



Memorandum / Note

TO	IDRC Board of Governors
DATE	November 18, 2015
FROM	Dominique Charron, Director, Agriculture and Environment Sue Szabo, Director, Inclusive Economies Stephen McGurk, Vice President, Programs Branch
SUBJECT	Management response for the external review of two Programs: Non Communicable Disease Prevention, and Governance for Equity in Health Systems

This memo presents management's response to external reviews of two IDRC programs approved in June 2011: Non Communicable Disease Prevention (NCDP), and Governance for Equity in Health Systems (GEHS).

Management is satisfied overall with the conduct and findings of the external reviews of both programs and has drawn some lessons from these reviews. Many recommendations from these reviews were anticipated by programs and integrated into the 2015-2020 Agriculture and Environment, and Inclusive Economies Program Area Implementation Plans approved by this Board in March and June 2015, respectively.

Program outcomes

Management is satisfied with the validation of self-reported program outcomes provided by both reviews. In particular, the reviews found that both programs performed very well in increasing capacity to conduct high-quality research, and to achieve high-level policy impact. Management is pleased that reviews of both programs found important leadership had been exerted strengthening the fields of research. Management acknowledges the important role of strong staff mentoring and monitoring in supporting this result, given that, in the case of GEHS, at least half of the sampled projects were implemented in countries with considerable political volatility and weak governance that often required early detection of potential risks and rapid action. Management acknowledges the finding of high degree of relevance for NCDP, particularly its emphasis on policy change as an outcome, and on its contributions to understanding the effectiveness of fiscal policies for tobacco control and associated strong policy results in several countries in Africa and LAC.

Management is encouraged that the reviewers noted the results of the program in building leadership in the health systems field, including a critical mass of health systems researchers and policy analysts in Africa. Nevertheless, they also noted that many more experienced grantees no longer need IDRC funding for research per se, and Management commits to exploring new ways in which senior research leaders could be mobilized to support and potentially scale the capacity building and partnership efforts of the program

Research quality

Management is encouraged that the quality of the research supported by both programs was good, even though a number of projects worked in high risk research environments, and much of the research focused on capacity strengthening. Management is also satisfied that adherence to standards of research ethics was good in both programs. Management acknowledges that attention to gender dimensions of the research was found to be weaker than expected in GEHS programming. Gender responsiveness is a priority for the continuing programming in Agriculture and Environment, and Inclusive Economies Implementation Plans approved by the Board earlier this year. Management accepts that still more could be done to disseminate high-quality results, notably those of NCDP on key tobacco control findings in Latin America.

Program Implementation and Strategy

Management is satisfied with the finding that both programs demonstrated sound strategy throughout. In particular, management recognizes the review's finding of a high level of adaptability and good risk management in GEHS, in its positioning in partnership with the Canadian Government on maternal, neonatal and child health. Management acknowledges the recommendation from both reviews to better communicate and make more visible the results of the programs. Program Implementation Plans approved earlier this year present a greater thematic focus, and therefore strengthen opportunities to communicate more effectively. Centre management and systems are being improved to ensure adequate acknowledgement of IDRC's support.

Key issues for IDRC's Board of Governors and Senior Management

Management agrees with the review of NCDP recommendation to build on the program's leadership to convene like-minded donors to focus even more on non-communicable diseases. The new program (approved in March 2015) will pursue partnerships with past partners like UK government and Gates Foundation. The program continues its emphasis on capacity strengthening of researchers and advocates to enable to have credible influence on decision making to prevent NCDs.

Management acknowledges the recommendation for IDRC to maintain its leadership in the field of health systems research, and believes that this will be further strengthened, and be more visible, with the emphasis on maternal and child health outcomes.

Management also recognizes the finding that there is a need to strengthen monitoring and evaluation of results, beyond the immediate outputs of projects. Management is committed to improving the collection and analysis of data that can better illustrate the results of the programs relative to their own goals and to better capture the contributions to IDRC's strategic objectives.