Portfolio Evaluation at IDRC:
Using Program Evaluation to Understand “research excellence”

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• What is Portfolio Level Achievement @IDRC?
• How do we understand research portfolio excellence?
• How do we evaluate @ the portfolio level?
• What are we learning?
• What are continuing challenges?
IDRC supports researchers to find solutions for a better tomorrow in the Global South

Our efforts lead to healthier people...
cleaner environments...
higher incomes ...
responsible governments.
What is IDRC Portfolio Level Achievement?

Research Excellence:

✓ Methodologically sound
✓ Evidence-based
✓ Scientifically valid

....Is that all??
Understanding “excellence”: Context

Use-inspired research at IDRC: problem-focused, solution-oriented, innovative, policy-relevant, multi-disciplinary

Source: Ofir & Schwandt 2013 citing Donald E. Stoke (1997)
Understanding “excellence”: How do we break it out?

4 ELEMENTS:

1. Technical quality & scientific merit
2. Research effectiveness (reach, influence, use)
3. Process excellence
4. Innovation
How do we evaluate excellence in the research portfolio level?

**Final Prospectus Report**
- Program implementation strategies
- Program level outcomes
- Main Lessons

**External Review Report**
- Program strategy implementation
- Research output quality
- Outcome relevance & significance

**Board discussion**
- Discussion of performance
- Discussion of Management Response
- Issues for consideration
Core Challenge: How far can and Research for international development funder measure?

Research Quality

Research Effectiveness

Outputs:
- articles
- books
- policy briefs

IDRC and Researcher grantees

Research design (relevance, scientific merit, scientific integrity, innovation)

IDRC

Occasional capacity strengthening support

Research implementation (incl. unexpected innovations) and reach (communication)

Researcher Grantees

Sphere of Control

Sphere of Influence

Policy/Practice Actors

Research use and influence

Impact of the research

Policy/Practice/other Actors

Outcomes:
- changes in policy, technology, practice

Impact:
- Changes in state, improved well being
What are we learning?

• “Excellence” has meaning only context

• 5 Common Program Level Outcomes span the 4 essential elements of excellence; often mutually reinforcing

• Portfolio level outcomes must have higher level strategic intent

• RE@ IDRC means research outputs cannot be assessed in isolation from projects – and projects cannot be assessed in isolation from the program.

• Rubrics testing: Early signs of potential to add consistency, coherence, and equity to portfolio level evaluation.
Ongoing Challenges?

- Keep Innovating new frameworks & approaches
- Demands of multiple constituencies
- Mixing & managing portfolio profiles