

ICT4D External Reviews

PAN Americas Corporate Project

Independent External Review

Final Report

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Supplementary Volume¹

¹ A supplementary volume is being submitted to IDRC's Evaluation Unit as background information associated with this external review. It is proposed that this section be restricted to internal dissemination. It contains raw data, informal notes, and preliminary (mostly unfinished) conceptual and methodological materials.

i. *Forward*

This report is a summary of the findings of an independent external review of the PAN Americas Corporate Project. The report has been divided into three volumes: Volume 1 contains the findings, comments, and perspectives regarding PAN Americas; Volume 2, is a collection of appendices that detail the methodological and factual information for the more technically oriented reader; Volume 3, is a supplementary volume containing background information (raw data, informal notes, and preliminary conceptual and methodological materials).

ii. *Acknowledgments*

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Last but not least, we would like to emphasize the generous cooperation of managers and personnel of PAN Americas' partner organizations, particularly the coordinators, staff, and associates of projects selected for in-depth review. During visits and interviews, participants recognized the importance of the review exercise. All were willing participants and all provided useful and pertinent information, and shared their insights willingly. The reviewers are confident that without the support of all those involved, this report would not have been possible.

The analyses and interpretations herein are the sole responsibility of the reviewers.

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iii. Executive Summary

This report summarizes the methodologies, findings, and assessments of the external review of the PAN Americas Corporate Project for the period 2001–2004.

The report identifies the key questions and issues faced by the reviewers and highlights issues and problems requiring the attention of IDRC management. As per IDRC's request, no attempt has been made to offer any recommendations. If warranted, however, the reviewers chose to propose possible prognoses so as to appraise the results of inactions.

The report is divided into four sections. Section one presents the normative framework governing the external review and provides the elements that support the objectives of the review's processes and findings. The review privileges direct consultation with an extensive and representative group of external partners and stakeholders. A sample of projects from the 2001–2004 portfolio was used to investigate the results, influence, and strategic dimensions of PAN Americas' actions. **Table 1** presents a list of the nine projects selected. These projects are an excellent example of the principles and strategies of PAN Americas. The innovative and participatory character of these endeavours is considered to be far beyond the conventional, donor-driven ICT4D projects.

Section two analyzes the objectives of the PAN Americas' Corporate Project (CP); it studies the consistency with which its projects and actions have been aligned with the objectives. First, the CP mission and objectives are briefly described. Second, the relationship between the 2001–2004 PAN Americas' project portfolio and CP objectives is established. The section then examines the concept of project results (outputs, reach, and outcomes) and the strengths and weaknesses affecting a project's influence. Armed with these conceptual tools, case studies are described in each genre of project. These are focused on the behaviour and effects of the nine sample projects selected from the 2001–2004 period. The projects were grouped in broad categories using their main objectives ("knowledge creation," "policy and advocacy," and "capacity building"). In this way, potential interaction between projects within each group can be discussed later on in the review.

Section three describes the strategies, administrative policy framework, and operations of PAN Americas. The idea is to examine the principles and criteria found in the 2001–2004 Corporate Project's prospectus and study the degree to which they have been realized. Many important strategies were examined: research focused on priority research themes; geographic coverage; priority partners privileged; use of ICTs and preferred digital economy models; special output delivery strategies; public communications; learning and evaluation; and staffing strategies.

Finally, section four represents a recognition of the insufficiency of a purely historical "lessons learned" approach. To look back at what PAN Americas has accomplished during the 2001–2004 period is considered important; it is not however, enough to provide IDRC with a more complete decision-making framework. Changes – either manifested, emerging, or potential – in the immediate PAN Americas' environment and changes expected from the initiatives of ICT4D actors and donors focused on LAC countries, create a very different situation from the one that existed in 2000 when the PAN Americas CP was conceived and approved. New issues and challenges render invalid any attempts to project existing objectives and strategies previously tested by PAN Americas. This analysis was supported by an initial and preliminary

SWOT (strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis undertaken by the reviewers. It was discovered that this analysis would acquire new meaning, depth, insight, validity, and influence if developed through new exercises where IDRC and PAN Americas staff and key stakeholders could participate. When compared with the historical analysis of previous sections, this strategic analysis allowed the reviewers to detect problem areas and to formulate a number of concerns and further questions to be addressed by PAN Americas. What follows is a summary of the external review's findings.

Pan Americas projects studied during the 2001–2004 exercise, had numerous successful strategic *achievements*. For example:

- The selected sample projects were on the whole quite successful; their influence was significant on their respective environments and they all contributed, in innovative ways, to the objectives of PAN Americas. Innovative and reproducible projects were designed and executed and several projects are still ongoing. Partners have varied, though their quality standards have not decreased.
- Fidelity to PAN Americas and IDRC principles and guiding purposes, along with reasonable adaptive solutions to changing situations were achieved. Development and ICT contexts and partners have changed and so has ICT4D within IDRC, inclusive of the new ICA initiative, which is very visible and active in the region. IDRC has been persistent but not inflexible on some key topics such as partner networking, capacity building, and increasing the policy relevancy of ICT4D research.
- Networks of researchers and other social actors were developed or sustained on-line and collaborative work was encouraged.
- ICT4D research areas were successfully explored, such as public information policies for participatory citizenship, judicial information transparency vis-à-vis information privacy rights, gender dimension tools for ICT project evaluations, school-level factors for ICT integration, and so on.
- PAN Americas excelled in its relationships with a substantial number of relevant and diverse civil society organizations; although overworked, a highly motivated, efficient, and competent staff was able to maintain the PAN Americas vessel “afloat” in spite of problems and staffing issues.
- Learning and evaluation culture was maintained and improved.

The *shortcomings* of PAN Americas' 2001–2004 projects also need to be mentioned. For example:

- Some projects under performed because of the complexity and originality of the previous experience of the partner organization. MASTER, MISTICA, and ICT-IMPACT are examples of possible in-depth “lessons learned” exercises that might prove fruitful.
- The Caribbean region, particularly the non Spanish-speaking area, received inadequate coverage; the Andean region, with the exception of Ecuador, was not sufficiently

represented (even taking into account existing instabilities in specific Andean countries and particular periods).

- ICT4D research linked to economic, entrepreneurship, poverty, and gender issues was not sufficiently explored.
- Many partners were not familiar with outcome mapping concepts and tools for planning and evaluation, limiting their broader view of “outcomes.”
- Not enough information was communicated by PAN Americas’ public information policies on this key regional initiative, thus contributing to its increasingly blurred perception in LAC countries.

Today, the basic challenge for IDRC in ICT4D projects undertaken in LAC countries, appears to be how to proceed with such a distinctive and important initiative as PAN Americas in a competitive and at times turbulent environment. In this context, an urgent new partnership with the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (ICA) is required so that real synergies can be generated, and in order to ensure that both initiatives acquire enhanced presence and distinctiveness in the LAC territory they share. Other initiatives supported or promoted by IDRC, such as FRIDA, the Knowledge Economy Initiative, and the new Telecentres Network, should be closely monitored by PAN Americas staff (and ICA staff for that matter) so that their valuable experiences can be capitalized upon and shared.

Certainly, the findings and solution-seeking exercises designed to identify and describe problems, represent a major challenge for a highly reduced and rather new PAN Americas team. The team is over-extended by a demanding workload and facing the additional burden of the CP’s diminished status in LAC countries as a recognized and distinctive authority on innovative approaches for ICT4D research. Present partners, historical allies, and new partners need to be enticed and encouraged to join in the efforts of PAN Americas and IDRC. Positive actions and a new treatise are required to advance from the former “ICTs and development discourses” to new initiatives that respond to emerging regional and global ICT4D research challenges. Additionally, a new breed of forward-thinking PAN Americas projects will be required.

Fortunately, the LAC region is teeming with increasingly networked, savvy, and enthusiastic ICT4D leaders, researchers, and policymakers. IDRC and PAN Americas have historically contributed to the development and strengthening of a valuable network of ICT4D research partners. In their company, and with their generous collaboration, new exciting scenarios and strategies for the region and its people may be developed and put into action.

1. Mandate and Context of PAN Americas Review

1.1 Terms of Reference and Evaluation Questions

The PAN Americas Corporate Project (2001–2004) focuses on “Strengthening Research on Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) in the Americas.” The external review involved a thorough investigation of the Corporate Project results and influences, as well as the strategies pursued. The review objectives were: (1) to assess the extent to which the program is meeting its objectives and aims, and to identify any evolution in program objectives; (2) to document the results of the program (i.e., outputs, reach, and outcomes) and analyze their influence; (3) to offer reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the program’s thematic approach and strategies, and (4) to assess the composition and functioning of the program team as it relates to its ability to meet the program’s objectives. Our schematic, overall methodological approach on how to deal with the Corporate Project based on the Review’s four objectives is summarized in Volume 2, Appendix 1 (External Review Questions: Graphic Presentation).

IDRC support for the review was significant. A *Reviewers’ Guide* prepared by IDRC’s Evaluation Unit, provided specific questions sets for each objective, while additional evaluation guidelines were set forth in the Orientation Workshop attended by all reviewers in October 2005. Subsequently, IDRC provided substantial program and project documentation as required by the review, and PAN Americas’ staff facilitated the initial contacts with partner organizations.

1.2 Methodological Approach

The guiding principles of the external review were mainly to:

- *Gain insight into PAN Americas* using an hierarchical approach and an historical process timeline (c.1997–2005).² The levels examined included: IDRC, ICT4D, PAN Americas Program, and PAN Americas projects.
- *Determine project selection.* Projects to be reviewed in-depth were selected through a purposeful, careful, and well-designed sampling exercise, done jointly with IDRC’s PAN Americas and Evaluation Unit staff in Ottawa. (Details are provided in Section 1.3.)
- *Examine team relationships and work.* Strategizing and solving methodological and operational issues was undertaken in the startup months in face-to-face meetings, as well as ongoing on-line exchanges, document sharing, and collaborative work. Our first field interviews conducted in Montevideo and Buenos Aires, were deliberately set up as two-person visits to every project and interviewee. This facilitated the development of superior collaborative viewpoints, improved learning exchanges, and fine-tuned our written and verbal questioning and conversation procedures. Subsequently, we conducted independent field trips, supplemented by on-line debriefings, and met for

² The historical process timeline is included as a component of Volume 3 (Supplementary Volume).

final brainstorming and analysis sessions prior to composing draft and final reports. (See Volume 2, Appendix 2, People Interviewed.)

- ***Provide documentary analysis.*** A broad-spectrum study of IDRC documents pertaining to PAN Americas was paramount for a comprehensive and forward-looking evaluation of the program. We questioned the documentary evidence in accordance with the four main evaluative questions of the review, a task that continued throughout our fieldwork and subsequent analyses.³ (See Volume 2, Appendix 3, Documentation Reviewed.)
- ***Conduct field visits and interviews, and develop instruments.*** We sought to make our project field visits and interviews as friendly, transparent, collaborative, and learning-reflective experiences as possible, notably when reviewing project results and influences. Time did not allow for these encounters to be true capacity-building experiences on program or project evaluation. All participants felt they had been honestly consulted; they were pleased at having been considered, were open and enthusiastic, and appreciated IDRC's concern for the evaluation process. Fieldwork and interviewing guidelines and tools were developed, tested, and refined during our first joint trip.⁵ Interview topic guides, cover letters, and informative brochures on the review were sent in advance to project leaders and selected participants. (These are presented in Volume 2, Appendices 4, 5, and 6.)

Conduct iterative analyses. The review period consisted of several iterative analytical cycles. Early sharing of initial findings and impressions allowed for a joint, progressive, and encompassing construction and understanding of PAN Americas' meaning, processes, results achieved, and prospects.

The development of the draft and final reports considered a four-step process: (1) a joint analysis of outputs, reach, outcomes, and strengths and weaknesses factors associated with specific projects as illustrative cases; (2) a joint SWOT analysis and strategic prognosis of PAN Americas as a whole, during the reviewers' stay in Puebla; (3) the completion of project analyses; and (4) the writing of draft and final reports in Santiago and La Serena, including at least three face-to-face meetings.

1.3 Project Sampling

³ The emphasis on documentary work was well founded, since many program-level questions could not be directly ascertained from our field visits and interviews. Thus, our prepared documentary knowledge helped ease a complicated field discussion of project and program purposes and influences.

⁴ Briefly stated, our starting point was PAN Americas' Corporate Project and Work Plan 2001-2004. We then proceeded hierarchically: at the highest level, we considered strategic IDRC documents; next, we revised ICT4D-level documents that provided the bigger picture and context within which PAN Americas operates, including Board of Governors' presentations; at the PAN Americas program-level we considered supportive conceptual and strategic materials, team planning and meetings, project portfolio, PCRs, and the Web site, where materials were substantially updated December 2004; finally, we considered PAN Americas' projects, that is, the projects that have been or are being supported by PAN Americas. (We paid particular attention to those that were most directly related to our in-depth review projects from the current cycle.)

⁵ Four sequential stages were conceived: (1) joint mission of reviewers to LACRO and projects or participants located in Montevideo and Buenos Aires; (2) separate parallel fieldwork of reviewers (Contreras-Budge: Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Temuco; Cubillo: San José, Managua, Quito); (3) thorough review of partial findings (during the reviewers' stay in Mexico DF and Puebla); and (4) joint final stage of field work in Mexico DF and Puebla.

As indicated by the review design, a deliberate sampling exercise was conducted in order to choose a meaningful and significant number of projects from PAN Americas' current cycle project portfolio. Projects chosen had to meet certain criteria, for example: 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 would represent the variety and quality of PAN Americas' project portfolio during the period under analysis.

Table 1 illustrates the nine projects selected. They are identified by an acronym, an internal IDRC code, an official project title, and the name of the executive partner organization and its site. These nine projects (along with their antecedents where appropriate), were exhaustively studied through documents, materials, and field interviewing of their main actors. Some other projects received intermediate consideration, including field visits, while the rest of the portfolio (past and present) was only subject to documentary review.⁶

⁶ Projects ultimately not included in final selection but field reviewed were: ICT-Knowledge, #101389, ICTs and Knowledge, Acceso, Costa Rica; GENRE, #102197, From Words to Action: ICTs, Youth and Gender Equity, FLACSO Buenos Aires; WSIS, #102373, Towards WSIS II, ITeM, Montevideo. The remainder of the PAN Americas' Project Portfolio was only reviewed via the provided documentation.

Table 1. PAN Americas' projects selected for review

Project Acronym	IDRC Project Code	Official Project Title	Partner Organization/ Site
ICT-IMPACT	100582	ICTs in Education: Method for Evaluation of Social Impact and Equity Conditions	FOD, San José
GEM-LAC	100994	Gender Evaluation Methodology for ICT Initiatives - Phase II	APC/WNSP, Global-LAC
ICT-POLICY	101046	Public Policy and Internet in Nicaragua and Costa Rica	Acceso, San José
JUDICIARY	101107	Internet, Privacy, and the Judiciary in LAC	IJJ, Buenos Aires
MASTER	101159	Internet Policy MA Thesis Program	FLACSO, Quito
RITS-OPPI	101383	Engaging Civil Society Organizations in ICT Policy Formulation & Implementation ⁷	RITS, Rio de Janeiro
MISTICA	101662	MISTICA 2 - Ensuring the Sustainability of the LAC Network of Researchers on ICTs ⁸	FUNREDES, Santo Domingo
REDAL	102073	Schoolnets Latin America/Redes Escolares de América Latina	F. Evolucion, Buenos Aires
FRIDA	102237	Digital Competitive Grants - FRIDA	LACNIC, Montevideo

⁷ In the case of RITS a previous phase of this project partly carried out during the 2001-2004 period was also considered in the review.

⁸ In the case of MISTICA a previous phase of this project partly carried out during the 2001-2004 period was also considered in the review.

2. Objectives, Results, and Influence of PAN Americas

2.1 Introduction

The influence of an IDRC Corporate Project such as PAN Americas is the result of a complex, multi-layered set of actions. The initiative's core revolves around the project portfolio it promotes and manages in a given period of time. Through projects, we can look at results and influences, the implementation of CP strategies, and CP responsiveness in general, vis-à-vis target audience needs.

This "project approach" is essential in our view but it does however, have its weaknesses. The impact of a corporate project is not completely realized through the analysis of individual projects and a sample of these projects reveals even less information. Merely examining the broad policy, the strategic framework, and CP workplans, reveal the skeleton of a program without actually seeing how the supported projects materialize. We will attempt to "bridge" specific project actions with broad strategic and program frameworks by grouping projects that share the greatest affinity in terms of program categories. Additionally, all individual projects will be examined for their unique contributions to a broader PAN Americas purpose and not as isolated efforts to be assessed on their own merits.

This section will be divided in two parts. The first examines the contextual and conceptual elements of projects; the objectives; the relationship between implementation, project portfolios, and programming; the results; facilitative and limitative factors; and the criteria used for grouping the selected projects by similarities in terms of a "predominant" purpose.

The second part examines the types of projects ("knowledge creation," "policy and advocacy," and "capacity building"). Case studies of the nine projects sampled from the 2001–2004 period are discussed. The section concludes with lessons learned.

2.2. Objectives

Historically, IDRC has had a strong tradition in information, communication, networking, and ICTs; within its research mandate, it has pioneered and innovated in these areas. Yet, the current PAN Americas Corporate Project (2001–2004) was designed as an interim solution at ICT4D/IDRC to strengthen a Latin American and Caribbean regional focus and identity in ICT4D research.⁹

⁹ Previously, IDRC had convened a Regional ICTD Consultation in 1997. LAC research projects reported and were operating under global PAN Asia (e.g., MISTICA for a virtual ICTD research community; APC's Women's Network Support for Gender and ICTs research (WNSP/GEM); and TELELAC for telecentres). Over the period, IDRC had succeeded in contributing to the development and networking of "a vibrant community that shares a common interest and enthusiasm for the use of ICTs for human development" in the LAC region. Subsequently the new ICA initiative, announced in 2001, came into operations in 2002 as a separate, distinct unit. The ICT4D Program Area was constituted as a working team by March 2001 and has significantly evolved and grown since then.

The mission of PAN Americas is the following: “Strengthening Research on ICT4D in the Americas.” The initiative’s aim is to help diverse stakeholders make meaningful use of ICTs for development. The preferred method used is one of strengthening the abilities of researchers in civil society organizations. A variety of IDRC strategies, partnerships, and modalities are put into action to support PAN Americas’ mission and its three objectives:

- *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.
- *Dissemination and Utilization of Results:* to explore effective and innovative ways to use ICTs and other means to disseminate, exchange, and use research results.

Thus, IDRC and PAN Americas developed and maintain a unique strategic niche and continuing opportunity, given the increasing relevance and sophistication of proper and measurable uses of ICTs for equitable and inclusive development, the variety of regional and local social actors and stakeholders involved in such aims, and the relative paucity of applied research in such matters.¹⁰

2.3 Implementation, Project Portfolio, and Programming

The implementation of PAN Americas projects has varied over time, due to strategic and practical program, managerial, and staffing reasons and the natural life cycle of supported projects.

From an IDRC viewpoint, assessing the programming and management of the project portfolio is crucial. On the one hand, project portfolio promotion must continually seek to contribute to the advancement of CP objectives. On the other hand, portfolio decisions touch upon the people, resources, and opportunities available to implement PAN Americas adequately. In fact, IDRC can mostly act upon CP objectives, as it cannot act directly or decisively on what the research partners do, or how they do it in an already approved project (except under major non-compliance or breach of contract conditions). Thus, the nature and timing of IDRC’s actions affect how much and in what way PAN Americas’ objectives are, or are not, adequately pursued within its own sphere of influence.

The external review team analyzed the available evidence on team programming and decisions, as well as the complete portfolio of projects (past or ongoing projects, or projects under consideration); a few projects never materializing.¹¹

¹⁰ The partners we interviewed have consistently valued IDRC’s support, perspectives, and contributions, though the PAN Americas “brand” was far less noticeable.

¹¹ We developed a timeline covering 1997–2005, so as to locate PAN Americas’ events, processes, and supported projects in their proper contexts and times. Given the dramatic global and regional changes in ICTs and ICT4D, time and context matter enormously. The longitudinal view provided us with a better understanding of shifts and

2.4 Results, and Facilitative and Limitative Factors

While project outputs are more easily conceptualized and recognizable, identifying other project results such as reach and outcomes, and their influence is far from simple. Here we provide some basic notions of the kind of results and influences to look at; they are supported by examples and illustrations from the projects that were analyzed in-depth.^{12,13}

Outputs are typically the most visible, tangible, and most proximate results of a project. They might be equivalent to the deliverables (products and/or services) promised by a project.¹⁴

We considered as output deliverables the following examples: project reports to IDRC; publications; varied Web-based outputs (ranging from occasional newsletters to very active discussion lists, simple Web pages to full Web sites and portals, and ICTD and research resource repositories); presentations to project partners or important audiences and potential influencers; project-related meetings that merit publicizing or sharing of results; and capacity-building events and processes. It should be noted that for many interviewees, doing the project was in itself a huge personal and collective capacity-building process (which is why we deal with such processes as outcomes).¹⁵

In its simplest form, **reach**¹⁶ can be defined as either the potential or actual dissemination of project results beyond its own parameters. At least some project processes, actions, or results “touch upon” other persons, organizations, or contexts. In IDRC’s more sophisticated concept, reach is far more connected to possible outcomes and influences, for which a number of

variations over time, what specific projects have meant at different moments, and some staffing issues and circumstances that affected the corporate project. Through the review of the 1997–2005 sets of projects, we could also discern some evolving trends in ICT4D and PAN Americas. A graphic representation of this historical timeline analysis is included in Volume 3.

¹² The continuation of this exercise should be formally addressed within PAN Americas and its partners, since we encountered difficulties in many partners’ comprehension or application of these basic concepts. It seems imperative that both the program and the projects brainstorm and operationalize outputs, reach, outcomes, and influence and determine how some outputs and the strategies pursued help to better achieve the former. This same reason restricted our full usage of Outcome Mapping as an evaluative tool, given that the process should be collectively constructed and constructed earlier on in the life cycle of a project.

¹³ A more complex issue remains and this report can hardly address it adequately: attempting to establish program outcomes as inferable from unique project outcomes, themselves often not so clear. Yet, we do provide in this section some indicative analyses that could promote an internal IDRC collective exercise, useful in the process of generating a new prospectus and strategies.

¹⁴ Based on what was obtained from project documentation and fieldwork, several output types were considered. Our study reveals that both PAN Americas and the projects themselves do not have a comprehensive list of outputs generated by or attributable to the project. Such omissions affect reach and outcome analysis and more importantly, tend to diminish actual (but not reported) project achievements.

¹⁵ Additional comments for output types: many project reports are not on-line, and many partial, interim, and unsubmitted project reports or intermediate products are valuable in their own right since they contribute shareable knowledge, particularly on research methodologies, tools and instruments, and field experiences. Publications in print (and increasingly on-line) are not exhaustively or systematically reported. Web-based outputs deserve a more sophisticated characterization, quality, and reach, given their increasing importance. We found that there are relevant project-related meetings that produce outputs, such as research advisory committees. Presentations to other partners and audiences are not typically well reported by several projects, so possible extra reach and influence remains unknown. Capacity-building is not only limited to formal events, and more attention should also be given to reporting its substantive results, as antecedents for possible outcomes.

¹⁶ Reach is a very valuable concept, partly rooted in marketing research, and is not so frequently used in project evaluation, except by IDRC. A working document on this subject is included in the supplementary volume.

prerequisites need to be met. Some of the projects we visited have simple, and at times, quite precise quantitative reach figures; a few only deal with a potentially (but immeasurably) high reach (for example, projects associated with a Web presence). Still others confuse reach as the mere “contact” with another NGO or influential partner.

For the purposes of this report, **outcomes**¹⁷ are a simplified concept of what IDRC and others understand by such a notion. Outcomes are those longer term, “derived from,” extensive/intensive, farther-reaching results of a project, its processes, its outputs, and its reach.¹⁸ They are considerably harder to measure and “see.” A good mixture of outputs and reach is usually accompanied by an effective strategy, and can produce outcomes or contribute to them.¹⁹

Facilitative and limitative factors are very diverse and dynamic. Facilitative factors are external influences on the project environment, or influences coming from within the project team that can assist in overcoming obstacles or accelerate certain processes. Limitative factors, on the other hand, cause difficulties, uncertainties, and conflicts. They might originate inside or outside a project team and/or physical setting, and might affect outputs, reach, and outcomes.

2.5 Grouping Sample Projects by Predominant Objective

The projects in the samples analyzed have been grouped according to main objectives in terms of their “predominant” focus: the main direction or purpose of the project. “Predominant” has to be distinguished from the more restricted “exclusive” or “unique” focus. For the purposes of our analysis, the *foci* considered are “knowledge creation,” “policy and advocacy,” and “capacity building.” Analysis of project groupings will allow discussion on comparative approaches and lessons learned. Supra-project analyses facilitate inquiries that would have not been possible if the analyses had been done individually and independently for each project. (For example, learning from different analytical perspectives favoured within each group and facilitating the understanding of broader issues, project interrelationships, and potential synergies.)

If we look at the nine projects chosen, we can see that ICT-IMPACT, REDAL, and GEM-LAC are *primarily* “knowledge-creation” projects; RITS, ICT-POLICY, and JUDICIARY are *primarily* “policy and advocacy” projects; and MASTER, MISTICA, and FRIDA are *primarily* “capacity-building projects.”²⁰

¹⁷ IDRC’s concept of outcome is inextricably linked to outcome mapping methodology. While outcome mapping as an approach helped us (and some partners) look beyond project results, we could not apply the full methodology for reasons intrinsic to the project’s design.

¹⁸ Some project leaders and staff liked our term project “irradiations” to describe outcomes, since there is no clear Spanish (or Portuguese) comparable notion. The term “*alcances*” actually means reach and not outcomes.

¹⁹ A workshop is an output. But what participants subsequently do as a result of having participated in the workshop, might become an outcome. Establishing an e-list of ICT4D researchers, big or small, is an output, while developing and nurturing a sustainable on-line community with growing external influences and/or mutual learning and support can be considered an outcome. Creating and maintaining a Web site are worthy and significant outputs, but not an outcome itself; having it generally perceived by knowledgeable outsiders as the reference site for digital inclusion matters is however, an outcome.

²⁰ We stress the predominant, non-exclusive, and non-excluding nature of the focus associated with any given project: most or all projects selected have dimensions corresponding to the other foci. Each one also has some unique, distinctive features, as will be detailed later on. Of course, other viewpoints could be chosen, such as “networking.” We believe our categories are sound for PAN Americas’ purposes, since we examined alternative groupings.

2.6 “Knowledge-Creation” Projects: Case Studies

“Knowledge-creation” projects are those endeavours having as a predominant focus, the generation of new concepts, frameworks, and/or tools that can be applied to better describe, understand, and act upon the relationships between ICTs and development processes.

The review has considered three knowledge-creation projects: ICT-IMPACT, REDAL, and GEM-LAC. (Basic information about each project is provided in boxes inserted throughout the text.²¹) Only some illustrative examples are interspersed here; they are by no means representative of the ample amount, variety, and relevance of each of the project’s results and influences.

2.6.1 ICT-IMPACT

ICT-IMPACT is a pioneering research effort on the social impact methodology of ICTs within educational, ICT-related contexts.

ICT-IMPACT

This project is a Fundación Omar Dengo’s (FOD) initiative. FOD is a private, non-profit, civil society organization, based in Costa Rica, that seeks to promote innovations in education, technology, and development issues. Among other things, FOD is responsible for Costa Rica’s official governmental “computers for schools” program.

The ICT-IMPACT project (IDRC project #100582) attempted to develop a general methodology for assessing social impact and equity conditions of ICT-supported educational activities. Its main expected contribution was to provide a wide array of tested practical tools for assessing the social impact of ICTs in education and related projects. (Leaders and staff associated with this project are found in Volume 2, Appendix 2.)

The ICT-IMPACT project story reached rather dramatic heights. To start with, the initial research objective was not realized as had been envisioned. The magnitude of the task became apparent once the FOD research team analyzed existing experiences and presented state of the art findings to a high-level committee comprised of experts and experienced, senior policymakers. The first consultations revealed a rather large gap between specific knowledge needs expressed by practitioners involved in assessing the impact of ICTs in highly complex settings, and the outputs that the FOD research team might reasonably be expected to produce. Today, in retrospect, FOD staff now considers that the attempt to elaborate a generalized methodology for assessing the social impact of ICT-based educational projects was overly ambitious.

The FOD team internally invested in a team-building approach and allocated valuable time to a rather “heroic” effort to map out, revise, and group countless social impact indicators, their relative merit, and their application feasibility. This introspective – and to a large extent “invisible” work – was not properly revealed in formal reports to IDRC. Naturally, as time

²¹ A detailed analysis of outputs, reach, outcomes, and influential factors for each of the projects of the sample is provided in the supplementary volume.

went on, doubts lingered as to the FOD team's ability to deliver some sort of product at the end of the project.

Fortunately, the story ended successfully, albeit with delays and some missing essential requirements. A methodology was attained for mapping social impact situations in educational ICT-related activities, and for designing applied impact research through an interactive process with policymakers. This represented a less ambitious output than what was originally expected. Also, the "extended maturation process" within the FOD team has continued to prevent the wide delivery of findings through seminars, meetings, Web site publications, etc. Yet the developmental potential of carrying out such tasks is still highly significant.

The *output* of a major methodological publication is primarily delayed (at least while the reviewers' visit to FOD took place).²²

The *reach* is still largely limited to FOD itself. The high-level consultation committee is the only external actor that knows about the value of the research undertaken through PAN Americas. Yet, the potential for further reach of the research findings and proposal is enormous.

Outcomes have largely been expressed within FOD's walls (the methodology was applied internally and with success in a couple of FOD promoted projects). Also, capacity-building efforts are not only found in the project team but in other members of FOD's research department. The potential for outcomes can also be great in terms of follow-up initiatives associated with the discussion, improvement, and use of the methodology by other organizations inside or outside Costa Rica.

There are several *facilitative and limitative factors*. Facilitative factors include: the leadership, commitment, and complete support of this project by FOD's senior management; the perseverance of the project coordinator amidst considerable challenges; and FOD's rich educational and ICT experience, which was crucial in terms of the promising results finally obtained. Limitative factors include: the financial difficulties experienced by FOD which led to two members of the research team being offered better contracts in other national organizations.

There were numerous *lessons learned*. We will name here only the most obvious ones. The project partner chosen was the right one and the criteria applied for approving an admittedly risky project proposal can, in our view, be usefully considered in other similar knowledge-creation cases. Difficulties during project execution could probably have been avoided if an informed assessment had been done regarding the conceptual and methodological complexities posed by the research output envisaged. Also, additional external assistance on social impact issues could have been sought to strengthen an initially less experienced research team.²³

2.6.2 REDAL

²² Programas educativos que trabajan con las tecnologías digitales: Guía práctica para la evaluación de su impacto social y de sus contribuciones a la equidad. (Educational programs working with digital technologies: Practical guide for social impact evaluation and contributions to equity).

²³ As examples: a highly focused working visit by a senior social impact researcher on ICTs in education from Canadian academia could have helped in an early mapping of existing and relevant methodological knowledge; an expansion of the peer consultation network originally set up by FOD; and devising a more feasible and effective research strategy.

REDAL is a key innovative, comparative, school-based research initiative on factors associated with the successful integration of ICTs into networked schools.²⁴

REDAL

REDAL (Latin American SchoolNets) is an innovative research project into the functioning of seven exemplary ICT-enabled school networks in the region (Red Telar in Argentina; World Links [Enlaces Mundiales] in and Paraguay; Enlaces in Chile; Red Telemática Educativa in Costa Rica; Conexiones in Colombia; and Red Escolar in México). These networks are quite diverse, ranging from a few schools to national programs. The ultimate aim of the research project, in its final writing stage, is to empirically substantiate some key factors usually present in the successful integration of ICTs into education, schools, and classrooms. Policy recommendations will ensue. The project was developed by Fundación Evolución, an NGO based in Buenos Aires that carries out collaborative and networked activities on ICTs in education for Argentinean schools and teachers, with some global partnerships. (IDRC project #102073). (Leaders and staff associated with this project are found in Volume 2, Appendix 2.)

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 seven 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.

The sound and robust REDAL proposal addresses a pertinent and urgent problem for the region: the "better" introduction and integration of ICTs into educational sites and learning environments, in light of expanding national programs that may lack proper prerequisites and locally relevant research evidences, repertoires of good practices, and policy and practical assimilation of global lessons learned.

Well-documented "success" factors for ICT integration were empirically examined to check their success in various regional networks. Twenty-eight sample schools were intentionally selected. The qualitative, micro-level work done at these schools was processed and analyzed with the help of an appropriate software package. The findings are integrated with a macro-level policy study, based on documentary work and interviews conducted with network leaders.

Serious preliminary work preceded the project, with an initial IDRC small grant, followed by a proposal preparation grant. We met with enthusiastic and well-prepared researchers and advisors from FE and from four other partner entities. We also ensured adherence to adequate research procedures, collaborative group work (whether face to face or on-line), mastery of a complex, qualitative research software, and careful analytical work, from which a new "ICTs in education success factor" was discovered: *pertenencia* (or "belonging to the network").

In terms of project *outputs* (beyond important intermediate conceptual, methodological, and field reporting products the project should exhibit), the final research reports are forthcoming. A

²⁴ Only very limited details are provided here. A full account of the project itself and of its results are included in the Supplementary Volume.

book aimed at teachers and the educational community, and a policymakers' recommendations brief are expected around August 2005. A functional REDAL Web site was created specifically for the project by Fundación Evolución, of use and of interest mostly for the participant partners; the site includes research documentation and field notes. Three main workshops took place: a start-up and a debriefing workshop for project leaders and advisors, and an intermediate workshop for all researchers.

In terms of *reach*, two levels must be noted. This was Fundación Evolución's first research endeavour into its own TELAR school network. For the REDAL project-network, central team members interviewed different schoolteachers and students on-site along with local researchers; draft results were shared with schools for their review. Looking ahead, there is excellent potential for an extended reach, given the project's relevance, uniqueness, and quality, once its results and recommendations are made public. The network's survival and reach beyond the project itself is quite feasible.

On the other hand, there are *outcomes* specific to Fundación Evolución (FE): an explicit recognition that FE has a dramatic "before-and-after" period due to the research process it led; and FE can now include a relevant research agenda into its mission and TELAR network. A team of competent researchers was thoroughly tested. Members developed specific competencies in all the major stages of a complex research project and can now be considered as another FE asset. Other outcomes applicable to all REDAL key participating research partners: the first workshop substantially expanded the roles of local researchers, producing a high commitment for subsequent fieldwork; there was hands-on research capacity-building, collaborative work, and purposeful networking during field time (though not during the analytical stage). Outcomes that are applicable to a continuing REDAL network include a successfully tested basis for a research-oriented network and an actual tryout for a focused, on-line, collaborative research project. Moreover, one partner defined the project as the best evaluation they ever had, and REDAL members and teams are already mapping out new, specific research needs and topics on a cross-network, comparative basis.

Several *facilitative and limitative factors* intervened in REDAL's processes and results achieved. Within the project itself, favourable factors include: the quality and relevance of the research proposal; the novelty of the approach and procedures; the competent guidance from the advisory board; and FE's strong support. Most crucial was the outstanding work performed by all research teams. There were some limitative elements as well, such as a rather reduced on-line contact and work for most users; the Portuguese/Spanish language barrier for some users; and some hesitancy in reporting progress results to IDRC and partners, while working out very complex data processing and analysis. Also, a later, second meeting of all researchers would have been useful to enrich analysis, improve capacity building, and enhance ownership, sharing, and network continuance.²⁵ Favourable outside factors include the successes of the partners' other networking endeavours and collaborative work. Their prestige also facilitated entry into schools and in fieldwork.

Prospective positive factors for results include the fact that few, if any, research proposals in the LAC region have comparable scopes and processes for the topics empirically investigated at a school-level. Thus, there should be good, even pan-regional, demand for the findings and

²⁵ At an IDRC level, one should note that the initial idea was supported and encouraged by PAN Americas' officer and there was a good rationale and reasonable risk-taking for entering into a new, yet strategic area: ICTs in education. Subsequently, the PO accompanied the whole process.

recommendations derived from the project. The policy brief is being prepared by an experienced partner. Conversely, beyond the fieldwork that requires substantial, additional voluntary work by local partner researchers, the time for producing findings and results was underestimated (given the quantity and variety of qualitative data), somewhat delaying the timeliness of policy recommendations.

Several *lessons learned* can be noted.²⁶ One has to do with supporting and consolidating the research abilities of good quality entities and networks, working on specific, shared, timely, and relevant challenges. However, far more can be done to enhance focused, on-line collaborative work, an upcoming generalized challenge. Second, when developing, supporting, and implementing relevant and policy-implicated research proposals, quality matters. Specific capacity building and strengthening within a committed and serious entity is enhanced, particularly if augmented by the “network effect.” IDRC has had, and can continue to have, a unique impact therein. More attention, however, should be paid to possible outcomes from the start; IDRC might be more proactive and supportive in this area. And, a lesson also learned here – and in other projects as well – is that proposals need to better address the practicalities of considerable fieldwork and important time commitments; some partners tend to underestimate such efforts.

In sum, it can be argued that the REDAL project provides a good example of how PAN Americas’ objectives evolve in accordance to emerging and pertinent ICT4D regional issues, and how the program is entering into new arenas and partnerships without compromising its thrust.

IDRC’s support for this project – pending its formal outputs and, subsequently, outcomes – represents a valuable, unique, and exemplary contribution to “strengthening research on ICTs for development in the Americas,” since it happens to address several issues of concern in ICT4D: the empirical exploration of a crucial theme requiring urgent research; the value of quality, collaborative teamwork, enabled by ICTs and the Internet; the value added by research into existing educational networks; and perhaps a better leverage for, and synergy with, an ICA project aiming to consolidate a regional network of educational portals.

2.6.3 GEM-LAC

The GEM-LAC project is an excellent example of internationally networked partners collaborating in conceptualizing, developing, and testing methodologies to assess and evaluate whether and how gender issues are considered in ICT projects.

GEM-LAC

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). WNSP has enjoyed longstanding IDRC support. 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-LAC is the regional component of GEM, though GEM operated as a global WNSP program. GEM-LAC’s evolving development, testing, and adaptation in sites and entities in Ecuador, Brazil, and México has allowed a significant contribution by Latin American women (and a few men) to APC’s global aims as well as to the

²⁶ A detailed account is provided in the longer case study found in the Supplementary Volume.

empowerment of women's organizations. Beyond valuable learning- and knowledge-generation processes, GEM's main visible contributions, all on-line, are the GEM tool itself, its supporting resources, and a GEM Practitioners Network, both in Spanish- and English-language version Web sites. A CD-ROM and print manual are forthcoming (IDRC project #100994). (Leaders and staff associated with this project are found in Volume 2, Appendix 2.)

The project²⁷ is a continuity of two IDRC-supported projects (GEM-I and an earlier project leading to the creation of APC's WNSP). GEM-I generated the tool framework, but GEM-II actually developed the toolset, tested components in a variety of settings, and produced the Web-based GEM tool itself.²⁸ GEM has operated in conjunction with other WNSP (PARM²⁹) activities, and has given the network a distinctive feature. Our focus is only on its LAC components, though global collaboration was inherent.

GEM-LAC produced a substantial amount of *outputs*, but only a few are mentioned here. Since both the proposal and final report for the previous GEM project are outstanding, and its lessons were incorporated into GEM-II, its proposal was also notable and didactical in explaining processes, outputs, and far-reaching results.³⁰ Most research outputs, other than the GEM tool itself, are readily available on GEM's own Web site.³¹ (Of those, we highlight the "GEM Field Testing Process In Latin America."³²) But the ultimate, outstanding, and exemplary output is the GEM Web site itself. Built collectively, the site ultimately tied together all the GEM-related components.

In terms of *reach*, GEM-II reports that the project brought together 103 women and 19 men from over 50 organizations in global, regional, and local workshops and trained them in the use of the GEM tool.³³ Of these, 31 (eight from LAC) were trained as GEM workshop facilitators, and 19 (five from LAC) developed appropriate GEM consulting skills. Within the PARM network, reach was additionally expressed through members' participation in project activities in a volunteer capacity. New partnerships were developed: GEM participants interacted with other projects or entities supported by PAN Americas or IDRC such as RITS, Acceso, Chasquinet, ALAI, and Bellanet's Evaltica e-list. Testing also incorporated organizations external to WNSP, such as telecentres and AMARC community radio members. PARM values the fact that with GEM, they are able to provide some useful tools, services, and resources to partners and their

²⁷ A full, detailed analysis of GEM-LAC and its contribution to PAN Americas' results is included in the Supplementary Volume.

²⁸ While IDRC was not the single supporter for GEM-II, it allowed WNSP-APC to obtain substantive additional funding from UNIFEM and DFID. Project scope and fulfillment is fully consistent with such enhanced support.

²⁹ WNSP is called PARM in the region, Program de Apoyo Regional a la Mujer.

³⁰ The GEM-I proposal identified key women's network needs that applied research could help address; the lessons learned final report transparently analyzes the research processes and challenges they encountered. We refer to the Supplementary Volume and we simply omit valuable Global GEM outputs.

³¹ See <http://www.apcwomen.org/gem/esp/> (Spanish) or <http://www.apcwomen.org/gem/> (English).

³² See <http://www.apcwomen.org/gem/practitioners/findings/latam.htm>. The report is extremely well done, addressing substantial gender issue findings and methodological lessons and also summarizing the findings of the five LAC testing sites (out of thirteen global sites).

³³ While GEM mostly worked through on-line groups, there were key face-to-face workshops and meetings both for GEM-I and GEM-II. For the latter, a much-remembered LAC regional workshop in Cuernavaca (May 2002) for participating testers, and several LAC training and testing local workshops during field time (approx. 200 participants reported). GEM's regional coordinator visited and worked with eight local testing organizations. There was a final global GEM Practitioners Exchange meeting in Rio de Janeiro (June 2004). See <http://www.apcwomen.org/policy/activities/gemagenda.html> for a complete report.

groups. But GEM also 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. Reach at such a level is more a result of APC and PARM influence and advocacy than of GEM itself. Beyond direct personal reach, the specialized, focused, and well structured GEM Web site favours wide-ranging, on-line reach and usage for several purposes, ranging from gender awareness to project planning, to the use of some of its evaluation procedures.

WNSP reports that GEM has been its biggest and longest project to date and “has resulted in many gains for the network, our partners, and our constituencies.” Our own field interviews and visits, along with on-line and print resources analyzed, substantiate such an assertion. It is, however, a process that takes time, as is the case for most *outcomes*. We find that central to GEM’s actual and future outcomes was WNSP’s guiding premise that, ultimately, the GEM tool was a vehicle for understanding and acting upon the notion that ICTs can make a difference in women’s lives.

In terms of identifiable outcomes,³⁴ the many, long, and varied processes GEM imposed on the network has helped PARM member entities develop practical research interests and skills as well as enhance reflective abilities. The GEM Web site is seen by PARM as an evolving, “living,” on-line toolset, pedagogically articulated and accompanied by a practitioners’ network; it is therefore more an objective outcome than a static output.³⁵ Substantial learning and capacity building were consistently noted by all GEM participants interviewed, encompassing several levels, realms, and competencies, and permeating and strengthening other activities such as policy, advocacy, and workshops. GEM also helped PARM frame broader ICT equity concerns and contributed to members’ organizational self-reflection and subsequent operational changes and growth. But GEM was mainly inner-directed to WNSP as an interviewee stated, and new steps are to follow. Finally, GEM is a unique value-adding, practical, and available toolset for advocacy and policy influence activities, an ultimate outcome for APC, WNSP, and PARM.

Several **facilitative and limitative factors** affected the GEM project. Within WNSP, the protracted, collective, collaborative, sharing processes practiced favoured sustainable outcomes; there was good use of on-line and face-to-face communications and collaboration, appropriate selection and use of testing sites, open and adaptable tools and resources, and dedicated, labour-intensive testing, with sharing of substantive and methodological findings. However, the multi-layered complexities of GEM development delayed products, and there was an underestimation of time required to develop and/or test GEM, affecting organizations and persons who provided volunteer work and time. Volunteerism in developing a complex tool has its share of problems. The preconditions for evaluative work sometimes were (and are) absent or poorly developed in testing sites. Finally, as tested, GEM did not have a module for data analysis.

Favourable IDRC factors include early, ongoing, and consistent support over time for APC, WNSP, and GEM processes. More specifically, there was substantial (outstanding) expert support by IDRC program officers from the Evaluation Unit and Pan Americas. Personal, face-to-face interactions with IDRC staff and their substantive intellectual and methodological contributions are valuable components of the project. An excellent IDRC project approval

³⁴ The Supplementary Volume expands on these outcomes.

³⁵ Originally, GEM was to be a print manual. This speaks to the transformative effects of ICTs on knowledge-creation and sharing.

document (PAD) set the groundwork for maximizing the potential influences and outcomes of GEM. The synergies and collaboration among GEM, WNSP, and other IDRC-supported projects resulted in mutual gains during collaborative work. No unfavourable factors were mentioned. There are contextual factors as well³⁶: without WNSP members' existing outreach to specific groups, GEM testing would have been very poor. However, gender awareness and sensitivity were absent in some testing sites, and population ethnic and/or racial factors at times could, and did, override gender concerns. A final limitative factor and pending challenge, as noted by an interviewee is the fact that GEM has found important uses as a sensitization tool, not only as a gender evaluation tool, but as a representation of the fact that 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.

2.6.4 “Knowledge-Creation” Projects: An Inter-Project Analysis

This analysis considers both actual and potential inter-project links. Building synergies between boundary partners undertaking comparable projects, can enhance further capacity building and may create new environments for outcomes. The Relationships between the three “knowledge-creation” sample projects examined by the reviewers are depicted in **Figure 1**. Solid lines indicate actual interactions, while dotted lines indicate possible interactions.

The only built-in relationship detected was FOD's participation in the REDAL project. Yet there appeared to be little interaction between the central REDAL team and the FOD ICT-IMPACT research team. FOD's participation in REDAL has had an auxiliary and supportive nature for fieldwork in schools. A potential area for developing a stronger, substantive relationship between both research teams could revolve around new qualitative analysis research tools used by the REDAL research team. The application of these analytical tools can have an impact in the development of ICT-IMPACT methodology and FOD's capacity building. Similarly, ICT-IMPACT methodology can be examined jointly by REDAL and FOD teams.

³⁶ Since it was also a factor for REDAL, we mention that the Portuguese-Spanish language barrier effectively diminishes interaction possibilities for many potential partners and groups, despite efforts and good will, mostly in. The GEM tool was translated into Portuguese and also simplified for testing in in telecentres.

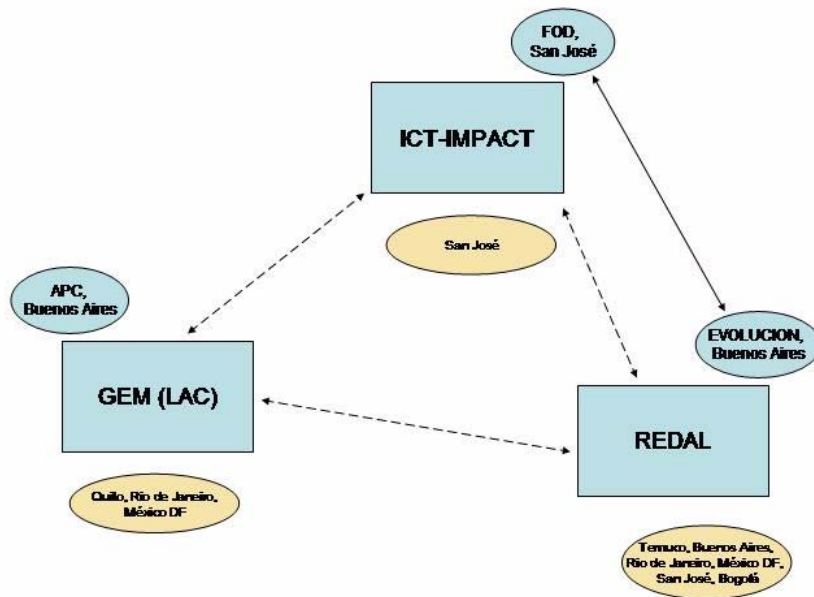


Figure 1. Possible links between “knowledge-creation” sample projects.

GEM-LAC experiences on ICT gender evaluation methodology and the processes and steps they went through could potentially be brought to bear on future ICT-IMPACT and REDAL teamwork. Beyond sporadic on-line exchanges, this interchange could take place between project coordinators or participating organizations headquartered in the same cities. Pairs of organizations based in Quito, Rio de Janeiro, and México, could be excellent candidates, as RITS has already demonstrated for GEM.

PAN Americas can be more proactive in nurturing similar inter-project continuing relationships, well beyond the supported project period. Most of these may be achieved on-line, though some selective face-to-face key events may be worthwhile.

2.7 “Policy and Advocacy” Projects: Case Studies

The policy and advocacy projects have a predominant focus on the systematization of existing knowledge, experience, and expertise and its transformation into information packages or advocacy campaigns and efforts or enhancement of support and resources to be delivered to or used with actors and entities in a position to influence policy-making.

The projects selected in the review sample are RITS-OPPI, ICT-POLICY, and JUDICIARY.

2.7.1 RITS-OPPI

RITS-OPPI is a proactive, observatory project on Internet public policies. The RITS-2 (or OPPI project³⁷) builds upon valuable, previous experiences delivered by this influential network.³⁸

³⁷ Only summary notes are included here to illustrate PAN Americas influenced results. Full details on RITS and OPPI are found in the Supplementary Volume.

³⁸ The processes, reach, and results achieved under RITS-1 (IDRC #100583); RITS projects have been supported by other donors too, but RITS explicitly recognizes IDRC’s support as “seminal,” particularly so in the large-scale policy-

RITS-OPPI

RITS (Rede de Informacao para o Terceiro Sector [Third Sector Information Network]) is a Brazilian CSO based in Rio de Janeiro with an operational branch in Sao Paulo, and associated partnerships and activities in other territories and communities in Brazil, including the Amazonian Region. RITS actually provides quality, reliable, and secure Internet services to over 300 NGOs and CSOs, hosting some 700 sites. RITS has also been very active in promoting digital inclusion policies and strategies in Brazil, Latin America, and the rest of the world. RITS-OPPI is the Internet Public Policies Observatory Project. Its most concrete expression is a Web site and comprehensive resource centre on infoinclusion and civil society participation. The Web site holds contributions from Brazil and abroad, and refers to many external, public policy-relevant Web sites. The RITS-OPPI project helped RITS define its three strategic axis: Internet services, information and communication, and public policies for ICTs and the Internet. OPPI provided the strategic framework for RITS' varied digital inclusion work that has had a remarkable influence in the public sector, both at federal and state levels. (IDRC project #101383. Leaders and staff associated with this project are found in Volume 2, Appendix 2.)

I

In terms of *outputs*, RITS exhibits an impressive record. It has for instance consistently provided IDRC with comprehensive proposals and reports bearing a strategic view. The publications are well detailed both on methods and results to be achieved. But RITS-OPPI's most significant outputs have been reports and proposals leading directly to specific governmental, federal policy formulation and implementation, notably on Internet governance for, but also addressing, FUST, FOSS, wi-fi, telecentre expansion, and other new technologies.³⁹ Along with other LAC partners (several linked to PAN Americas projects), RITS contributed to the four-language book entitled *The Other Side of the Divide* for WSIS, Geneva. On its own, it wrote the key handbook, *WSIS: A Theme for All of Us*, and translated and expanded the Chasquinet and IDRC booklet entitled, *Community Telecentres for Development*.

A few of the Web sites hosted and managed by RITS are directly related to OPPI and IDRC support. One key result is the *Observatório Políticas Públicas Internet* (www.infoinclusao.org.br), a Web resource centre on infoinclusion and ICT public policies, aimed at fostering civil society participation. This portal is continuously updated and is the key Brazilian reference on digital inclusion. The Citizens' Portal, *Cidadania na Internet* (www.cidadania.org.br), completed its pilot phase under RITS-1 and is now fully operational, serving the NGO community on topics relevant to them, and to which some 60 NGOs provide content and resources. RITS-1 developed a weekly e-mail bulletin for mostly CSO/TSO subscribers. Currently, this renewed on-line RITS, *Revista Electronica do Terceiro Sector* (<http://rets.rits.org.br>), serves around 60 000 subscribers.

Among workshop outputs, three sets deserve special mention. The Digital Inclusion Weeks, co-organized or led by RITS, are the reference points on infoinclusion in Brazil. The second one (held in 2003), attracted 1 500 persons from leading CSOs; the third one (2004) was held in conjunction with the 3rd LAC Regional Meeting of Somos@Telecentros. RITS held the 1st and 2nd National Meeting of Telecentres: 46 persons attended in 2002 and 500 in 2004, mostly from the

related objectives and results. Through OPPI mostly, IDRC PAN Americas provided the strategic framework for RITS' digital inclusion work and influence.

³⁹ FUST is Universal Telecoms Fund, FOSS is Free and Open Source Software (federal policy directive).

Sao Paulo municipal community telecentres. Finally, RITS co-organized the Final GEM-II workshop in Rio in 2004.

In terms of *reach*, RITS is also a remarkable initiative. Since it generally serves civil society or third sector organizations and does not compete against them, potential reach is very high. It has garnered a well-earned prestige and high quality Web presence and e-resources. The Digital Inclusion Workshops are one example of successful reach. So is the annual meeting of the DLIS network.³⁹ Reach is also visible in the Brazilian public sector, at federal, state, and local levels. At the federal level, key RITS-OPPI influences have involved Internet governance, FUST and FOSS issues, PBID (Brazilian Plan on Digital Inclusion) formulation, and a feasibility study for 1 000 telecentres nationwide, based on RITS' earlier partnership with the municipality and Sampa.org to co-manage 128 municipal, community-based and operated telecentres in Sao Paulo's poorest marginal sectors, with 400 000 registered users. And at local levels in remote Amazonian locales, RITS is involved in the public Health and Happiness Project, under the premise that this is "the last mile of inoinclusion."

At the LAC regional level, RITS-OPPI co-organized and hosted the "Somos Telecentros" III Regional Meeting. Fifty-four non-Brazilians participated (41 supported by IDRC's PAN Americas; IDRC has previously supported the related TELELAC projects I and II). This meeting, made possible by RITS-OPPI, was key to the network's formalization and the election of its first steering committee. RITS also participated in MISTICA's final two meetings and expansion plans, as well as had an early and continued involvement with GEM and WNSP. At the global level, RITS and OPPI have been most active in WSIS-related events, at times representing ABONG (Brazilian NGOs), and being present at other international movements, the most visible one being the "Foro Social Mundial" events in Porto Alegre, whose Web sites RITS has impeccably hosted.⁴⁰

RITS *outcomes* are noteworthy, particularly regarding policy influence. RITS-OPPI's original proposal for a new Internet governance, was the basis for a government decree (September 2003) that created a new structure in which all sectors are represented (public, private, academic, CSOs) and members are elected by their constituents. Carlos Afonso (RITS) is now a member of such a steering committee. Thanks to OPPI, RITS is involved in the formulation of the federal Brazilian Program on Digital Inclusion (FBID) and in some of the current activities. RITS has also provided analyses, scenarios, positions, and proposals that have reoriented some FUST principles and operations; it is also active in policies and operations at FOSS, following the institution of federal FOSS guidelines. However, there are also capacity-development outcomes to which OPPI has contributed: in networks, organizations, or persons (as has been noted already under outputs and reach). RITS itself has acquired credibility and legitimacy on ICT4D, inoinclusion, and Internet policy through serious, persistent, and transparent work and strategic risk-taking. RITS explicitly acknowledges a key IDRC supportive role in its own growth and positioning: "seminal" to many initiatives, plus overall framework bringing all activities together. The first IDRC funding came in at a critical moment for RITS and allowed for a strategic redefinition of the organization, its role, and its mission. And RITS's current status was developed through designing, strategizing, and implementing OPPI.

³⁹ DLIS is about integrated local development services. Their 2004 event had over 3 000 attendants. In partnership with ABDL, RITS contributes to DLIS and developed and hosts its Web site. See <http://www.rededlis.org.br/>.

⁴⁰ See <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/>; 200 000 page views daily, for six days, from 100 countries. Service never failed. Such hosting is the best indicator of RITS's capacity to reliably operate on a large scale.

Several *facilitative and limitative factors* have affected RITS-OPPI results and influence. The RITS coordinator himself was, and is, an outstanding factor for RITS endeavours, involvements, and influences. Even though some senior staff members are pioneers in ICTs and ICT4D in Brazil, RITS as a whole has grown from the initial expertise of individuals. RITS also pays careful attention to administrative and financial operations, since efficiency and transparency are required for its cooperative status. RITS has leveraged seminal IDRC funds with other donors for combined, integrated work on parallel fronts, issues and partners, and has had a strategic, contextual, forward-thinking approach that allows it to pursue opportunities and select partners in line with its mission and key directions.

While the mix of too many activities, donors, and partners could lead to confusion, serious concerns have not materialized. However, an ICT research focus as such is still absent from RITS as a whole (other than that occasionally commissioned); RITS is seriously considering and planning for at least an in-house research component to support its strengths on ICT policy issues. RITS has consistently underlined the value of IDRC's adequate, strategic, and timely support, and the open relationships and collaborations from a caring organization and its officials. An almost natural cooperation with other IDRC PAN Americas partners has occurred.

Two unfavourable situations were noted however: IDRC's agreement with Microsoft and finding people to talk to at IDRC.⁴¹ In terms of contextual factors, the political environment and the characteristics of the current and past federal government was, and is, increasingly favourable for advancing RITS values, notions, strategies, and activities on digital inclusion. Context has thus been a very strong factor affecting RITS' influence on governmental Internet policy, strategies, and initiatives. Concurrently, such outcome influence would not have been possible if RITS itself had not been exceptionally well prepared and legitimized on such ICT4D matters, both in policy issue positions and past "in the field" experiences and expertise.

Over time and projects, RITS has developed practical and strategic approaches and mechanisms to transform knowledge, experiences, research, and expertise into important policy influences and outcomes. It has done so through its leadership and excellent involvement in its support to CSOs and in ICT and Internet policy issues, debates and decisions, and its legitimacy coming from public sector authorities.

Most significantly as a success indicator, RITS acknowledges it is now seen as a key reference point ("RITS knows"), is no longer in a "testing" or "learning" phase, and its opinions are valued and requested. This comes with a major responsibility as demand for expert contributions grow. RITS wants to continue being a policy reference on digital inclusion policies and strategies, and developing research and digital resources to support its knowledge and expertise. RITS claims IDRC support has been the key to such a purpose and is now in a privileged position to interface CSOs with public sector entities, policies, and activities.

2.7.2 ICT-POLICY

⁴¹ The agreement with Microsoft leaves RITS in an uncomfortable and delicate situation given the federal government's policy and legislation on Free and Open Source Software (FOSS), and RITS's own decision to favour FOSS in a broader context of digital inclusion policies, partners, and principles. Then, there is some confusion or perplexity as to who to talk to at IDRC, given ICA's entrance and projects, along with past and new PAN Americas' projects. IDRC is aware of both concerns.

ICT-POLICY was one of the first 2001–2004 projects that PAN Americas implemented for pursuing the “Internet Policy” objective of the whole Corporate Project.

ICT-POLICY

Fundación Acceso, a private, non-profit, civil society organization based in San José, Costa Rica, promotes the ICT-POLICY project. Fundación Acceso carries out research and development activities on multiple social change processes taking place in Central America. Active links with dozens of influential CSOs interested in community-based development in Central America, is a major component of Fundación’s social capital; one priority area has been the impact of ICTs on social development, to which IDRC has substantially contributed.

The ICT-POLICY project (IDRC project #101046) attempted to undertake a cooperative research effort between CSOs based in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, on the critical question of production, access, and use of ICT-supported public information that is relevant, timely, and adequately formatted for enabling participatory citizenship. The main contribution expected from the ICT-POLICY project is the understanding of the strategies of different citizen communities in Costa Rica and Nicaragua used to overcome sociocultural and technical obstacles affecting the flow of relevant public information for participatory development. (Leaders and staff associated with this project are found in Volume 2, Appendix 2.)

The ICT-POLICY project story is filled with learning and evolution experiences. The initial research objective was attained with a variation: the need to change the project’s main objective was detected early when CSO partners were identified and consulted by Acceso in both Costa Rica and Nicaragua. In fact, very few partners and citizen action groups considered had any (reasonable) access to the Internet at such time. So it was strategically decided to treat the problems of public information in their own right, independently of the presence and use of ICTs by CSOs. Fundación Acceso then undertook intense field consultations to learn about possible views on public information policies. This mechanism ensured the participation of various CSO partners but it also meant an adjustment on the project’s objectives and its early strategies.

This redirection in the project’s objectives highlights a frequently ignored conceptual finding: it is not always possible to isolate ICT access policies from information content policies. In this case, the dubious quality of public information quality as it existed in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, its biases and obscurity, and its packaging and presentation rigidities were significant problems, irrespective of their Web presence. Obviously, the value of low quality public information for citizens is not necessarily enhanced if information becomes available through a Web site.

Another important finding was that research results were greatly context-dependent on socio-economic, legal, and cultural dimensions existing both in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The ICT-POLICY project was thus able to provide an enriched interpretative framework when compared to pre-existing knowledge.

Project *outputs* included publications, reports, and meetings. The recently published *Ver para Creer* (“Seeing is Believing”) book is an excellent example of applied, action-oriented research, deserving not only wide physical distribution (which in fact did take place), but also a wider multi-stakeholder discussion in the whole LAC region. The potential for further testing and improvement of Acceso’s conceptual framework is there to be exploited by other LAC countries.

Intermediate research reports can also be considered as model reports, since many clues were provided about where research was going and the kind of assumptions and technical decisions required. Technical workshops and the final book presentation meetings were also remarkable in terms of reaching influential people and organizations with an outstanding research product.

Reach was, on the other hand, highly diversified in terms of Nicaraguan and Costa Rican participants involved in executing development actions or as audiences receiving project results. Environmentalists, women activists, media researchers, political parties, and related organizations were touched upon.⁴²

Outcomes were particularly important. Some were expressed within Fundación Acceso itself. For example, the subsequent Acceso IDRC funded project on knowledge management questions, exploited many of the contacts and consultation methodologies improved and tested by the ICT-POLICY project. Nicaraguan environmentalists internalized Acceso's workshop methodologies and applied them in their own seminars, independently from the ICT-POLICY project.

Facilitative and limitative factors contributed directly to the project's performance. Among facilitate factors, two should be mentioned: the substantial Central American network already established by Acceso and the creativity and ability for articulating knowledge frameworks exercised by the ICT-POLICY research project coordinator and associated research team. The most influential limitative factors appear to be the relative novelty of the project theme, the innovative character of Acceso's approach, and the not-so-ICT-ready CSOs. The new framework for an informed, participatory citizenship clashed with traditional views and clichés about information access and uses and the role real people should play in development.⁴³

Two *lessons learned* are worth mentioning. One was the impact of prior field consultations on conceived *ex-ante* project strategies. The more intense participatory and open minded the consultations, the higher the risk of modification to the project's objectives and strategies. On the other hand, intensity and open-mindedness create more favourable conditions for partnerships and for joint risk taking – a real dilemma for ICT project management. In this case, addressing information policy before ICT policy was a sound decision, since it researched an important precedent and ignored issues with practical implications for policy influence.

The second lesson is the rather poor "infiltration" of the project execution and dissemination of results into the realm of senior political élites. This project is a good case study of an extremely valuable endeavour, with contents suitable for political visibility and actions failing to substantially influence political elites and agendas. We could not gather conclusive evidence about the reasons for this failure. Perhaps the time was not yet ripe for introducing this sort of topic in Central America. Or perhaps efforts to create CSOs links with policymakers, opinion leaders, and political elites were poorly engineered or insufficient. Thus, better strategies and practices for policy influence are needed and IDRC is currently working on them. In many LAC

⁴² At the initial stage of the project, contacts were also attempted with Guatemalan and El Salvadoran organizations and actors.

⁴³ Various macro-political situations happening at the same time as the project's implementation stage both in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, sometimes opened, sometimes closed windows of opportunity. But extraneous political turbulences cannot be avoided or controlled by most ICT4D projects.

instances and environments, building relationships of trust between CSOs, government, and the private sector is still a major issue.

2.7.3 JUDICIARY

The JUDICIARY Project is rightly considered by IDRC as being a “flagship” example of a policy influence project within the 2001–2004 PAN Americas initiative.

JUDICIARY

The JUDICIARY Project is an initiative promoted by a civil society, non-profit, research and advocacy organization called the Instituto de Investigaciones sobre la Justicia (IJ) (Justice Research Institute). The Institute has built active, formal and informal alliances with other like-minded sectoral organizations, such as the Fundación Libra, the Corte Suprema de la Nación, and the University of Buenos Aires (all Argentinian in origin), and with similar organizations in other LAC countries, the USA, and Europe. The IJ is headquartered in Buenos Aires.

Use of the Internet in judicial LAC structures has created a transparency in legislative processes and initiated radical change in a traditionally aloof, closed, conservative, isolated, and rather obscure segment of LAC states. Yet, practice has shown that transparency policies, if taken to an extreme, may affect the privacy rights of citizens, an issue hardly present in the LAC public agenda. Thus, diffusion of the Internet in the region has created the urgent need for undertaking 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 exchange of experiences among LAC and non-LAC countries in this emerging area, the design of basic equal rights regulations, and the need for sensitive and cultural changes in judicial staff in the LAC region, were expected to be the main contributions of the JUDICIARY project. (IDRC project #101107. Leaders and staff associated with this project are found in Volume 2, Appendix 2.)

The story of JUDICIARY, from an IDRC point of view, starts with a preliminary exploration of information rights issues in LAC, channeled through FLACSO's small grants project, a pioneering endeavour belonging to the previous programming cycle of PAN Americas.

One of the lessons learned through this early version of the project, was the existence of differences in legal structures associated with information issues and cultures in relation to the development and enforcement of laws. Some LAC countries favour information access and transparency in legal acts, while others openly privilege obscurity and privacy protection. Legislative frameworks on information issues in Europe, Canada, and the USA are more complex, fine-tuned, and stricter than incipient frameworks in LAC. Also, most judicial power structures are weary of changing existing legal frameworks.

These early, valuable perceptions framed the strategy taken for the JUDICIARY project implementation. The project was conceived as a multi-pronged initiative, attempting to penetrate into indifferent and hostile grounds or organization clusters resistant to changes in established rules and regulations. Thus the project was designed as a multi-objective effort and proceeded cautiously through intense consultation exercises.

Many doors were slammed in the faces of JUDICIARY's coordinator and research team member by judges and other judicial staff who did not want to change, or who wanted to avoid appearing as supporters or willing partners of the project. In other cases, the project failed to be included in international activities; blocking or delaying tactics were obvious. The "newcomer" actor was perceived as a potential "agitator" and was not greeted nor welcomed. The presentation of the seminar product (later known as "the Heredia Rules"), was delayed nearly six months, awaiting a decision on who would sponsor the meeting. Both IIJ and IDRC had to "pay" the costs of the delay. But the long and uncertain wait finally delivered high-value results. The final project meeting took place in Heredia, Costa Rica, and was a highly successful validation of basic information rights equality rules. It also helped to uncover the presence of a network of senior judiciary and academic staff committed to the advancement of these issues in LAC countries and beyond the region.

Naturally, multi-directional explorations within a complex, fortress-like territory, had to produce differential results. Certain objectives were more successful than others. Yet the JUDICIARY project saga was extremely useful as a learning tool and was seminal in ascertaining future changes in many LAC judiciary and legislative communities.

There were several *outputs*. The most prominent was the elaboration and wide distribution of the Heredia Rules. 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. Moreover, two excellent books reporting different experiences on information transparency and privacy in various countries are to be highlighted. Also, the JUDICIARY project was responsible for the organization of several seminars on the legal dimensions of information access and use. Finally, the project staff published several articles in various legal, academic, and professional journals.

Reach was extensive, although the audiences and territories touched were affected in different ways. Several organizations in both LAC and non-LAC countries were contacted and consulted. Cooperation links and relations were proposed with different degrees of success. Yet, with the exception of the central judicial institutions of Costa Rica (and to a certain extent Argentina), most JUDICIARY project contacts materialized in provinces and smaller cities of the LAC region such as Puerto Madryn (Argentina) and Cualicán and Villa Hermosa (México). This is neither surprising nor disappointing, given the small size of this pioneering project operating within difficult organizational settings.

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. And researchers and professional lawyers not related to IIJ have submitted papers to various print media and specialized publications.⁴⁴

Several *facilitative and limitative factors* are worth mentioning. The IIJ is almost a virtual organization: its presence in the physical world is minimal. It is similar to a working cooperative agreement between colleagues communicating through an *ad-hoc* network, each working within different organizations or even from their homes. The budget of the organization is basically

⁴⁴ Given its prominent influence, the case can certainly be made for the Heredia Rules as a stand-alone outcome product.

built around project contracts. This virtual character has acted as both a facilitative and limitative factor. IJ has been extremely dynamic and mobile, able to react and change rapidly. On the other hand, the lack of full-time dedication by several IJ cooperating agents coupled with the Institute's ineffectual technical infrastructure, made it difficult to progress in certain matters (for example, the assessment and development of software tools for handling privacy issues). Yet, all in all, the major limitative factors affecting the JUDICIARY project have been the novelty of the subject matter, and the lack of proven solutions to deal with unexplored and complex problems and dilemmas.

One very noticeable *lesson learned* was the success of the multi-pronged strategy devised for penetrating, discovering, and understanding a sector populated by many established actors exercising different roles in a tradition-bound arena. Now IJ staff and JUDICIARY project staff are much more aware of potential new initiatives, know what to expect, are aware of where certain benefits can be reaped, and when and where to be patient and await delayed reactions from an essentially culturally conservative environment.

2.7.4 “Policy and Advocacy” Projects: An Inter-Project Analysis

The links between the three “policy and advocacy” sample projects examined by the reviewers is depicted in **Figure 2**. They are primarily potential links and there are no apparent built-in interrelationships. Dotted lines exclusively explore potential relationships. Even then, there is a radically altered scenario presented by Fundación Acceso since the ICT-POLICY coordinator and research team responsible for the project are no longer there. Moreover the Fundación was, when visited by the reviewers, still going through a transition period and attempting to fill its senior leadership positions. Hypothetically, had the ICT-POLICY research team been available, new partnerships with RITS and JUDICIARY could probably have been organic. The theoretical framework developed by the ICT-POLICY project, could have had the possibility of contrasting with the conceptual and strategic frameworks and specific key activities of RITS and JUDICIARY. Perhaps the results of this analysis might have led to further applications through the autonomous networks of the three projects. Unfortunately, the reality is different today.

The search for common ground between RITS and JUDICIARY appears more promising as Fundación Acceso searches for a strategic definition on ICT4D. Certainly RITS can transfer its experience to JUDICIARY's project partners in the appropriate use of Internet technologies for non-ICT motivated entities. Also, IJ and its partners possess a wealth of knowledge on information-related rights that can be shared and put to use among the wide and energetic RITS-related network of NGOs and CSOs concerned with public information policies, the digital rights of citizens, and information-inclusion challenges.

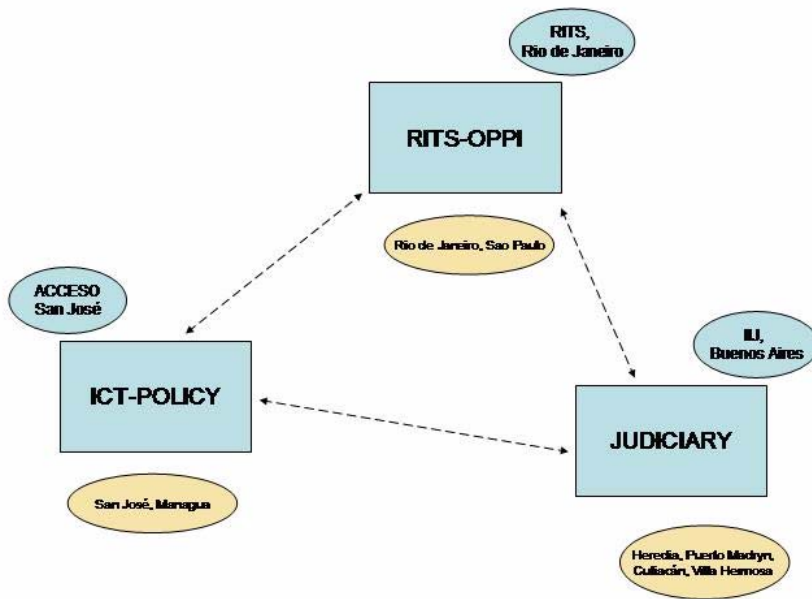


Figure 2. Possible links between “policy and advocacy” sample projects.

2.8 “Capacity-Building” Projects: Case Studies

The “capacity-building” projects have as their predominant focus the empowerment – in terms of new competencies, abilities, values, innovative behaviour, and perspectives – of key people associated with ICT4D research in LAC.

The projects selected in the review sample are: MASTER, MISTICA, and FRIDA. Two of the projects are formally completed (MASTER and MISTICA), while FRIDA is still operational. The nature and strategies of each of the projects are very different, as will be seen below. Yet by varying means they pursue and should produce ICT4D research capacity building.⁴⁵

2.8.1 MASTER

MASTER was a unique project of its kind in LAC, devoted to the creation of an academic program leading to a graduate degree in communication and development with an emphasis on Internet public policies.

MASTER

The MASTER project was the only initiative of its kind promoted by PAN Americas in the 2001–2004 period. The focus of the program was communication and development with an emphasis on Internet public policies. When the MASTER project (IDRC project #101159) was initiated, there were no equivalent initiatives in the LAC region.

⁴⁵ FRIDA is also building LACNIC’s organizational capacity for research management. MISTICA, still active but not funded, was intended primarily as a virtual community of ICT4D LAC researchers.

FLACSO-Ecuador's⁴⁶ MASTER project was built upon a successful, small-grant project supported by IDRC, whose main output was the seminal book *Internet and Society*.

A graduate course leading to a master's degree was expected to build professional and research capacities on ICT4D in Andean countries. The project, if successful, was supposed to act as a catalyst for other similar initiatives that might later be created in the LAC and elsewhere.

For this purpose, PAN Americas' staff selected FLACSO-Ecuador, an academic organization headquartered in Quito, as a suitable and respectable subregional organization already offering graduate programs in the social sciences to Andean participants. The training of high-quality graduates with a research profile in communication, development, and ICT public policies was expected as the main contribution of the MASTER project. (Leaders and staff associated with this project are found in Volume 2, Appendix 2.)

The MASTER project story is a rather complex one. The project start-up was complicated.⁴⁷ The first call for candidates, successfully gathered a group of 22 enthusiastic students; fifteen came from Ecuador but only seven came from other Andean countries.⁴⁸ The initial curricula consisted of a balanced set of courses adequately suited – on paper – to produce the desired graduate profile. Some courses even offered a highly innovative content and approach for LAC standards. This first group went through a well-designed, first semester where sound classroom lecture courses were offered on subjects such as epistemology and communication studies. FLACSO's Department of Communications was able to provide or obtain high standard lecturers for these courses. The second semester – delivered on-line – had some problems with a highly differentiated and sometimes incomplete course content/approach.⁴⁹ There were comprehensive seminars on public policies for development (a FLACSO field of competence), but ICT-related contents were, on the whole, weak, both in terms of policies and practices. The performance of on-line lecturers located in Ecuador or abroad, and their dedication to the digital campus was uneven.

Operational problems plagued the virtual campus; the on-line education technology was quite a new experience for FLACSO. On the whole, the theoretical and methodological contents can be considered as having been satisfactorily delivered in the first two semesters. However, the final two semesters – devoted to independent, individual thesis preparation – were problematic due to insufficient methodological orientation and a highly uneven performance by thesis supervisors (most of them located in Quito and a few abroad). Only two or three students were

⁴⁶ FLACSO-Ecuador is one country site for the regional entity Facultad Latino Americana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO). In this text, the FLACSO acronym refers to FLACSO-Ecuador exclusively.

⁴⁷ One of the operational reasons for choosing FLACSO-Ecuador had been the existence of a talented young academic that had successfully acted as coordinator of the previous PAN Americas supported project. This person had also been an active participant in the design of the MASTER project and was enthusiastic about ICT4D issues. Unfortunately, this professional had to temporarily leave FLACSO-Ecuador to initiate graduate studies abroad. FLACSO-Ecuador subsequently had to designate a coordinator for the MASTER project. The Director of FLACSO-Ecuador's Communication Studies Department was chosen because of the similarity of topics with those of the MASTER's program.

⁴⁸ According to some lecturers consulted, the quality of the students of this first group was rather uneven in relation to graduate program standards with only one or two well-above the average, and with around half a dozen below the average.

⁴⁹ Some of these lecturers were Quito based while others were recognized leaders in ICT4D issues and research; most have been linked to other IDRC-ICT4D projects.

able to progress properly and deliver good to excellent final products. The remainder of participants faltered during this critical period and there were some dropouts. A major problem was that thesis topics had to be related to ICT policy issues, precisely the very issues that had been covered less rigorously or successfully during the previous phase.

While the thesis cycle of the first group was in progress, FLASCO's regulations dictated that a second master's course immediately be underway. The second course promotion was less effective this time and only nine students were convened, most of them residing in Ecuador. This was a major setback for the project. Fortunately, there were corrections in the program delivery in this second round and, when one of the reviewers visited the project site, a new thesis cycle was underway, with considerably less problems than in the first.

The coexistence of the two master's student groups and the growing managerial and administrative problems stalled the call for a third session of the course. A shorter, less demanding on-line diploma was set up later on. There are presently 12 students enrolled in the course.

This cursory review of a highly complex project highlights several problems. Obviously, the temptation to regard the project as a failure is very high. Yet the basic notion of the master's course on ICT4D issues continues to be forward-looking and worthwhile analyzing. The emerging and promising conceptual framework and concerns that plagued the *Internet para Todos* seminal book (sponsored by FLACSO-Ecuador) have yet to be implemented.⁵⁰

Outputs for this project are unevenly expressed. Visible outputs today have been the three to four graduates of the first group; they completed their thesis and obtained their degree. Many other candidates from both promotions are in the process of doing the same. Less visible outputs are the curricular designs and the detailed course proposals for the two versions of the master's program and for the on-line diploma course.

Reach was expected to be mainly visible within the Andean region. Yet its main reach has been concentrated in Quito, Ecuador. It is also interesting to note that Ecuadorian participants have come from civil society organizations and local government.

Outcomes have mostly concentrated on the program's direct beneficiaries – the participating students. Some have obtained new jobs or initiated new careers. Conversations are underway between FLACSO's Communication Department and the Municipality of Quito and its Digital Program in order to initiate joint ICT4D projects. Also a potential outcome expected for this year is the publication of the best theses produced through the program.

There are more *limitative than facilitative factors*: FLACSO's lack of commitment with ICT-related topics and, accordingly, its relative weak access to an available network of appropriate lecturers; the initial non-functionality of the virtual campus, particularly during the on-line

⁵⁰ Several scenarios can be considered: (1) overhauling and refloating the program within FLACSO itself; (2) transferring the program to a partnership of organizations where FLACSO continues to be present; or (3) displacing the program to another Andean subregional organization. International cooperation organizations would need a serious assessment before considering the provision of required support in a critical capacity-building initiative. At best, FLACSO should try to fully document the experience, and reorganize and recover the project's memory so that valuable lessons can be capitalized on by FLACSO itself or by other organizations in LAC that might be willing to improve this pioneering PAN Americas initiative.

activities of the first group of candidates; and the insufficient academic help and advice provided by FLACSO for the advancement of thesis elaboration. A facilitative factor was the network of lecturers on the subjects of epistemology and public policies provided by the Department of Communication.

There were many *lessons learned* on this project but only a few will be discussed here. First, PAN Americas' expectations about FLACSO's performance were perhaps too high. Two key words – “Andean” and “ICTs” – embody the areas where FLACSO was not as competent or as flexible as assumed. FLACSO-Ecuador (at least in this project) appeared to be mainly an Ecuadorian organization and not a particularly open organization towards the Andean subregion. Even if relationships were perceived to exist with academic organizations in some Andean countries (through researchers and students exchanges, for example), not too many seemed to exist between FLACSO-Ecuador and Andean political bodies.⁵¹ On the other hand, FLACSO was, and is, highly competent in development-related research. Yet it does not particularly excel in ICT4D projects. Thus, FLACSO's network of ICT specialists was not strong enough to engage regional ICT peers or partnerships.⁵²

Second, the very optimistic assumption about student demand was over-estimated. Demand was, and is still, there but it has to be discovered, developed, and accompanied by an attractive offer. FLACSO calls and announcements through the Web, the distribution of posters, pamphlets, and other traditional promotion material (produced according to very good to excellent standards), appeared to be insufficient to ensure a dynamic, explicit demand.⁵³ Also, FLACSO's public relations apparatus was not very responsive nor effective in supporting a badly needed external promotion effort.

Third, the issue of FLACSO's senior staff was problematic. The change in authority during the project cycle created favourable conditions for an arm's length behaviour from the Secretary-General's office and by many departments heads. The MASTER project was treated as any other master's degree offered. Perhaps there was also a bit of mistrust, as its ICT-related content is still a misunderstood and undervalued area by many traditional, social science, academic communities.

2.8.2 MISTICA

MISTICA was, and is, a bold experiment to create and consolidate a virtual community of ICT4D specialists, researchers, and other concerned practitioners and advocates. For this review, our focus is on MISTICA-2, even though it is very difficult to understand it in isolation from its IDRC-supported antecessors; the summary presents the overall, longer process view.⁵⁴

⁵¹ For example, possible partnerships with CAN, or Convenio Andres Bello, or CAF, and many Andean projects where ICT4D researchers could have made a difference, were apparently not sufficiently explored during the MASTER project design.

⁵² Organizations that might have provided valuable ICT4D-specific assistance to MASTER could have included: ALAI, ASETA, Escuela Latinoamericana de Redes, Chasquinet, ITDG, and APC.

⁵³ The project coordination was quite successful when it was involved in direct promotion efforts in “communication studies” academic entities in Ecuador. Yet similar efforts were apparently not considered in other Andean countries and organizations.

⁵⁴ Full details on MISTICA's analysis are found in the Supplementary Volume. We deal here with the final, funded stage (end-2002 to end-2004). There is still an ongoing, non-funded, autonomous transitional process, called M-3. The original MISTICA project (#004235) started in late 1998. It was somewhat followed by OLISTICA in 2001 (#100584).

MISTICA

The MISTICA project is an innovative yet complex process, long supported by PAN Americas under three major projects. Under the strong leadership of Fundación Redes y Desarrollo (FUNREDES), a non-governmental organization based in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, the project was supposed to create an open, virtual community of (mostly) researchers – widely dispersed in various LAC and non-LAC countries – who would share knowledge and carry out on-line, collaborative work on research methodology, social impact, and policy issues related to ICTs for development. Initially, MISTICA managed to convene approximately 200 on-line participants. Many were attracted to the novelty of the proposal but soon became passive observers; some simply left the community, though the current list has over 400 subscribers. As time went by, a core group of people really interested in the ICT4D issues under discussion, assumed responsibility for the network and undertook joint work (some high quality in nature), mostly on a voluntary basis. In the core group, an interesting mix of ICT4D researchers, practitioners, and academics – associated with different types of CSOs – was realized. For outsiders, MISTICA’s Web sites and/or discussion lists became a crucial knowledge source on ICT4D agendas and issues; for the core group there were many added values (beyond sharing professional development resources), such as peer networking and timely advice, some face-to-face meetings, as well as peer support and heated discussions. For many members of the core group, MISTICA even operated as a sort of informal graduate program on ICT4D. The creation of an open, virtual think-tank on ICT research, issues, and policies in LAC countries was expected as one of the main contributions of the MISTICA project. MISTICA is more than a capacity-building effort; it can be thought of as a networking process, via several sequential projects, and leading to a virtual community of concerned, capable, and influential ICT4D professionals. Yet most of our MISTICA interviewees recalled the deep, formative influence MISTICA has had on them. The notion of MISTICA as a virtual learning community is currently under debate within the core members net (IDRC project #101662). (Participants in this project are found in Volume 2, Appendix 2.)

Given the process-oriented and on-line features of MISTICA’s e-exchanges, many important intermediate *outputs* were not “productized” but are still archived in one or another MISTICA site.⁵⁵ The list of on-line documents is impressive, and so are the e-discussions and the Internet resources provided, though a major recovery task is needed to make them more readily available.⁵⁶ One major print product is *Working the Internet with a Social Vision*,⁵⁷ a 2002 collaborative work widely cited and influential among the region’s ICT4D actors. MISTICA essentially operated on-line, and had only four workshops/meetings: M-1 at start-up (February 1999); close-out, coupled with OLISTICA’s start-up (March 2001); and M-2, which had its “Juan Dolio” meetings in June and December 2004. Approximately 25 people attended each of the four meetings, less than half overlapping. These intensive workshops were the pre or post occasion

⁵⁵ MISTICA sites and past or ongoing e-lists have different URLs. Most MISTICA “product” links are available in Volume 2, Appendix 3 and in our Supplementary Volume; these are the key ones: a full updated list of publications at www.funredes.org/mistica/castellano/ciberoteca/tematica/.AllMistica-2; documents at <http://funredes.org/mistica2/1Mistica-1> under www.funredes.org/mistica/english/project/1OLISTICA under <http://funredes.org/olistica>; and the current M-3 under <http://mistica.net>.

⁵⁶ Some of MISTICA’s focused discussion lists were the vehicles for on-line collaborative work preparation, a procedure that operated mostly under MISTICA-2 for preparing its two final meetings. The most productive on-line collaborative effort was the “EquipoWEB,” a dozen-person technical group charged with redesigning the Web site in the transition towards the new, non-funded, virtual community (CVM).

⁵⁷ At times attributed to the OLISTICA period project.

to prepare and deliver some products and to strategize and strengthen established virtual community ties.

In terms of *reach*, MISTICA has compiled usage statistics that allow for some interesting quantitative analysis.⁵⁸ 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.

These “raw” reach figures do not account for the meaning or quality of reach in MISTICA, accomplished via two convergent but parallel routes: Web sites and discussion lists. Nevertheless, a few facts remain: 400 individuals, mostly from LAC, in an ongoing, quality ICTD Spanish list, with a core group of around 30 to 50; an average of three messages a day, and between a third to half of all its messages comment on, or point to, relevant ICT4D resources.

Qualitative explanations are needed to extricate key *outcomes* from MISTICA processes.⁵⁹ First, we state that MISTICA per se never was a “researcher’s” network. It did include many ICT and ICT4D researchers, but there were also academics, theorists, and ideologists, activists and advocates, practitioners, newcomers, etc. The emerging community shared and upheld ICT4D and social concerns and values, while respecting diversity of views. PAN Americas’ type of outcomes are better quantified if MISTICA is seen as a virtual ICT4D community and an open, trusted, on-line environment where quality knowledge, training, critical discussions, and relevant resources lived.

Second, the MISTICA Web sites and discussion lists go beyond expected project outputs, as usage statistics show. Considered as outcome, they constitute a relevant and much accessed repository of important information and knowledge on ICTs for LAC. This repository will migrate to the new expanded site, which has built a considerably more user-friendly access to documentation and resources.

Third, there was dissemination and influence of key products. Though few products were actually considered as such and/or disseminated off-line, the creation of collective documents gave them credibility and legitimacy on important topics such as those related to WSIS Geneva.⁶⁰ Since the project fell short of “productizing” many of its most relevant discussion processes, some beyond-the-network influence may not have properly materialized. On the other hand, the collective discussion and production worked in conjunction with similar processes in the region, many supported also by IDRC’s PAN Americas; mutual and collateral influences therefore, did happen and a few were expressed through documents.

⁵⁸ See our Supplementary Volume for more details. Raw data is found at www.funredes.org/mistica/castellano/emec/produccion/estadistica-hits.html.

⁵⁹ What outcomes were to be expected? Given the stated or intended objectives of the set of projects, some hesitancy is warranted. Project proposals and reports are not so straightforward. Was it (also) strengthening, sustaining, or even constituting a network of researchers on ICTs in the region? Was it in fact “researchers” or a broader notion of competent people concerned and active in the issues of ICTs and ICT4D in the LAC region? The task is pending but this is not a MISTICA assessment except as a representation of PAN Americas’ achievements.

⁶⁰ Many ICT4D actors – expert and novice – have used *Working the Internet with a Social Vision* as a key document to understand and guide action in ICTDs.

Fourth, there are three or four layers of capacity-building and capacity-strengthening outcomes in MISTICA. The most basic one (beyond surfers) involves people accessing specific MISTICA Web site resources through others' references, and then coming back and spreading the word. A more lasting one is the capacity-building processes of those participants belonging (actively or not) to MISTICA lists.⁶¹ If one focuses on "lurkers," it is apparent that for most there is a reason to stay there, even if silently. As we learned, people were coming into the ICT4D challenge and finding first- and second-phase orientations and mapping plus updates, by going through the messages and some of the usually ensuing debates. Arguably, MISTICA's list discussions and referred resources somehow helped to set the agenda on what matters most regarding ICT4Ds in the region. It was not having to agree with any given viewpoint, but having to seriously think about the issue. This process may be hidden since many newcomers felt embarrassed to participate, given the "high-level" nature of contributions and debates from some enthusiastic or expert members. Regardless, it is a capacity-building exercise, both in ICT4D content and thinking, as well as in learning to work on-line.

A third layer involves approximately 100 individuals who are relatively active on the list, who review it regularly, and who at times contribute. The capacity-strengthening derived from the list is stronger, more focused, and far more interactive for these participants. They come into or abandon a thread, and are well versed on discussion lists. This group, to which some of the former have accrued, is more than an aggregate of individuals in a discussion list: they are the basis for a value-added, virtual community. A good indicator is the ongoing vitality of the current non-funded M-3 discussions. Finally, there is a core group of "loyalists" – between 25 and 30 individuals – who are the most proactive in the whole MISTICA "movement" and virtual community. Most have been in one or more of the launch meetings, nine of them comprise the current M-3 Transitional Team. On their own, or as small or broader collectives, they have contributed resources, ideas, and debates, prepared working documents, helped shape the character and ethics of the virtual community, and sustained the notion of continuity, consistency, and worthiness of MISTICA over time.

Fifth, MISTICA also was, or is, an environment and opportunity for knowledge-sharing and creation. One of the most noticeable assets of the network is how it is evolving into a knowledge-creation community, beyond the expert contributions of a few chosen members. However, it is still an ongoing or developing outcome that needs substantial, additional, and focused collective work. An additional implication is that if MISTICA is seen as a learning virtual community, then a crucial transfer – and outcome – effect is achievable: passing on the accumulated wisdom, experience, and expertise of senior participants to the newer generations that are being immersed into ICTs generally, and into ICTDs specifically.

Sixth, the discussions held before, during, and immediately after the final project close-out meeting, however, point to a farther-reaching future outcome. As one key proponent has indicated (and others disagree on its particulars), the information-rich MISTICA Web sites and

⁶¹ It is highly significant to note how several members interviewed, and most active in MISTICA, explicitly recognize how much they have gained in their ICTD competencies and knowledge sophistication over time by "belonging" to the virtual community. One such person noted that: "I am the best living proof that MISTICA can have and has had a transformative effect. I would not be where I proudly stand today on ICT4D issues had I not learned what I did from participating in MISTICA" (paraphrased). Several mentioned coming in almost by accident, and quite ignorant on ICTDs, and how their knowledge changed and grew over time. Such professional and personal growth is indicated by their current activities and competencies outside MISTICA.

lists, and the knowledge generated have not really been tapped into. If there is no deliberate educational intervention, such resources cannot be used as a tool for knowledge creation, learning, and capacity building. In fact, MISTICA's sets of resources can be seen as databases, sources for knowledge production. Contributions manifest ongoing, original LAC knowledge-production, but they have not been thoroughly or systematically processed. And they are not yet part of learning experiences, which require deliberate pedagogical acts. One example provided by a key informant: the examination of some 500 messages produced links to 2 000 Web sites. Who partakes of this?

A final seventh outcome refers to networking and the virtual community. To maintain a discussion list is one thing, but to help consolidate a virtual community, one with strong feelings of belonging, is another. One of the most important features of the MISTICA processes (leaving aside any critical project evaluation) is unifying such a community. Belonging to MISTICA matters to its members. There is also recognition from outsiders. Earlier evaluations of MISTICA by members indicated that having created a network of individuals concerned with ICTDs was an accomplishment, that it had not been easy to create and sustain a virtual community where individual concerns, aims, and backgrounds differed widely, and whose processes were democratic, participatory, and respectful of diversities.

In summary, if two of PAN Americas' desired higher-level outcomes for the MISTICA project were to create or consolidate a network of ICTD researchers in the region, and experiment with on-line methodologies, both were generally accomplished (though a project-level discussion is still warranted on the specifics, the mechanisms, and the still unmet challenges and difficulties). By experimenting with on-line methodologies, the MISTICA project accomplished – and actually lived and practiced over time – a set of enduring values to guide the virtual community, a type of moderation, a way to do on-line discussions, and a laborious, ongoing construction of how to build a participatory, democratic, mechanism in cyberspace.

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. And it is also relevant to note that the community itself, or at least several of its most active members, are otherwise engaging in a set of synergistic networks, movements, and entities concerned with ICTDs in the region and globally.

A number of *facilitative and limitative factors* affected MISTICA. In addition to facilitative factors already discussed, there was continuity over time, collectively developing values, and ethics for an on-line community engaged in a moderated but open, democratic debate. The project coordinator's ever-present leadership, moderation, and pedagogical role are recognized as the most critical success factor. On the other hand, there was an over-dependency on the coordinator and on FUNREDES. There are other limitations,⁶² however, suffice it to say that the MISTICA notion and methodology was hard to understand for many ICT4D practitioners.⁶³

⁶² Further factors are suggested in the Supplementary Volume.

⁶³ Within MISTICA, further confusions ensued between M-1 and later M-2, with OLISTICA in between and not pursued or recaptured under M-2. The financial gap between M1 and an expected M2 created real problems for FUNREDES as well as network disappointment. MISTICA-2 probably began too late to better address the network's substantive and sustainability issues currently being considered by the transitional team, both virtual and voluntary.

2.8.3 FRIDA

FRIDA is an important small-grants allocation mechanism, supporting organizations willing to develop their research and innovation abilities on ICT4D issues through the submission of competitive, quality, research proposals.⁶⁴

FRIDA

FRIDA is the Digital Innovation Regional Fund in LAC. It is a small-grants fund mechanism dedicated to creating or strengthening research capacities in ICT4D in LAC. The coordination of the FRIDA initiative and of the FRIDA project in particular, is the responsibility of LACNIC (Internet Addresses Register in LAC Countries), a civil society organization headquartered in Montevideo.

Initially, the fund for the FRIDA initiative came from contributions from PAN Americas, ICA, the Internet Society (ISOC), and LACNIC itself. The selected areas of interest for FRIDA funds are ICT innovation, ICT policies, and the social uses of ICTs.

The FRIDA project (IDRC project #102237) is an ongoing initiative and is the channel through which PAN Americas and ICA support the longer-term FRIDA initiative. During the project, two rounds of grant allocations are envisaged. In the first, presently underway, 12 small projects lasting from one to two years are being funded.⁶⁵ (Leaders and staff associated with this project are found in Volume 2, Appendix 2.)

This project is the result of a valuable IDRC lessons learned exercise.⁶⁶ FRIDA's initial coordinating unit is expected to administer processes such as: prepare calls for proposals; confirm the selection of senior technical committee members; and follow-up and operate the administrative and financial controls. LACNIC's Secretary-General openly supports the FRIDA initiative at large as leverage to consolidate LACNIC's positioning in LAC and abroad.

The FRIDA project is an ongoing experience. At least another year would be needed to review the project in greater perspective. Yet some conclusions can be drawn about the project and its evolution based on what we, as reviewers, have observed at LACNIC headquarters, both in Montevideo and at five project sites (Montevideo [ICD], Temuco [IIE, UFRO], Buenos Aires [Fundación Mediterránea], San José [FOD], and Libres municipal site [SICOM]).

The mechanism tested in the previous small grants project was transferred to the present FRIDA project. Yet, it must be noted that the earlier small grants project differs from the FRIDA project in many important respects: (1) the FRIDA project does not uniquely correspond to a "pure"

⁶⁴ The functioning of the fund is straight-forward. It starts with an on-line call for proposals for grant applications. The proposals are then examined by a group of selected specialists – external and independent from LACNIC – with expertise in various ICT areas and coming from various countries. Each proposal is examined by designated pairs of specialists, and each pair is prevented from examining their own-country proposals. Highly transparent eligibility criteria are then applied and funds are allocated to a few projects promising a best performance in terms of eligibility criteria. Eligible proposals are those envisaging projects lasting between one to two years, with amounts no greater than \$12 500 to \$25 000 CAD.

⁶⁵ The second call for proposals had begun when the reviewers visit' to LACNIC took place.

⁶⁶ The design of the FRIDA project was based on a previously successful small grants project experience by PAN Americas, promoted and administered in partnership with FLACSO-Ecuador. PAN Asia has also developed and operated such a mechanism and provided lessons.

PAN Americas' realm. In fact it is a "twinned" initiative with ICA. In practical terms this means that new ICT demonstration projects plus other technology-based initiatives – not necessarily linked with longer-term ICT4D research – are now included as part of the package; (2) the FRIDA project operates within a larger environment – the FRIDA initiative engineered by LACNIC – where other donors are practicing and may exercise further influence.⁶⁷ In the future (once the IDRC FRIDA project has been wrapped up and once there is an increase in new donor contributions⁶⁸), nothing would prevent LACNIC from defining a new profile for the projects that would be considered interesting and valuable for ICT-related LAC organizations and territories; and (3) while the historical "soul" of FLACSO-Ecuador implied a lukewarm attitude towards ICT4D issues,⁶⁹ LACNIC is overtly striving to become an influential player in ICT-related issues in LAC.

In the opinion of the reviewers, LACNIC is basically doing a good job in the management of the FRIDA project: calls for proposal have proceeded smoothly; some very interesting projects were selected in the first round of grant allocations; the proposals received during the second round (taking place during the elaboration of this report), increased fourfold; an external, senior evaluation and selection committee is in place; and the Web site operations are practical and work efficiently. Many details, operations, and processes need improvement but generally, the FRIDA project is proceeding smoothly towards attaining its main objective: ICT research capacity building in LAC. Another important aspect of this project is organizational capacity building for LACNIC itself as a research management entity. Thus, all the processes and operations of small grants projects do matter.

Some concerns must be raised, however. It is true that funded projects under the FRIDA regime cannot be favourably compared in size or influence to any of the medium or relatively large initiatives of the PAN Americas' portfolio, nor be considered serious competitors or allies. But it is also true that LACNIC is getting what it is looking for: increased visibility in the region.⁷⁰ So far, LACNIC has been transparent when information is required but it does not seem too enthusiastic on embarking on shared initiatives with PAN Americas and/or ICA, or on developing its own funding needs and solutions. It would seem that in the LAC ICT development field, no one has yet invested any time and effort in analyzing what FRIDA is asked to do and for what purpose, or how the associated trends are evolving. This troublesome situation runs the risk of causing problems for PAN Americas and ICA if nothing is done to prevent it. They may face a demand shortage if applications from partners are diverted in favour of other funding sources and regional mechanisms.

The analysis of FRIDA's results and influences at this stage must consider the essentially unfinished state of the project. On the other hand, results and influences are "irradiated" from two sources: one is LACNIC as the central, coordinating unit and the mechanism that LACNIC

⁶⁷ Presently the other donors are ISOC and LACNIC itself. The Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) has recently committed funds.

⁶⁸ IDRC may or may not wish to become a minority donor in a continuing, long-term FRIDA initiative.

⁶⁹ What was once a FLACSO-Ecuador-based enthusiastic and emerging group in ICT4D issues, can now be considered only a passing episode, since FLACSO has returned to its historical social science research profile.

⁷⁰ It is our impression that, for the moment, a tactical, temporary move is taking place: quantity might matter more than quality at LACNIC headquarters. This would explain why not enough attention is being given to problems such as the workloads of advisory committee members, or the systematization of proposal selection criteria. Admittedly a weak signal so far, but one to watch nonetheless, particularly when so many good proposals are submitted and only a handful are chosen.

has set up for screening proposals; the other is the different projects being supported through small grants. The following example of results and influences has been developed using FRIDA's first-round project portfolio; from this portfolio, attention is focused on five of the 12 projects funded.

Outputs at the central coordinating unit level are: the procedures for calling proposals; the current methodology for project selection⁷¹; FRIDA's Web page; and the administrative reports to IDRC. Projects examined and receiving small grants from FRIDA's first round, are all in the early stages of execution. However, the diagnostic study already available on employment in the digital economy is worth praising as a rather unconventional ICT4D research report.

Reach is quantifiable and possesses great potential. Many organizations and specialists have been "touched" during FRIDA's first round of funds allocation, and it was all done exclusively on-line. The small, expert network constituted by the members of the evaluation and selection committee, and the numerous and different organizations applying for funds is worth mentioning, even if only a dozen received funding. It is important to mention that the first funded projects do not include only NGO-type organizations, but also some traditional public and private universities and local governments, and a private-sector foundation. Geographically speaking, reach is very wide in terms of the LAC continent as a whole, with relative weak participation in the Caribbean region.⁷²

Outcomes are still very difficult to detect because the project is in a rather premature state. It is also too early to assess the capacity-building effort aimed at LACNIC itself and little or no networking among projects seems to be happening yet.

The project has experienced *facilitative and limitative factors*. LACNIC presence and involvement, and its remarkable independence can be considered as a facilitative factor. LACNIC is also considered a regional yet prestigious newcomer, an "uncontaminated" organization in the ICT4D field. The weak supply of funding for ICT4D issues in LAC has played a role in labeling FRIDA as a perceived value, greater than otherwise would have been the case. A limitative factor might be LACNIC's relative lack of experience in managing this fund allocation mechanism.

Lessons learned are also too premature to detect, but will be very important to establish early in 2006. Yet there are potential areas for future learning that are worth mentioning. One is the huge amount of organizations expressing formal interest by completing and submitting a rather demanding proposal protocol, despite the small funding amount. For IDRC, this is an important opportunity for exploring and finding new partners, and assessing a range of ICT themes, not all of which are ICT4D research topics. The other is to learn how to deal with worthy, non-selected proponents, and identifying and rewarding the potential ICT4D value of their proposals.

2.8.4 "Capacity-Building" Projects: Inter-Project Analysis

⁷¹ In the first round of grant allocation, the independent evaluation and selection committee developed screening and selection spreadsheets, reviewed over 100 proposals, and selected 12. Work was done via e-mail and teleconferences.

⁷² The on-line call for proposals obtained responses from over 120 applicants in the first round. The second round received about 400 proposals.

The only built-in link detected between these three important projects is the key suggestion made by the PAN Americas' incumbent program officer at the MASTER project start-up: the chance to obtain on-line lecturing services from active senior experts participating in MISTICA's virtual community (as well as in other former IDRC projects). But the MASTER-MISTICA relationship could have been enriched by an active participation of the MASTER's coordinator and graduate students in MISTICA's discussions and projects. A broader range of relevant thesis topics and motivated supervisors could have been detected. Also MASTER could have used a virtual window to publicize the program and attract more and better student candidates. It should be noted that many key participants in MISTICA are otherwise active in IDRC-supported and/or other ICT for development projects and possess superior capacity-building and networking expertise.

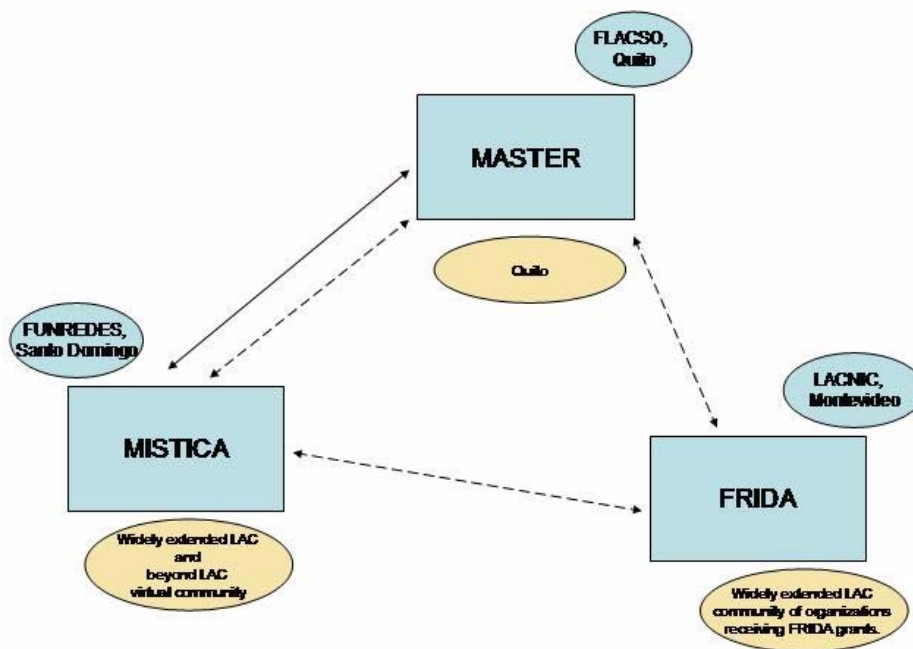


Figure 3. Possible links between “capacity-building” sample projects.

Possible links between MASTER and FRIDA do not seem to have been fully explored. This seems curious since PAN Americas' small grants mechanism was first tested through FLACSO-Ecuador, sponsor of the MASTER project. Some qualified MASTER students are resources that might be integrated into FRIDA's project analysis. Also LACNIC, and its external evaluation and selection committee could suggest specific research topics to master- or diploma-level students for their thesis program.

Possible relationships between FRIDA and MISTICA might cover a wide range of topics. Yet they do not seem easy to implement at this stage. FUNREDES, MISTICA's former coordinating organization has adopted a very low profile towards the further development of MISTICA, and MISTICA's virtual community is undergoing strategic discussions on the future directions and formalizations of the community. In this situation, it does not seem easy to establish formal relations between a virtual community in transition and a formal organization such as LACNIC. However, substantial exploratory conversations might take place with MISTICA's current

transitional team. At present, more direct information exchange and mutual monitoring of the activities of each other's initiative in order to discover opportunities, are regarded as ambitious and feasible strategies for future cooperation.

2.9 2001–2004 Project Work: Lessons Learned

The overall appraisal of the nine sample projects is quite favourable.

The "*knowledge-creation*" projects are extremely good projects. Traditionally, projects whose predominant focus is research generally have the danger of drifting into mere academic or never-ending contemplative work. In this case, the three organizations involved have managed to avoid this danger. On the contrary:

- High quality ICT4D-applicable research was produced.
- Expected and delivered outputs and their potential longer-term outcomes have been of high relevance for the LAC region.
- Different research production models have been tested.⁷³
- There are reliable, high quality, and committed partner organizations.
- There are good prospects for further involvement in advancing or expanding the topics researched in association with partner organizations.

Certainly, then, IDRC's mandate, principles, and strategies regarding applied research for development have worked well with partners; they value IDRC's stance, commitment, and respect.

PAN Americas' management and program officers had the vision to support the three sample "*knowledge-creation*" projects. Each case can be seen as an example of serious research on relevant topics, responsible behaviour of partner organizations, and solid PAN Americas' partner organization relationships.

The "*policy and advocacy*" projects were also remarkable. PAN Americas' program officers and ICT4D management took calculated risks in supporting these model initiatives. Further investments on the problems tackled by these projects and additional links with the respective partner organizations seem to be fully justified. This is particularly the case of RITS and IIJ, where leadership and staff are intact, partner organization brand names and recognized expertise have acquired higher value on the completion of their respective projects, and each continues to maintain their own involvement in ICT4D matters and initiatives.

The situation is less clear at Fundación Acceso, where governance problems have developed over time and where the ICT4D research team has, to a large extent, been dismantled. All projects in this group have had, and still have, a strategic intent and potential. New research and policy fields were explored, new capacity-building areas and intervention modalities were tested, while innovative environments and novel conditions for generating, sharing, and putting into practice original knowledge were favoured.

⁷³ A possible lesson to be learned: the higher the networked nature of the model, the more generous the project is in terms of reach and outcomes. And, obviously, good networks are made up of good participants.

The “*capacity-building*” projects were all bold attempts at penetrating new areas, tackle new ICT4D problems, and test new methodologies. The stakes were very high indeed in initiatives such as MISTICA and MASTER.

The MISTICA project involved an extremely forward-looking social innovation, where not enough previous experience was available, even globally, particularly when the first stage got underway. Substantial resources were invested during the different phases of the project, with results obtained enjoying varying degrees of success. The MISTICA virtual community has tested innovativeness and responsiveness to rapidly changing ICT and ICT4D discourses and contexts, a true forerunner of many other similar initiatives to come in the digital economy. As reviewers we believe that the merits of the idea, the substantial experience acquired, and the remaining, unfinished potential would deserve a thorough assessment in order to identify important lessons learned by a community too immersed in its own history to perform an auto-review. The alternative, and still embryonic, scenarios available to ensure MISTICA’s survival and eventual sustainability, also deserve scrutiny from external sources.

The MASTER project also represented a very risky initiative for many reasons. Perhaps the main one was, and still is, the selection of a prestigious, academic, social science organization in LAC. Sadly, FLACSO-Ecuador has presented inconveniences for coordinating a PAN Americas endorsed project.⁷⁴ Yet, in spite of the dropout rate, diminishing registration, and rather poor outputs in terms of the number of graduated students, there are also excellent features that need to be shared and disseminated. The project is teeming with lessons learned, and is a typical example of methodologies and innovative contents lying below the surface. A small number of new ICT4D researchers in the Andean region are now available thanks to the project. But the need for more researchers – not only in Andean countries – justifies an external assessment of the whole experience; non-documented experiences of students and lecturers must be recovered, research outputs assessed, and possible scenarios developed to extend and improve the experience in the Andean and other subregions.

FRIDA in a sense was less risky since it was the second application of an already successfully tested “small-grants funding model”; the question was to identify, pledge, and nurture relations with a responsible, active, and reliable organization as coordinating unit for managing research proposals and projects. The FRIDA project is, on the whole, working quite well, and presents only some emerging, possible, unexpected operational glitches and potential strategic concerns that can perhaps be addressed by LACNIC, PAN Americas, and/or ICA. Current risks include adequately managing the effects of high submission/low granting rates, and tapping into the full set of IDRC proposals to gauge the themes, issues, and methodological approaches emerging from the field.

Summing up, as external independent reviewers, we strongly feel that these projects were, or are, extremely sound, timely, forward-looking and, on the whole, quite successful initiatives at a

⁷⁴ There have been three main inconveniences in the opinion of these reviewers: (1) the differential criteria to assess value and excellency of graduate programs. While FLACSO-Ecuador has historically been more concerned with theoretical and epistemological issues, PAN Americas is expected to be highly interested in applied research for development and, ultimately, in research capacity building capable of generating impact proposals and solutions for specific communities; (2) the relationship between FLACSO-Ecuador and the Andean community is also an organizational problem. While ties with like-minded academic programs seem to operate well, the links with governments, the private sector, and many CSOs seem to be weaker; (3) the “ICT4D dimension” does not yet form part of the “soul” of FLACSO-Ecuador. So to a great extent, the difficulties of the MASTER project came primarily for an organizational environment not really supportive of a project such as MASTER’s.

programmatically at least, because of their strategic character and because they are prototype projects or modalities that may be replicated in other areas or territories inside or outside LAC. It is true that, when proposals become operational and partners must actually implement them, problems will emerge and lessons will be learned. More sharing of these, however, and greater inter-project synergies are needed in an open, honest, and respectful environment. IDRC and PAN Americas have traditionally provided such venues.

We therefore conclude this section with warm congratulations to PAN Americas' management for its support of innovative, high-impact projects, fully aligned with the institution's objectives. And we also recognize the efforts of program officers who initiated these projects, for their vision and imagination, and for those program officers who assumed responsibility for some "orphaned" projects, and who competently and generously lead these efforts to successful completion and/or further advancement.

3. Strategies of PAN Americas

3.1. Introduction

The various projects and initiatives promoted by PAN Americas in the LAC region during the 2001–2004 period, developed within the context of different, adaptive IDRC and ICT4D policies (that is, while key IDRC values and criteria were constant, changes in ICT and ICT4D contexts required flexible, evolving project portfolio approaches and options). The key policy document orienting all PAN Americas' actions is known as the Corporate Project's Work Plan 2001–2004. The following analysis, based on the different criteria and declared strategies and policies of this document, will examine the projects sampled within that context.

From the outset, it was clear to reviewers that this analysis was merely indicative of some general trends since – by design of the review exercise – they were not to examine the entire project portfolio. The samples were purposefully chosen – albeit carefully – commensurate with a sound representation of PAN Americas' activities in LAC. Most importantly, the complexities of linking the performance of specific projects to broad strategic categories are well known. In order to bridge the "PAN Americas' projects world" with the "PAN Americas' strategic world," admittedly some assumptions must be made. These are required to facilitate the building of preliminary "sketches" or "associative schema" that relate projects to strategic dimensions. Simple analytic tables will be used for these purposes. Specific strategic dimensions that are "affected" or "advanced" by a given project, are indicated with an "x." Each "x" will require a thorough investigation, seeking foundational evidence that will also refine the importance of the finding. Thus, the analysis that follows is only intended to imperfectly map out and convey an initial "bird's eye view" of how PAN Americas' strategies have been implemented through various projects and actions in the 2001–2004 period.⁷⁵

As far as *PAN Americas' external strategies* are concerned, the following horizontal strategies common to all of PAN Americas' projects and actions were considered:

- Research-focusing strategies;

⁷⁵ Moreover, it must be noted that the approach taken by the reviewers is that of an external review, and thus may not necessarily be aligned with IDRC's own way of seeing and categorizing its strategies. However, all the review evaluation questions have been addressed.

- Geographic coverage strategies;
- Partnership strategies;
- Digital strategies; and
- Special output delivery strategies.

External strategies were examined through the perspective of how they were perceived as guiding a given project or how a given project was being effectively addressed by a strategy. Simple, two-dimensional tables have been developed in which projects (represented in rows) and strategies (represented in columns) are included.⁷⁶ The projects are arranged by ascending IDRC project codes. The advantage of adopting this criteria is that projects are arranged in chronological order. (In the case of the FRIDA project, a distinction has been made between the FRIDA central mechanism and a group of small-grant implemented projects examined during the reviewers' fieldwork.⁷⁷)

On the other hand, the *internal strategies* examined focused on public communication strategies, staffing strategies, and learning and evaluation culture strategies. Internal strategies governing PAN Americas at IDRC are common and affect all projects and actions. That is why external, strategy type tables are no longer used.

3.2 Research-Focused Strategies

This strategy is fully expressed in the so-called "research themes" included in the CP. These themes are a way of focusing or aligning ICT4D efforts and projects so that a worthwhile and ICT4D-relevant aim provides directionality and purpose to specific projects. The research themes to be considered are:

- Poverty Reduction;
- Partnerships;
- Networks;
- People Development;
- Social and Economic Opportunities; and
- Learning and Development.

We understand that these categories present some difficulties, but we use them exactly as they were intended and included in the CP.⁷⁸ We attempted however, to provide a description of each one so that our decision about projects complying or contributing to a particularly strategy – even if minimally – can be better understood. These categories are further developed in **Table 2**.

⁷⁶ The set of assumptions used to build the tables that interrelate reviewed projects with broad PAN Americas' strategies, need to be defined. The following admittedly simplistic assumptions have been made: it is possible to ascertain when there is and when there is no link between projects and strategies; when there is a link, it is possible to distinguish between a high intensity link (dark gray cells) and a medium intensity link (light gray cells); when there is no link at all (or an insignificant one), cells are left blank.

⁷⁷ Note that each FRIDA small projects hover around 5 to 10% of funding allocated to other PAN Americas projects.

⁷⁸ Among the difficulties: the strategies are not mutually exclusive; they are not explicitly defined; and some hierarchies and relations exist between them (e.g., poverty reduction might ultimately be attained by a complex combination of the other strategies).

Table 2. Research themes of PAN Americas' 2001-2004

Research-Focusing Strategy	Our Understanding of the Strategy
Poverty-Reduction Strategies	Ultimately, the strategy focuses on pro-poor activities, even if direct reach to poor or facilitating mechanisms is very indirect and long-term.
Partnerships	Focus on creating, cultivating, and strengthening sustainable partnerships – beyond the IDRC project relationship – that collaborate based on specific shared values, agendas, topics, or actions.
Networks	Mostly favouring the development and continuance of sustainable on-line communication exchanges, discussions, knowledge-sharing, alliances, partnerships, and collaborative work, along with increased use of ICT tools and resources for networking.
People Development	Capacity building or enhancements, new competencies, whether for partners, broader networks, or beneficiaries.
Social and Economic Opportunities	More specific than poverty reduction, focuses on exploring or developing the concrete roles of ICT4Ds that might contribute to the socioeconomic improvements of specific populations or groups.
Learning and Development	Knowledge creation, strategies, and tools to create or share knowledge and experiences; promoting understanding of ICT4Ds for actions and policies.

With these in mind, **Table 3** has been developed as an “associative schema” or sketch:

Table 3. Research-focusing strategies

	Poverty Reduction	Partnerships	Networks	People Development	Social and Economic Opportunities	Learning and Development
ICT-IMPACT	x				x	x
GEM-LAC		x	x	x		x
ICT-POLICY				x	x	
JUDICIARY				x		x
MASTER				x		x
RITS-OPPI		x	x	x	x	x
MISTICA		x	x			x
REDAL			x	x		x
FRIDA		x			x	
F-Argentina-Inclusion	x				x	
F-Costa Rica-Robotics				x		x
F-Chile-Science and Youngsters				x		x
F-México-Appropriation	x			x		
F-Uruguay-Social Integration			x	x		

Judging from the projects sampled, some research-focus themes seem to so far have been achieved. Not coincidentally, their expected results more closely resemble expected outputs,

outcomes, and the preferred processes used to advance them; they are also at the core of IDRC's values (people development or capacity building, and learning and development [applied research for development]). There also exist instances of substantive/thematic or methodological examples of knowledge generation. Strengthening researchers' competencies through ICT4D projects is still a core outcome of IDRC's support, as described earlier on in this report.

Beyond the prescribed partnership relationship with IDRC, progress is being realized in other partner relationships. For example, RITS has formed a partnership with TELELAC (not in our project sample), GEM-LAC, and MISTICA. MISTICA members are also active in other IDRC-related projects or organizations. FRIDA is a welcomed test of a partnership with other cooperative entities. Networks can be considered ICT-ways of partnering. It is worth mentioning that far better, intensive, and more sophisticated uses of ICT resources and possibilities are still a work in progress. GEM actually learned and experienced the value of ICTs and of e-networking as essential for its work processes, and by definition, RITS must be a networked entity. MISTICA is the strongest and longest LAC attempt at consolidating an ICT4D virtual community; its current post-project deliberations are very promising.

The longer term and broader substantive issues of socio-economic opportunities and poverty reduction however, seem less entrenched. One plausible reason is the nature of the themes; another is that projects analyzed were not thus conceived. Other, more related initiatives are just beginning (e.g., knowledge economy, telework) or are being addressed by ICA (SMEs).

The themes most likely deserve reconfiguration. Attention could then be concentrated on a policy-influence theme, as well as a better specification and differentiation of themes, sub-themes, mechanisms, strategies, and modalities versus shorter- and longer-term results, etc. For the time being, the reviewers conclude that the six research focus themes served their intended purpose reasonably well.

3.3 Geographic Coverage Strategies

The categories of geographic coverage are well defined in the prospectus. They are mutually exclusive categories, unambiguously understood, and relatively homogeneous sub-areas in terms of culture, economic weight, and strategic location. The question is how intensive and extensive a geographical coverage strategy could be, given the limited nature or intent of projects.

The compliance of sample projects with various geographic areas is shown in **Table 4**. The table shows that in the period 2001–2004, Central America, the Southern Cone, the Andean countries, and Brazil, were almost evenly covered within the geographic range of the respective projects.

The general picture of PAN Americas is positive, with the exception of the non Spanish-speaking Caribbean. None of the geographical areas has been left unattended. Within that general view, however, some caveats are needed: it is usually one organization within one country that “represents” the full geographical coverage.

Table 4. Geographic coverage strategies

	Central America	Andean Countries	Caribbean	Brazil	Southern Cone	México
ICT-IMPACT	x					
GEM-LAC		x		x	x	x
ICT-POLICY	x					
JUDICIARY	x				x	
MASTER		x				
RITS-OPPI				x		
MISTICA	x	x	x	x (limited)	x	x
REDAL	x	x		x	x	x
FRIDA	x	x		x	x	x
F-Argentina-Inclusion					x	
F-Costa Rica-Robotics	x	x				
F-Chile-Science and Youngsters					x	
F-México-Appropriation						x
F-Uruguay-Social Integration	x	x	x	x	x	x

3.4 Partnerships Strategies

During the 2001–2004 period examined, PAN Americas has shown a remarkable flexibility in the way projects are designed and organized. Partnerships have been maintained during a project’s life cycle, at least with key partner organizations. Continuous experimentation with different partnership modalities, quality standards to be ensured, organizational learning, and an open-minded attitude facilitated the negotiation of sound, cooperative contracts. However, projects reviewed are different in many ways: for example, their governing structures, their implementation strategies, and their use of “digital economy” concepts.

We will consider only two dimensions to characterize “the PAN Americas’ way.”⁷⁹ The first dimension refers to modalities that partner organizations choose to implement a PAN Americas project. Three modes are distinguished (see **Table 5**): a “single organization mode,” where all activities are performed by one organization; a “partial partnership and networking mode,” where the execution of many actions falls upon a single organization while others are subcontracted or delegated associate organizations; and a “full partnership and networking mode,” where implementation and process execution are divided among many different collaborating organizations or persons introduced into a network, while being coordinated by the primary organization (or grantee).⁸⁰ Table 5 shows a trend towards favouring full networking and partnership modes.⁸¹

⁷⁹ In Volume 3, submitted to IDRC’s evaluation unit, we include a section informing on exploratory investigation (still unfinished) on project business modeling based on the observed PAN Americas projects. Additional dimensions for characterizing ICT4D projects are included in this supplementary volume.

⁸⁰ This categorization does not consider the size or complexity of the modes used.

⁸¹ Note, however, that a full or partial partnering strategy does not per se imply e-networking.

Table 5. Partnership strategies

	Single organization mode	Partial networking mode	Full networking mode
ICT-IMPACT	x		
GEM-LAC			x
ICT-POLICY		x	x
JUDICIARY			x
MASTER		x	
RITS-OPPI		x	x
MISTICA			x
REDAL			x
FRIDA			x
F-Argentina-Inclusion		x	
F-Costa Rica-Robotics			x
F-Chile-Science and Youngsters			
F-México-Appropriation	x		
F-Uruguay-Social Integration		x	

3.5 Digital Styles Strategies

The second dimension refers to the degree in which a PAN Americas project innovatively uses and promotes ICTs (see **Table 6**). Three attitudes (*digital styles*) towards ICTs are considered: a “conventional digital style,” where the project staff and associates deploy basic office suite applications, and favour an elementary approach towards the Internet (simple Web pages and e-mailing); an “intermediate digital style,” where either innovative applications and/or enriched Web resources accompany the project’s actions; and an “advanced digital style,” where project staff and associates are involved in the use of leading-edge ICT technologies and more sophisticated uses of ICTs as project means (powerful applications software, advanced Web sites and portals, strong interactivity mechanisms and resource, etc.).

Digital style strategies *appear* to be evenly distributed among different projects. In general, it was to be expected that PAN Americas would favour a greater number of projects where more advanced and innovative uses of ICTs were explored, adopted, evolved, and promoted; however, this was not generally the case.

Table 6. Digital strategies

	Conventional digital style	Intermediate digital style	Advanced digital style
ICT-IMPACT	x		
GEM-LAC		x	x
ICT-POLICY	x		
JUDICIARY		x	
MASTER		x	
RITS-OPPI			x
MISTICA			x
REDAL		x	
FRIDA		x	
F-Argentina-Inclusion	x		
F-Costa Rica-Robotics		x	x
F-Chile-Science and Youngsters		x	
F-México-Appropriation	x		
F-Uruguay-Social Integration		x	

3.6 Special Output Delivery Strategies

A number of special delivery strategies were applied to the way that project portfolio outputs should be delivered. According to the 2001–2004 CP prospectus, these strategies were expected to assist in the alignment of output design, production, and dissemination processes with broader organizational needs, so as to respond to critical commitments and international concerns.

Among other strategies quoted in the CP, the following ones have been selected because of their contributing nature to: “Development and programming of the ICA”; “Strengthening regional and subregional networks”; “Understanding and promotion of gender-ICT4D relationships”; and “Closing the loop’ between research results and development decision-making.” These special strategies represent desirable perspectives to be adopted in project promotion and execution that would further the overall contribution of PAN Americas to LAC countries.

Table 7 is quite interesting. It clearly shows that the most pervasive special strategy for output delivery was a contribution to “strengthening regional and subregional networks.” The strategies that had a weaker presence in the sampled projects were “development and programming of the ICA,” and “understanding and promotion of gender-ICT4D relationships.” The relatively low consideration given to “development and programming of the ICA” can be explained by the relatively late appearance of ICA, a strong newcomer during a difficult PAN Americas’ period. Finally, the “understanding and promotion of Gender-ICT4D relationships” does not show a prominent presence, although more attention to gender dimensions and issues was feasible across several projects.

Table 7. Special output delivery strategies⁸²

	Contribution to the development and programming of the ICA	Contribution to strengthening regional and subregional networks	Contribution to understanding and promoting gender-ICT4D relationships	Contribution in “closing the loop” between research results and development decision-making
ICT-IMPACT			x	
GEM-LAC		x	x	x
ICT-POLICY		x	x	x
JUDICIARY	x	x		x
MASTER		x		
RITS-OPPI ⁸³	x	x	x	x
MISTICA		x	x	x
REDAL ⁸⁴	x	x		x
FRIDA	x	x		x
F-Argentina-Inclusion	x			x
F-Costa Rica-Robotics	x			

⁸² The table presents two readings. A reading by column indicates the presence of the strategy in the various projects considered. A reading by row indicates the degree to which a given project was sensitive to different delivery strategies.

⁸³ While RITS the entity is very gender sensitive and proactive, the OPPI project is neutral.

⁸⁴ While all researchers but one is a woman, gender is not addressed in REDAL.

F-Chile-Science and Youngsters				x
F-México-Appropriation				x
F-Uruguay-Social Integration			x	

3.7. Public Communication Strategies



The public communication strategies of an IDRC CP such as PAN Americas, are crucial to sustain, disseminate, publicize, exemplify, and enhance any actions intended to serve a given set of audiences in a targeted territory as vast and as diverse as LAC.

If an international, regionally-focused initiative such as PAN Americas is imperfectly or only partially distinguishable by Latin American and Caribbean partners from other similar or neighbouring initiatives, if its intentions and objectives are not well known, if its overall and specific aims and accomplishments are not understood, or if it is simply not visible or remembered by members of different ICT4D-issue related audiences, then that initiative faces a serious problem.

There are at least two ways to tackle this problematic and sensitive issue. One is to go out into the field and ask various development actors, and even IDRC partners, about their knowledge of PAN Americas. The other is to trace the “signals” sent by IDRC-Ottawa or its corresponding regional office, to LAC audiences and examine their frequency, content, orientation, media utilized, and costs associated with this “broadcasting” exercise. While the first approach seeks to perceive the impact of the public communication strategy on the “minds and hearts” of the intended audiences so as to ascertain how to capture their continuing or increased support, the other attempts to capture the effort and time invested by PAN Americas in reaching its partners and the relative technical merits of the salient communication signals.

We have chosen to see how PAN Americas is perceived from the outside. Accordingly, less prominence will be given to the examination of internal IDRC efforts to project a PAN Americas’ “image” or to the consideration of their inherent technical merits.

First, we recognize that the results obtained through this exercise are not conclusive.⁸⁵ We will therefore offer the partial results of an exploratory research, with the purpose of pointing out clues and possible issues, rather than suggesting more conclusive results.

⁸⁵ Time and a higher priority given to other tasks of the review prevented the reviewers from gathering sound evidence about the relative positioning of PAN Americas’ image among other related or akin initiatives with LAC presence. We did not undertake a survey. Rather, we accidentally came across signals, reactions, suggestions, or questions from the people we met that, in a rather disorderly way, began to crop up and develop into a more coherent set of concerns. The casual accumulation of isolated facts and opinions, made us review our initial assumption that an image building exercise of PAN Americas was not a concern.

The partial findings we submit are the following:

- a. The PAN Americas' initiative is only known to a small proportion of LAC stakeholders. As reviewers, we were faced many times, either during interviews or through electronic missives with a rather embarrassing question: what is PAN Americas?
- b. PAN Americas is better known by leaders and specialists who participated in previous CP programming cycles (i.e., before 2001).
- c. The reviewers were met by a generalized, external confusion about the relationships, synergies, overlaps, and intentions of an ICA initiative vis-à-vis a PAN Americas CP.
- d. None of the FRIDA evaluation and selection specialists, or the FRIDA small grant recipients consulted by the reviewers had any idea of the role played by PAN Americas (nor by ICA for that matter).
- e. Specialist interviewees who were not receiving funds but who were interested in presenting proposals to FRIDA, considered FRIDA an independent organization. A few were able to detect some IDRC influence in FRIDA, and none perceived participation from PAN Americas (nor from ICA) in FRIDA.
- f. The discontinuation of regional consultation meetings formerly convened by PAN Americas, and essentially focusing on ICT4D research issues and providing face-to-face project exchanges and experimental collaborative work, is considered to have left a vacuum in the region. The ICA sub-regional consultations – given their different objectives and methodologies – are not considered to be comparable successors of meetings convened by PAN Americas.
- g. Concepts promoted and advanced by IDRC are not well known or understood by most people consulted by the reviewers. Among them: “twinned projects,” “outcomes,” “outcome-mapping methodology,” and “closing the loop.”
- h. Quite a few publications published with the financial support and motivation provided by PAN Americas' staff, did not receive adequate credit (see for example, *Ver para Creer*).
- i. The use of PAN Americas' logo has gradually vanished from CP-sponsored publications.
- j. A few of the specialists consulted by the reviewers knew about the recent changes in PAN Americas' Web presence (since December 2004). Those who knew about it placed a high value on the wealth and rearrangement of documentary resources now available.

A forward- and outward-looking PAN Americas would be favoured if an internal discussion was undertaken at IDRC on this public information issue.

3.8 Learning and Evaluation Culture Strategies

PAN Americas resides within an international entity that supports research for development and, among other distinguishing features, is globally recognized as a learning organization. In our review of the CP at different levels, PAN Americas seems to have clearly reflected and demonstrated the commitment to equity and development that IDRC, as a whole, has consistently advanced. It is a research-driven, organizational culture, one open to continued reflection and learning, even when learning (and at least informal evaluation) represents revealing and then correcting, less than adequate processes or activities.

Not surprising, this was seen in the key supportive documents for the current and past cycle of PAN Americas. The CP we reviewed was notably founded on accumulated experiences and lessons learned. The learning and evaluation found in the current CP was not exclusive of IDRC

staff; many partners contributed to shaping the foundations and elements that eventually generated the CP through project results, supra-project documents, and collective inter-project meetings convened by IDRC. This external review and the transparent collaboration provided to us by IDRC staff – inclusive of their comments to our draft report – is another example of the value placed on learning and evaluation.

Learning and evaluation of past experiences were also evident in the CP's project portfolio at the planning and management level, and within the limits set by the operational and practical limitations already discussed. Key formal elements have been the Project Appraisal Documents (PADs) and the Project Completion Reports (PCRs); both are effective learning and evaluation instruments.

PADs require prior “reflective time outs” to assess prospects, the relevance and feasibility of a proposal, and the quality of the proponent partners. This is then aligned with the CP's aims. Most of the PADs we could review were in fact solid project appraisals, even when reviewed in hindsight.

PCRs require an even more elaborate reflection on what happened, why, and the ultimate results and lessons learned. This situates a project within the broader picture. We had access to an ample set of PCRs, both current and, inadvertently, from the prior PAN Americas' cycle. A good number of them are outstanding learning and evaluation pieces, and none of the PCRs examined were disappointing. Two limitations can be noted, however: many PCRs were not timely enough to inform potential programming decisions,⁸⁶ even if their learning and evaluative quality is upheld to date; flowing PCRs, still under pilot testing, may need to check whether the answers provided match the intent of the questions. It is obvious that other less formal learning and evaluation procedures have been happening and facilitating the sharing of myriad experiences and lessons among officials as well as informing PAN Americas' decisions.

But the internal and external staffing limitations certainly took a toll on learning and evaluation. These are not purely individual exercises, but rather a continuous, collective process where all must commit some time and partially disengage from their pressing multi-tasking roles. The IDRC Evaluation Unit has strived to foster “evaluative thinking” generally, and outcome mapping specifically. From what we saw, we believe even more needs to be addressed at the practical levels: collaborative strategizing work, tailored professional development, quality time, and special opportunities or venues. Additionally, exemplary PAD and PCR exercises could be mainstreamed into an organizational culture and with officials already exercising a favourable research “ethos.” Let us not forget that project officers must, at the same time, juggle far too many program and project activities, problems, and urgencies.⁸⁷

The critical test for our review of learning and evaluation culture, however, was performed at the projects level with our interviewees. 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. These partners' perceptions derived from the careful build-up over time of trusted person-to-person relationships, which are where

⁸⁶ On the other hand, perhaps some prudent time needs to pass before a PCR can better assess what happened, notably for assessing prospective outcomes.

⁸⁷ Even at the early time when there was a sizeable PAN Americas staff, a session on “evaluative thinking” was postponed and may have never happened. We found no documentary evidence of similar staff moments, though it is certain that at least non-formal evaluative encounters have happened.

IDRC's institutional principles and PAN Americas' program statements and strategies are put to the test.

In the views of the partners, IDRC and PAN Americas' officials and staff live up to expectations in their professional and personal conduct: honest and caring research peers, willing to listen and change, sharing lessons and expertise. Partners feel they can and do contribute to IDRC's learning. They are heard, respected, and valued. The most tangible evidence was how partners welcomed this external review without any hesitancy, were not at all surprised that IDRC reviewed its own PAN Americas program, and willingly and transparently provided information and insights they assumed IDRC would adequately assess, learn from, and subsequently incorporate into new program initiatives and actions.

What still seems to be missing, as inferred from our field visits, is a longer-range, systematic effort from IDRC to share and educate partners on learning and evaluation competencies, skills and attitudes. Research partners are not necessarily adept in either organizational learning processes or in evaluation conceptualizations and methodologies, nor in the added value they provide to ICT4D projects and organizational growth.⁸⁸

3.9 Staffing Strategies

There are many dimensions that can be considered as components of strategies affecting the staffing of a corporate project: recruitment, professional development, job descriptions, personnel transfers and vacancies, performance reviews and promotion, etc.⁸⁹ In this section we will focus our analysis on only two components: staff turnover and staff workloads; both have exerted direct influence on project portfolio management and PAN Americas' partners in LAC.

3.9.1 Staff Turnover

Staff turnover can create external and internal disruptions in an organization. If a key person is replaced, both the external partners and the internal teams, who must now interact with a successor, feel an impact. Sometimes there is a prolonged vacancy. This adaptation and learning process may proceed in different and sometimes unexpected ways. Moreover, the successor needs to learn who the players are, study "the market," scenarios, and "tricks of the trade" of his or her new position. In the long term, turnover is unavoidable and managers must learn to live with it.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ More specific assessments on evaluation matters specific to the review of PAN Americas are presented in our SWOT analysis in the next section, and have been footnoted throughout the report. For example, in outcome mapping, if not all partners can or should master the processes involved, certainly at least its conceptual basis should be proactively shared; it would help better align outcome considerations during project design with the desirable outcomes PAN Americas as a program espouses.

⁸⁹ Most of these dimensions will not be touched upon in this report, and no other topics will be considered for the same reason (e.g., staff motivation, job satisfaction, administrative support for staff, management-labour relations, and the impacts of organizational climate on staff performance). They are all extremely important topics but are not part of our mandate.

⁹⁰ A zero turnover organization would even engender the suspicion of immobility, conservatism, and lack of innovative spirit in the organization. Turnover has to be assessed by striking a balance between the advantages opened by staff moves and the potential disadvantages brought about by created instabilities.

Evidence has been gathered around the presence of different PAN Americas' program officers in the nine sampled 2001–2004 project portfolios. In **Table 8**, projects are shown in rows, while program officers appear in columns.

Table 8. Turnover of PANS officer in selected projects

Project Acronym/ Program Officer	Project Approved Date (and Amount Allocated in CAD\$)	Ricardo Gómez	Gilles Cliche	Sarah Earl	Alicia Richero	Angélica Ospina
ICT-IMPACT #100582	May 2001 (156 000 CAD)		1. Gilles Cliche		2. Alicia Richero	
GEM-LAC #100994	August 2001 (195 000 CAD)		1. Gilles Cliche	2. Sarah Earl		
ICT-POLICY #101046	September 2001 (307 000 CAD)		1. Gilles Cliche		2. Alicia Richero	
JUDICIARY #101107	February 2002 (246 000 CAD)		1. Gilles Cliche		2. Alicia Richero	
MASTER #101159	December, 2001 (394 000 CAD)		1. Gilles Cliche		2. Alicia Richero	
RITS-OPPI #100583 #101383	September 2000 (163 000 CAD) July 2002 (204 000 CAD)		1. Gilles Cliche		2. Alicia Richero	
MISTICA #100584 #101662	December 2000 (300 000 CAD) November 2002 (400 000 CAD)	1. Ricardo Gómez			2. Alicia Richero	3. Angélica Ospina
REDAL #102073	August 2003 (164 000 CAD)				1. Alicia Richero	
FRIDA #102237	December 2003 (300 000 CAD)				1. Alicia Richero ⁹¹	

⁹¹ Joint work done with Ben Petrazzini, ICA Program Officer based in LACRO.

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We can see that seven of nine projects experienced a program officer turnover. Although the turnover rate can be considered rather high for a four-year period, the effects of it were lessened by the generous and conscientious work of the incoming program officers who made up for “lost time.”

3.9.2 Staff Workload

A daily time allocation study would have been required in order to examine the staff workloads of the project officers. For lack of time, we will therefore address the issue partially and indirectly.⁹²

Based on project portfolio information received from IDRC and additional data gathered, we have compiled the work being done by by the LACRO project officer in lague 2004.⁹³ (It is possible that most of this work is still underway at the time of submission of this report.) At least six main, ongoing projects were being carried out,⁹⁴ and at least two activities derived from the MASTER and the ICT-IMPACT projects were still active.⁹⁵ Moreover, it is likely that the PO might be responsible for additional projects by the time of preparation of this report. And new ideas and requests might have emerged during the last six months. The workload is all project-related activity and includes consultation as well as travel to remote areas. A rather heavy workload can be inferred if the myriad of other duties expected from an IDRC’s PO are taken into consideration.

3.10 2001–2004: Progress Towards Objectives and Lessons Learned

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, despite the implementation and staffing difficulties already discussed.

In the adjustments made by PAN Americas, the reviewers identified trends emerging during the 2001–2004 period:

⁹² Partially, because we will only consider the case of the only full-time staff member of PAN Americas, Ms. Alicia Richero. The other two part-time persons are Mr. Richard Fuchs, Acting Director of the initiative, and Angelica Ospina (half of her time is assigned to ICA, half to CP). Indirectly, because we would look at the information that was provided to us by the end of 2004 that covers only some aspects of PAN Americas’ staff work.

⁹³ As seen in its 2004 workplan, there was an enormous workload on PAN Americas’ SPO: ongoing monitoring of 16 active projects (another one assigned to an ICA officer), four other ongoing but to-be-closed projects, four to-be-closed projects (the fifth closure was the responsibility of another IDRC officer), and one RSP. The implications and effects on the adequate fulfillment of program objectives need not be underlined, but there is more than a critical lesson here. A pool of research colleagues and time to reflect is needed to strategize and devise a program portfolio of relevant projects based on accumulated and shared experiences and expertise.

⁹⁴ ICTs and Knowledge (#101389); Schoolnets Latin America (#102073); From Words to Action: ICTs, Youth, and Gender Equity (#102197); Open Source in Latin America and the Caribbean (#102201); Digital Competitive Grants – FRIDA (#102237); Towards WISIS II (#102373).

⁹⁵ Internet Policy MA Thesis Program (#101159); Dissemination of Research Activities of FOD Research Unit (#102501).

- Our review of the project portfolio in the current cycle did not find explicit instances of overall program changes, new directions, or change of focus.
- We found no records for project ideas or proposals generated from the pool of potentially eligible projects from which PAN Americas might choose to support that did not pass the initial screening process.⁹⁶
- The first-ever PAN Americas meeting, was held in February 2002, with six staff persons and the DPA in attendance. Emphasis was placed on proposal screening procedures, partner relationships, and the PAN Americas' niche and objectives. By September 2002, the entire team discussed where they wanted to be in 2004 and what they expected to accomplish.⁹⁷ By 2003, however, serious staffing problems were affecting PAN Americas.⁹⁸
- When comparing the current cycle with past cycles, some subregional shifts in project sites can be discerned: from Central America (mostly Costa Rica and Fundación Acceso) and the Andean nations (mostly Quito-based NGOs in Ecuador and some in Colombia) to Argentine and Uruguay. The Caribbean (with the exception of FUNREDES, MISTICA's physical site) is still relatively absent from projects.⁹⁹
- Over time, new and returning partners have emerged. Still, many partners are not present at this time. A shift might be taking place: from more action-research and grassroots CSOs and NGOs, along with ICT4D activists and advocates, to NGOs composed of ICTD researchers and senior policy influencers. There has been a move towards broader inclusiveness and diversification.
- The scope of supported projects in this cycle has tended to move away from pilots, experiments, and single NGOs, towards networking- and partnering-type NGOs, and shifting towards global ICT4D scenarios (e.g., WSIS) and policy issues.
- Networking (e.g., MISTICA, GEM) has remained a constant PAN Americas' trait, though it has evolved according to new ICT facilities. In the past, there were explicit partnering opportunities between projects; several were face-to-face. Currently, these opportunities are more de facto, and partner-initiated (IDRC has contributed to this process in the past). The REDAL initiative required e-networking between research partners. RITS has actively formed partnerships in IDRC-supported projects such as Telecentres (TELELAC), GEM, and MISTICA. And within FRIDA, the Proposals Evaluation Committee worked entirely on-line.

⁹⁶ By mid-2003, however, the PO noted "the scarcity of solid research proposals lately," an issue that can be programmatically addressed. Learning and caveats for upcoming proposals or partners would have formally derived from related past Project Completion Reports (PCRs), though many excellent PCRs were not timely enough to inform related projects. On the other hand, Project Appraisal Documents (PADs) have regularly, well-informed, nascent projects.

⁹⁷ Such team analysis is quite coincidental with our own retrospective of the challenges still faced today by PAN Americas, despite worthy accomplishments to date (e.g., as noted by the team in September 2002: be positioned as a leader; strengthen the analytical component; balance grassroots and intermediate organizations; strengthen communications, dissemination, marketing and new partners, and consolidate the regional network; continue the capacity- building focus; and reinforce human contact).

⁹⁸ A new PO was appointed mid-2003. Only 50% of a RO (later on a PO) was also available.

⁹⁹ Yet, remedial steps were being taken at present.

Nevertheless, even within MISTICA, virtual collaborative work does not seem to be up to par with available, state-of-the-art ICT opportunities and resources.

- Different support modalities have been implemented across cycles. Initially, several were long-term and one was organization-based (e.g., ACCESO, FUNREDES, APC, Chasquinet). A successful small-grants program in FLACSO-Ecuador preceded the scaled-up FRIDA initiative, which facilitated the “discovery” of many potential research partners. Some expertise seems to have been outsourced (FRIDA, Knowledge Economy). Twinning between ICA and PAN Americas has begun.
- Not surprisingly, some topics have varied over time. Many remained constant but moved on to higher levels; a few are new areas under exploration. In the prior cycle, focus was on: ICT-access experiences and experiments, notably telecentres; critical perspectives on ICT4D challenges in LAC; policy thinking and clarification; and early on-line networking experiences. Subsequently, focus was more on the use and performance of ICT4Ds, such as ICTs in education and their influence on policy. Preparations for WSIS I and II topics have shaped projects and activities. New ICT4D areas emerged, such as the Judiciary, knowledge economy, or teleworking. However, several very relevant new areas were capitalized upon or taken over by ICA: e-government, SMEs, educational portals, and even FRIDA (a twinned project). Just very recently, a new, separate telecentres.org environment was created under ICT4D.

4. Looking Forward

4.1 Introduction

Many signals and emerging trends have been detected (or can be imagined) for the coming months and years of PAN Americas’ existence. We decided to include a “looking forward” concluding section, although a projection exercise was not asked for in the terms of reference of the review. We will undertake a prognosis exercise for PAN Americas. The main guiding question will be: What are PAN Americas’ prospects if the status quo is maintained, if things are left to evolve naturally, if trends are sustained, and if the same 2001–2004 strategies are preserved?

A SWOT analysis will be used to look beyond 2004. Some conclusions and concerns wrap up the section.

4.2 Why a SWOT Analysis for PAN Americas?

With the elements gathered during fieldwork and interviews, and the careful study of PAN Americas, ICT4D, and IDRC-related documentation, we have attempted to undertake a preliminary SWOT exercise for PAN Americas.¹⁰⁰ From the start, we were conscious of our considerable limitations in presenting this analysis. SWOT exercises are expected to be more comprehensive when done collectively and iteratively, and when subject to progressive modifications and consensus-building processes. Thus, our SWOT exercise was developed prior to the elaboration of report conclusions and is limited and tentative at best when compared to a

¹⁰⁰ We undertook a SWOT analysis equipped with various ideas and motivations. First, we felt we needed a synergic mindset to that of the decision-makers who might read this report and ask the following question: How would an IDRC manager, or the manager of an ICT4D program look at PAN Americas?

full participatory exercise involving PAN Americas' teams and partners. In any case, our critical comments are meant to be constructive and have been included with the greatest respect, care, and sincerity.¹⁰¹

4.3 An Actors' Schema for ICT4D Endeavours in LAC

In order to organize the strategic analysis, the following – admittedly highly simplified – analytical schema has been designed. The following figure illustrates PAN Americas' corporate projects within the boundaries of IDRC.

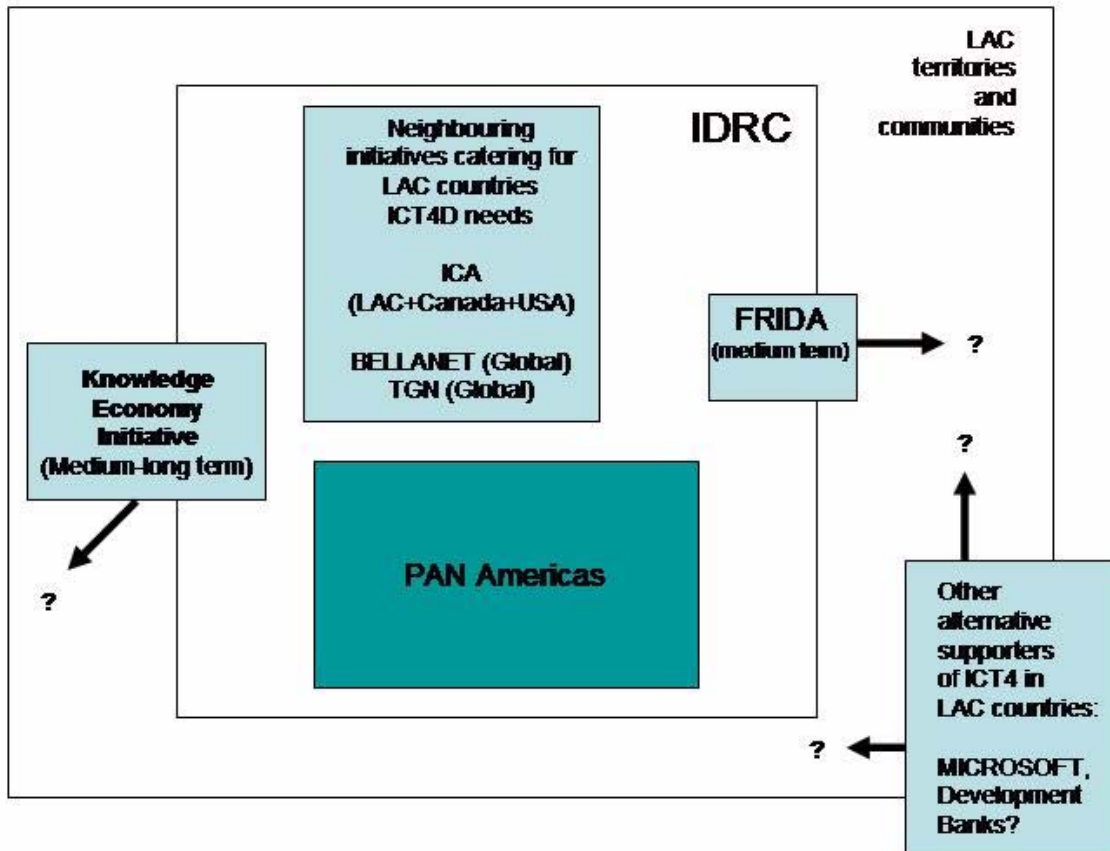


Figure 4. PAN Americas' corporate projects within the boundaries of IDRC.

In PAN Americas' "neighbourhood," other ICT4D initiatives are also supported and exist within IDRC's boundaries in LAC countries. The three included here are ICA, BELLANET, and the recently established Telecentre Global Network (TGN). We have depicted FRIDA (a medium-term possibility, since FRIDA, as a LACNIC-managed fund, temporarily coexists with the

¹⁰¹ For a few days we hesitated in putting additional work into improving a first draft of the report and subsequently make it public. But we have decided to incorporate these ideas in the report since many of our conclusions would probably become insufficiently understood without providing transparent access to the ideas and perceptions contained and expressed in the SWOT exercise. Yet, the SWOT analysis we undertook became both a complex and fascinating exercise. In this public version we have not hesitated to raise any issue we perceive as important in our capacity as independent, external observers; issues are meant to be a starting point for discussion, to be commented upon and corrected.

FRIDA PAN Americas' and ICA twinned initiative) as a force, acting outwards on a body moving about a centre. Also, the recently-launched Knowledge Economy Initiative might be undergoing similar dynamics (since the to-be-chosen external research coordinating organization might gain increased independence from IDRC in the future). The arrow directions indicate a possible future centrifugal movement.

External to IDRC, we have positioned the "marketplace" as being a gateway for possible financial assistance in support of ICT4D programs. This marketplace considers as "suppliers," those who can provide ICT4D research financial assistance (both direct and indirect influences in ICT4D endeavours are considered); "clients" or "consumers" of ICT4D research funds are the LAC communities and territories (which until now have been mostly expressed via a few identifiable NGOs, but would probably change to broader notions and actors such as CSOs, governments, and private stakeholders, if ICA proposal submissions are any indication).

All these actors and their potential actions may have substantial implications on PAN Americas' room to manoeuvre and on its functioning.

4.4 A Preliminary SWOT Analysis¹⁰²

4.4.1 Strengths

Strengths are the internal capacities, or existing, externally-perceived potentialities of PAN Americas and IDRC.¹⁰³

Strengths

PAN Americas	IDRC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad coverage range: thematic/topical. • Vast network of different, generally high-quality partners. • Highly respected by partners, by a vaguely expressed set of factors representing IDRC’s “ethos” and approach. Among them: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progressive agenda on ICTs for development: why, what, who, etc.; - Genuine concern and respect for developing world and partners; - Concern and actions for capacity-building - Independence given to projects and researchers - Flexibility in projects’ progress; - Transparency of procedures; - “Caring” project officers, seen as colleagues or “journey companions.” • Over time, and as is systematically acknowledged by interviewees, IDRC/PAN Americas has played a substantive contributory role in capacity-building and in fostering or supporting transparent opportunities and networking for strengthening research (and more recently, policy influence) on ICT4D in the region. • Comprehensive reach via many different projects. • Innovation, risk-taking in new themes, new strategies, new partners, “repertoire” of models/mechanisms to support projects, multiple strategies across projects, past and present. • Persistence over time in strategic issues, themes. • Global PAN Americas’ history; thus experiences and lessons learned or to be learned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IDRC legitimacy developed over time on supporting research in/for developing world. • Historical concern for information in development (prior to ICT4D); same for networking (even before ICTs). • Unique focus and “niche”: applied research on ICT4D. • Pioneering role among agencies on ICT4D emerging areas and issues • Concern about being at forefront of ICT4D research (and policy) issues. • Making it useful for developing world: “closing the loop,” from research results, to dissemination, to influence; moving from applied research into policy: research-oriented organizational culture; organization adopted learning organization model; clear, strategic rationale and directions in CSPFs.

¹⁰² We will proceed by first undertaking the “internal strategic diagnosis” (strengths and weaknesses). Once this is done, we will proceed with the “external strategic diagnosis” (opportunities and threats). In order to approach the “internal strategic diagnosis” we will consider not only PAN Americas, but also the whole of IDRC’s environment. This internal environment will be structured on two levels: on the left, PAN Americas, on the right, IDRC.

¹⁰³ Capacities can be: improved upon; used; left underutilized and exposed to suffer the degrading passage of time; or not utilized at all.

4.4.2 Weaknesses

Weaknesses are internal deficiencies, or existing, externally-perceived insufficiencies of PAN Americas and IDRC. Deficiencies can be intervened upon in order to eliminate them and eventually transform them into strengths; alternatively, they can be ignored and continue their disruptive or even destructive effects.

Weaknesses

PAN Americas ¹⁰⁴	IDRC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAN Americas' identity loss (What is PAN Americas? is a recurrent question heard during the reviewers fieldwork). • PAN Americas' staff issues: number of staff and their respective qualifications to undertake intensive and excessive demands, such as implementing programmatic strategic directions and continued professional liaison, and supervision of supported projects. • Staff turnover: temporary void and losses in PAN Americas. • Weak networking and synergies among PAN Americas' projects: linkages between projects, even if dissimilar, are weak and not proactively pursued. Yet, there is the crossover of notable actors (researchers, experts) within PAN Americas' <i>de facto</i> network of supported projects. • PAN Americas' subregional focus unclear or at times "erratic": shifts, absences, under-representations (Caribbean absence, geographic areas favoured and then abandoned?). • "Outcome mapping" paradigm not present in PAN Americas' project design, appraisal, etc., and thus not extended to partners to improve their projects' reach and outcomes. Need for initial or further training. Notion not clearly seen in filling out of new PCRs either. • BELLANET's collaborative resources not generally exploited by PAN Americas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAN Americas' corporate image allowed to weaken (as opposed to ICA and FRIDA). • Generalized and widely spread confusion between PAN Americas, ICA, and their differential roles (PAN Americas' research on ICT4D approach, "versus" ICA's highly pragmatic and demonstrative approach to its broader political mandate). Need for PAN Americas to clarify what it is and what it does that is distinctive from what ICA should/must do.) • PAN Americas-ICA twinning has been very limited in practice and needs careful balancing of win-win. • PAN Americas's research and ICA research. Not coordinated. Almost total absence of synergies. • Current FRIDA mechanism is fine for multi-project management and finances, even with outsourcing of matters requiring ICTD expertise, but is not taking advantage of multiple research processes, results, partners' (non)-networking, etc. • Risks of "outsourcing" knowledge-creation without devolution of lessons to PAN Americas-IDRC (e.g., FRIDA, Knowledge Economy), and loss of institution's tacit knowledge capital. Outsourcing does not equal "devolution." • A learning organization on the decline?¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Topics for further study include: the screening process for proposals leading to approval (we obtained no information on proposals [requested, negotiated, or spontaneous]); the quality, the proponents, and the ones chosen for monetary support; ICT4D research proposals submitted to PAN Americas is a black box (how many, who are they, the quality, the selection criteria, the envisioned portfolio mix, etc.); the risk to PAN Americas if only a few mediocre proposals are the only ones available for consideration; proactive, focused requests for proposals (see FRIDA as an example); supraprojects or multiple projects meetings not held; money, other factors (e.g., Telecentres 99 or Picton 2000, not even on-line, as Evaltica [not a PAN Americas project but involving PAN Americas' partners]).

(e.g., Dgroups). ¹⁰⁵	
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Now we move on to the “external” strategic diagnoses (opportunities and threats). We will look at primarily two levels: the request for financial assistance (LAC communities and territories), and the supply of financial assistance (mainly alternative ICT4D donors).

4.4.3 Opportunities

Opportunities are the external existence of environments for growth, diversification, and evolution of PAN Americas and IDRC. Opportunities can be tapped into and their benefits reaped, or they can be left for somebody else to benefit from.

Opportunities

LAC communities and territories	Alternative ICT4D donors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong, varied, regional demands for research on ICT4D (best evidence: FRIDA proposals: 100+; then 300+). Opportunities call for imaginative and responsible responses to such demand even for small grants, and for leveraging the comprehensive interest and qualified pool of hitherto unrelated proponents. • Strong pool of qualified ICT4D researchers and institutions has emerged and is partially networked.¹⁰⁷ • Growth of ICT4D researchers, leaders, and organizations in the region allows for better, senior-level partnerships with IDRC, particularly given a long history of prior and current projects supported. • ICT-access and connectivity conditions rapidly expanding and improving, thus increasing the range of new ICT4D applications and projects.¹⁰⁸ • Societal progression to information society, knowledge or information economy (even if irregular and quite inequitable), favours notions of human capital investment and development.¹⁰⁹ • Growing concern for and interest in research and evaluation of ICT4D interventions in several areas, from different actors and sectors: donors and cooperating agencies, governments, larger-scale programs, CSOs, accountability watchdogs, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given well-established IDRC and ICT4D niches (distinct but summary), IDRC has the opportunity for synergistic donor partnerships in mutual win/win situations to support worthwhile initiatives. • Increased lack of presence of former competitors in ICT4D (e.g., Development Gateway, IDB, World Bank).

4.4.4 Threats

¹⁰⁵ Evaltica did so in the past. So has ICA for its subregional consultations.

¹⁰⁶ Who within PAN Americas, ICA, or IDRC knows about the substance and processes of the dozen, ongoing FRIDA projects, or about the 300+ proposals recently received?

¹⁰⁷ IDRC can legitimately claim some credit on its own contribution to such outcomes.

¹⁰⁸ The fact that such developments are still fraught with inequities should be seen more as an opportunity for meaningful intervention and support than a limitation.

¹⁰⁹ This may lead to the further legitimization for expanded opportunities of personal and organizational capacity building and enhancements, along with opportunities for e-learning proposals and interventions.

Threats are the behaviours of external actors, or the generic societal conditions found in the environments of PAN Americas and IDRC that may jeopardize or limit prospects for PAN Americas' growth, diversification, evolution, and even survival. Threats can be eliminated, neutralized, transformed into opportunities, or continue unattended, thus enabling a surprise attack.

Threats

LAC communities and territories	Alternative ICT4D donors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outsourcing of massive proposal evaluation (as in FRIDA), threatens organizational learning and in-house capacity development, with a consequential landslide of weaknesses.¹¹⁰ • Relatively limited capacities (exceptions made), of potential partners to develop and advance ICT4D research.¹¹¹ • Lack of proactive, supportive intervention by IDRC for newcomers or weaker entities creates an exclusionary bias towards entities not well prepared to develop proposals, implement worthwhile research, or progress towards research communication, usage, and policy influence. • Public-private partnerships still not adequately explored, pursued, or materialized. The public sector has a variety of "smaller" (subsectorial or local) manifestations and expressions, as do non-state or private-sector players: CSOs (but mostly NGOs in actual project practice) and for-profit or philanthropic private sector entities or groups, as well as academia which looks upon itself as different from those. • Risks that the strong network of partners that IDRC has cultivated over time will vanish or become partially dismantled (despite the fact that a number of these are champions in their own right, and can and do benefit from ICT4D networks). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance of strong non-official development assistance (non-ODA) players as "donors" in ICT4D LAC activities can threaten the niches of IDRC, ICT4D, or PAN Americas (e.g., Microsoft's Community Development, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, CISCO, etc.).

4.5 Concluding Ideas and Concerns

In the opinion of the reviewers, during the 2001-2004 period, PAN Americas faced a number of strategic events that were very difficult to predict at the time the corresponding prospectus was elaborated. There are three prominent events to consider:

¹¹⁰ All (300+) proposals received could have been turned into a valuable and valid opportunity for mapping and assessing topics, approaches, trends, proponents, and state-of-the-field (if not state-of-the-art) contributions.

¹¹¹ It takes persistence and long-term commitments to develop or strengthen sustainable organizational competencies. Short-term or small projects, organizational weaknesses, and loss of professional staff are threats.

- The forced turnover produced when PAN Americas' Senior Program Officer – present during the 2001–2002 period – left IDRC. This created a void and required the recruitment of a new Senior Program Officer. Under the scrutiny of LAC partners and assuming responsibility for a set of “orphaned” projects, this new staff member had to be adequately trained “on the fly.” This meant understanding what was going on and quickly “re-knitting the web of contacts” in order to prevent ongoing projects from stalling or drifting.
- The strategic political agreement signed by senior staff which dictated where ICA and the designate ICT4D Program Area would reside, and where the Institute was to find staff, experience, resources, and infrastructures to launch its initial operations. ICA's first steps created a new situation and some natural adjustment problems, both internal to the ICT4D Program Area, and in the reception this new political actor received externally from many LAC partner organizations, historically linked to PAN Americas.¹¹²
- A composite of a highly complex set of events in the global ICT environment and the new positioning of many LAC countries vis-à-vis that same environment. A factor that was difficult to predict was that important donors – such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank – were going to adopt a low profile in ICT4D in LAC by the end of the 2001–2004 period, while private sector companies – such as CISCO and Microsoft – would aggressively penetrate various sectors of LAC societies, not only with their products, but as entities encouraging social changes through ICTs, even in remote communities. Also, in spite of being convened by the International Telecommunications Union, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), resulted in a repositioned civil society movement vis-à-vis transnational and intergovernmental bodies.

We, as reviewers, consider that most strategies set forth and displayed during the 2001–2004 period, were very helpful in sustaining PAN Americas in the face of manifest strategic and unexpected events during the period under review. PAN Americas managed to go on in spite of major staffing changes. Moreover, strategies gave continued direction to PAN Americas' efforts, now in the company of a new kindred organization acting in its immediate neighbourhood and quickly acquiring increased presence in LAC countries. Strategic direction allowed the continuation of an interesting and highly valuable project portfolio, although perhaps now in a lower-profile working style. And strategic adjustments were implemented with varying degrees of success so as to neutralize or take advantages of changes in the global and LAC environments.

4.5.1 Strategic Concerns

We have witnessed outstanding human-capacity development in the LAC region on ICT4D-applicable research; it has continued to grow and has forged new – albeit intermittent and partial collaborative – networks. This is a major, sustainable, far-reaching, and influential outcome to which IDRC-PAN Americas has certainly contributed.

¹¹² DPA's Presentation to BOG noted that PAN Americas was a small Corporate Project (\$1.2 million, 1.8 staff) as compared with the other ongoing ICT4D initiatives, notably ICA (over \$4 million, six staff), and had to manage an already full array of projects, as well as develop “twinning” processes with an emerging ICA.

During our site visits, we encountered many different partners in many different endeavours. Yet all recognized IDRC's key supportive or contributive role in their respective projects; all were passionate about their dreams and were extremely tenacious and hard-working individuals. We experienced no disappointments. Yet, we cannot ignore the possible risks to programs if additional nurturing, networking opportunities, and resources are not ongoing processes. Collective human capital may well deteriorate or wither away, or the dialogue with strategic ICT4D leaders in the region may cease.

On the other hand, the inevitability of globalization and sheer market forces have substantially changed contexts, opportunities, and arenas for ICT4D, pushed forward more large-scale ICT proposals, programs, and mechanisms, and created a sense of urgency for visible and massive accomplishments, bringing with them new and powerful social actors – not just the initial, rather small and courageous, innovative and risk-taking NGOs.^{113,114} We in fact perceive a pressing need for IDRC and its valued partners to assimilate and translate a forecasting of current and foreseeable trends in ICT4D (and ICTs) into new programmatic directions.¹¹⁵

But let us return to observed current trends: if nothing is done to intervene on PAN Americas' current course, that is, if nothing is done to overcome its current weaknesses, take advantage of its strengths, cash in on its opportunities, and challenge its threats, the initiative could rapidly be moving towards a highly tenuous situation.

We believe that inaction is not an option. A set of circumstances, most of them mutually reinforcing, must take place. What matters here is the dynamic interaction of factors rather than the compilation of a list of factors that may influence the degradation of PAN Americas. The dynamics involve understanding the cumulative side effects that are already taking place and will probably accelerate in the near future.

4.5.2 The PAN Americas-ICA Issue

First, using simple arithmetic, let us consider the basic staffing situation affecting PAN Americas, vis-à-vis the ICA hosted-initiative in IDRC's Program. ICA has a staffing capacity that is 2.9 times greater than PAN Americas'; it can move around and promote actions in the very same (and throughout) PAN Americas LAC countries¹¹⁶ and its budget and leveraging opportunities are secure.

¹¹³ We do not forget and cannot ignore that in earlier ICT4D times, a more critical and alternative discourse on development and the "correct" role of ICTs may have predominated, along with pioneering, pilot, or exploratory small-scale experimentations with ICTs.

¹¹⁴ ICA has read these trends better; this does not mean there is no room for a precise PAN Americas' vision and mandate that builds upon past experiences and successes, and remains committed to equitable development and the role that proper, applied research should play therein.

¹¹⁵ Countering such threats are IDRC's past and current CSPFs and the forthcoming ICT4D prospectus, as well as the global opportunities precipitated by WSIS.

¹¹⁶ In this calculation, and only for rendering a first simple analysis, the secretarial and administrative staff has not been taken into consideration. PAN Americas enjoys the full-time participation of Ms. Richero, and the half-time participation of Ms. Ospina. Further, the ICT4D director is in a position to devote one quarter of his time global time to the management of ICT4D initiatives in LAC countries (ICA, Knowledge Economy Initiative, BELLANET, and PAN Americas). Let us further assume that this time is further divided into equal parts among these initiatives. It can thus be estimated that PAN Americas is getting 1/16 of the ICT4D director's time. If this is added to the already mentioned participation, we get a total of 1.5625 equivalent full-time staff members, working on behalf of the PAN Americas initiative. On the other hand, if we consider ICA, we would need four full-time staff members (Mr. Zadra,

Second, the PAN Americas-ICA synergy-searching strategy was clearly mentioned in the 2001–2004 prospectus¹¹⁷; we were, unfortunately, unable to find evidence supporting successful compliance to this strategy. It is moreover, our impression that this strategy – with the exception of the FRIDA project, where a formal contribution of funds by PAN Americas and by ICA took place – did not work well during 2001–2004. In spite of a respectful, professional relationship between the two teams, we have found that cross-synergies were not immersed in either of the teams’ cultures. The different objectives, urgencies, and pressures on both initiatives might have had a rather large influence in the prevention of a closer (expected), cooperative relationship. Moreover, apart from remedial measures to build knowledge and experience “bridges” and to share “clientele” between PAN Americas and ICA,¹¹⁸ we did not find evidence of substantive discussions on such topics as: lessons learned through projects; interchanging and discussing the reports of external experts, subcontracted by any of the initiatives; common strategies to jointly penetrate target groups in countries or subregions; or distributing loads to jointly built and share knowledge on any overlapping topic. Apparently, no operational “knowledge-conveying mechanism” has been set up yet between the two teams.

Third, following a cursory observation of ICA’s and PAN Americas’ projects, three different scenarios seem to exist: (1) some projects are by definition, autonomous and can be independently treated; (2) some projects are complementary (thus requiring an embrasive and articulate overview); and (3) some projects show varying degrees for overlap potential. A relatively small proportion of projects existing in both portfolios are “twinable.” Interlinks and synergies seem largely untapped.

Last, from the outside, PAN Americas and ICA deliverables look very much the same in spite of their “different packaging.” This situation has created confusion and, on occasion, mistrust in many of IDRC’s historical partners in LAC. Moreover, the public discourses sustained by both initiatives are being quite independently delivered with different styles, approaches and terminologies, and do not seem clearly value-added.¹¹⁹

4.5.3 Other Turbulences in PAN Americas’ Environment

On the other hand, FRIDA, in spite of the small size of its staff (one full-time person and five or six outsourced external evaluators for specified deliverables), has managed to increase visibility (certainly a merit of LACNIC), and been able to attract a substantial portion of expressed demand for ICT4D research in the region (more than 300 proposals in the second round of call for proposals). It can certainly be argued that FRIDA handles small grants that cannot be compared with historically greater investments made by PAN Americas. But it is also possible to formulate the hypothesis that many of these proposals would have been directed to PAN Americas (or ICA) had the resources, staff, and mechanisms been available, in the same or most probably higher amounts of funding requests. And most seriously, PAN Americas currently

Mr. Muñante, Mr. Petrazini, and Mr Barnola), plus Ms. Ospina’s half-time, and 1/16 of the ICT4D director’s time. The addition yields 4.5625.

¹¹⁷ The CP mostly expected a unidirectional relation: PAN Americas contributing to ICA’s actions through the partners’ network and the research focus, while ICA would broaden the scope of partners.

¹¹⁸ Ms. Ospina appointed to equally divide her time between ICA and PAN Americas, and the mutual invitation of the other initiative’s staff to regional meetings, are obvious examples.

¹¹⁹ We witnessed this fact in PAN Americas vis-à-vis ICA’s presentations during the Global ICT4D Program area meeting (October 2004).

might not be aware of most of these requests, since all screening and evaluation is done externally.

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. (This was our experience when we were called upon to clarify some of these issues.) And, admittedly a highly subjective and emotional element, further adds to the confusion: a repeated perception from the field that these parallel initiatives are remarkably expressed through highly different “human interaction styles.” All these factors have converged to cause doubts about the initiative’s common origin and purpose. Confusion and doubt are both the building blocks and early indication of deteriorating trust and confidence in a program.¹²⁰

4.5.4 A New Vital Cycle for PAN Americas?

If PAN Americas wants to revitalize, old questions must again be asked:

- What are the core, distinctive features of the current and future PAN Americas that do, or should, attract the right partners, former, proven, and still legitimate, and new, guaranteed, or risky yet promising?
- What may be threatening those features or not allowing them to be articulated?¹²¹
- What elements would ensure synergies and cross-fertilization between PAN Americas, ICA, FRIDA, and the Knowledge Economy initiative?
- How can IDRC accumulate corporate learning in order to continue being a leading edge organization in ICT4D research and policy in LAC?
- Is there a need for a new ICT4D discourse that can attract and gather quality partner organizations, and reinvigorate the strong network-building capabilities and leadership that IDRC once had through PAN Americas in the region, admittedly in a different, earlier ICT4D context and actors?
- What do ICT4D and IDRC lose if PAN Americas happens to silently and discretely disappear, either in program terms, strategic thrust, or funding and resource allocation?

We have gone through a review of the PAN Americas’ project portfolio and examined a series of trends over time to illustrate how the program meets – in practice – its purpose and objectives,

¹²⁰ We cannot be against a dynamic management style constantly promoting new initiatives, strategies, and mechanisms in ICT4D for LAC. On the contrary, we consider that this certainly speaks to a remarkable degree of alertness caused by turbulent environments. Yet we also value that – from time to time – stock be taken on what has been done. And it would also be highly commendable to undertake in-depth analyses on the potential or real, adverse, collateral effects that new initiatives – entering an increasingly crowded environment – might bring about – interactively – in historically, well-performing components.

¹²¹ In fact, how actual or possible partners “see” and “construct” IDRC and PAN Americas may be either opportunities (already discussed) or threats to IDRC-PAN Americas’ own mandate.

while being responsive to changing circumstances. The new cycle will need to consider the staffing and implementation requirements to adequately address new and persistent ICTD challenges in the region, as per IDRC research for development priorities.

We hope that sharing these thoughts and questions will stimulate the emergence of a more hopeful scenario and strategies for PAN Americas: the birth of a new breed of seminal projects, the reconverted human network – the once “vibrant LAC community of ICT4D researchers” – and the re-emergence of its mandate of leadership and innovative research for development. This at least is the deeply felt expectation of organizations and actors, all faithful supporters of a distinctive IDRC presence in the LAC region.