-learning can deliver training to large numbers of civil servants across a large geographic area. President Fox's visit to IDRC in October 2004 illustrated the level of support for the project in the current government. The scaling up process for Central America has already begun, with the Government of Mexico discussing a formal agreement with Guatemala in order to begin

moving towards @campus Americas, and a full-scale @Campus conference being planned for November 2005.

15. ICA projects make a strong use of partnerships –often with multiple stakeholders—to fund and implement its projects. All of the projects reviewed are co-funded with organizations that include the IDB, OAS, CIDA, and Industry Canada, as well as other IDRC programs (Pan Americas). The relationships among the implementing partners can become quite large and complex, at times, such as the group of organizations involved in Central America in the ICT for competitiveness of MSME project. All of these partnerships require ICA to engage in relationship management as part of the implementation process.

16. ICA has leveraged additional financial resources for its projects. The data illustrates an overall leverage ratio of more than 2:1. Out of the CAD $22.4 million in leveraged funds reported by ICA, approximately 60% comes from multilateral and regional institutions (such as IDB, World Bank, ECLAC, and OAS) and 16% from other IDRC programs and corporate projects, primarily Pan Americas. Other Canadian government departments and the private sector are also co-funders of ICA projects.

17. ICA has developed a common communications platform – based on its web site, virtual groups, and newsletters—that has contributed to increased regional collaboration and virtual learning. The level of interest in the ICA reports, case studies, and regional information has increased sharply over time. The web site (www.icamericas.net) now receives over 10,000 visits monthly (April 2005), up from about 1,000 in January 2003. By April 2005, ICA had distributed 12 newsletters to over 1000 subscribers throughout the region. The web site, newsletter, and many of the Institute's publications (or summaries of them) are produced in four languages: Spanish, English, French, and Portuguese.

18. The review notes that a **weakness in ICA is the lack of a program framework and strategy (with articulated outcomes) for managing, evaluating, and reporting on its performance to key stakeholders.** At the time of ICA design, broad statements about its general aims and objectives, preferred approaches, priority themes, and programming areas were put forward. These were not subsequently translated into clearly defined outcomes and reach of the program (as might be done in a Prospectus).

19. A second weakness has to do with the **lack of an explicit and systematic way of integrating gender equality concerns into ICA programming.** Gender equality was not explicitly mentioned in the Summit's Connectivity Agenda, nor was it included as an explicit objective for ICA in any of its foundation documents. This may, in part, explain the lack of an explicit approach for incorporating gender at the program level and in the individual projects reviewed. In addition, ICA does not have full capacity in this area (e.g., specialized members of the team or gender consultants) and has relied on the work of Pan Americas, ICA's twin project, in gender analysis and research. Given the importance of gender equality for IDRC's corporate strategy, for the Summit of Americas, and for the equalizing potential of ICTs, it is an area that warrants additional strategic focus and capacity in a second phase of ICA.

Strengths and Weaknesses of ICA strategy and approach

20. The "start-up" strategy of ICA developed a large and diverse portfolio of projects. While this represented a spread of resources in the first couple of years, it also allowed ICA to create a constituency of regional and sector stakeholders and helped to lay the foundation for the "maturation" strategy that moves ICA towards more large scale and truly regional projects. This maturation strategy is characterized by larger budgets and leveraging power, more complex financing and implementation arrangements, greater risk and potential for impact.

21. ICA is recognized for strengths in several areas, particularly its capacity to blend projects with single and multiple stakeholders and its role as a matchmaker for institutions and sectors. Its ability to embrace a regional approach to programming is highly valued and differentiates ICA from international organizations that operate on a country basis. Among the weaknesses noted is that ICA's niche is still unclear to many stakeholders and that stakeholders perceive that it lacks a macro strategy for its work.

22. ICA is relevant to the current state of the field, the realities in LAC, and to the process and themes of the Summit of the Americas. ICA is also a relevant initiative to many of its key constituencies:

    - Country governments value ICA's different roles and some of the major governments in the region—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico—are partners in ICA projects.

    - In the case of civil society, the perceptions of some groups suggest a potential gap between how ICA is perceived and what it is doing in practice.

    - The private sector has had a small, but growing role in ICA, which has yet to be explicitly defined in ICA strategy. Recent ICA initiatives such as IT Access for Everyone and Aloo.com foreshadow new levels of private sector engagement.

    - Multilateral organizations, both regional and international, have come to recognize the important and complementary role that ICA can play in ICT4D in the region. They appreciate ICA's capacity to identify the needs and reach out to micro-stakeholders and, particularly, to launch horizontal meso-level projects.

    - The other founding Canadian government departments have expressed sound support for ICA's work, but they also note concerns related to strategy, vision, and some aspects of the ICA model. They have also agreed in correspondence that a second generation of ICA should be pursued, subject to certain conditions, such as a positive evaluation and an updated mandate.

Composition and functioning of the ICA model

23. Although the process of integrating ICA into IDRC has not been seamless, most IDRC/ICA stakeholders note mutual benefits to the relationship. The concerns that are raised, generally around administrative procedures, do not appear to have affected ICA's effectiveness, but they do reflect on its organizational culture. The results of "twinning"

with Pan Americas are emerging on a project basis, in the identification of more general areas of common ground, and in more intangible ways. At the same time, there are

24. concerns about the relationship between the two programs and their positioning in the region and in Canada. Since the rationale for a complementary relationship between the two programs remains valid, the evaluation identifies the need to strengthen it in a way that takes into consideration the identity and branding needs for each program and clearly explains the relationship to key external stakeholders (in Canada and in the region).

25. IDRC's Board of Governors and senior management have been responsible for the governance of ICA. Although the Institute may operate like other programs in the ICT4D area, several other components are built in to the program model, including the Hemispheric Advisory Board (HAB) and the Working Group of the founding government departments. The study identifies several strengths in the HAB as a component in the ICA model, but also finds that it may be an underutilized resource. Some of the factors that limit its potential contribution to ICA include its composition, its understanding of its role, and the mechanisms that are used for engaging Board Members.

26. The ICA model has also brought sustained opportunities for IDRC to engage in integrated discussions with the other government departments. IDRC has valued the interaction with and guidance provided by the Working Group, although the frequent rotation of members has affected the quality of the relationship. The members of the Working Group, express limitations to the nature of the relationship that has evolved, in which their expectations about participation in strategic decision-making about ICA have not been met. In the first phase, these issues have not prevented ICA from generating valuable results. The limitations illustrate the challenges inherent in managing the relationships and expectations of diverse constituencies and point to some weaknesses in the ways that ICA engages these stakeholders.

27. In general, the ICA team is recognized for its technical expertise and capacity. The two principal weaknesses noted in the team's functioning are: inconsistencies in internal communications and information management and the fact that the team is overextended –with E-Link Americas drawing considerable staff and especially management time in recent months. The program team may be too small to carry out its current activity level; team members express a particular need for an increase in administrative support for the program.

Issues for Consideration

28. Stakeholders from the founding government departments offered contrasting, yet often complementary, elements of a vision for ICA. For example, most of the stakeholders envision ICA as a Centre of Reference or of Excellence for best practices in connectivity/ICT4D for the region (a single window, repository model). In this model, the emphasis is more on quality and on ICA as a "leadership" institution, rather than ICA as a funding program. This concept could also encompass the view that ICA should focus on creating "franchise models", in which the experiences and lessons in the application of ICT4D strategies in the region (e.g. schoolnets) are collected and shared with others. From this point of view, ICA acts as a knowledgeable facilitator for country stakeholders in the region. Another perspective, put forward by one of the interviewees, takes the vision a bit farther, by spinning off ICA as a Canadian executing agency responsible for

promoting ICT4D technological innovation, transfer and training, including the provision of seed financing for joint ventures in the Americas.

The discussion of the visions also revealed some of the stakeholders' more concrete expectations for the second phase of Canadian government funding. Some of the expectations include: the need for ICA to identify the 3 or 4 activities/projects that are its indispensable trademarks; the need for ICA to ensure clarity in its value proposition; and the notion that the phase should be planned with the end in mind, since it would likely be the last round of Canadian government funds.

29. The ICA institutional arrangements or model generate some concerns among the founding government departments. At the centre of this, is their general sense of dissatisfaction with the mechanism/approach for engaging the departments. In their current role they feel that they have lacked the opportunity to provide more strategic orientation to the Institute. This leads some to argue for the need for ICA to spin off from IDRC, suggesting that as an independent entity all of the stakeholders could have a greater role in strategic decisions. Others just see a need for better clarification of the "rules of the game" in the current arrangement, of the tightly-coupled cooperation between IDRC and ICA, and more specifically, of the role of the external stakeholders in this structure.

30. The future role of the HAB is another issue for consideration. Many stakeholders (almost all of the members of the HAB that were interviewed) noted the need to change this role in such a way that the parameters and mechanisms for providing advice emphasize more strategic elements. The composition may also need to be reviewed, as some stakeholders note that it has become outdated.

31. The differences in perspectives shared with the evaluation team suggest that before preparing the submission to Treasury Board, and in order to facilitate that process, it would be useful to have a high level dialogue that engages Canadian stakeholders in discussions of the expected strategic outcomes for ICA and of the general operating parameters for the second phase. These discussions could aim to clarify issues such as: the Canadian-Hemispheric dilemma and how it will be handled in the second phase; the relationship between ICA and Pan Americas, and how this will evolve; and the role, expectations, and alternatives for engagement of the other founding government departments.

32. Both internal and external stakeholders provided some ideas about the directions for future programming. In addition, the strategy that is currently unfolding yields elements that can be combined with emerging needs and thrusts to form a post-2006 program strategy. New ideas for programming directions share what seem to be three main emphases: further engagement of the private sector as a partner in ICT4 development; an increase in the ICA's role as a facilitator of dialogue to promote connectivity agendas; and a stronger emphasis of ICA as a promoter of transparency.

33. The review concludes with reflections on the knowledge economy thrust in programming that is coming to the forefront in ICT4D and discusses some of its potential implications for ICA. Although ICA has already begun work in this area, embracing the knowledge economy may require shifts in the way that it operates. It may demand ICA to engage in a more sustained manner with its project partners, for example, so that these projects can

move towards sustainability. Entrepreneurship and innovation are some of the features of the knowledge economy that may require more intense risk management.