

Monitoring and Evaluation at IICD

An Instrument to Assess Development Impact and Effectiveness

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes a monitoring and evaluation instrument to be used to measure the role of IICD in assisting its partners in the South and the development impact of local projects supported by IICD. The instrument has been developed with experts in the Netherlands and with project partners in selected partners countries.

The Monitoring and Evaluation system is built on two instruments including questionnaires and focus group sessions. The questionnaires provide insight information on the profile of the users, the satisfaction with the assistance provided by IICD and local partners, and on the development impact on the individual users of the project. To analyse the results of the questionnaires, an annual focus group session is organised with the project managers. These focus group sessions are set up to analyse and compare the results for all projects in a country and to provide recommendations to improve the projects. The findings of the questionnaires and focus group are presented in the annual Monitoring and Evaluation report per project.

As time goes by, it may be desirable to change the instrument to collect the desired data. For now, it is a good way to collect detailed, project specific information as well as information on a more abstract level through which it becomes possible to compare different projects regarding their impact.

INTRODUCTION

This report describes the development of an evaluation instrument that aims to measure the impact of information and communication technology (ICT) projects assisted by IICD. Evaluation is very important because it helps to find out what is and is not working in a project and therefore to learn from past experiences and improve the project. It also shows what a project does and how it benefits the participants.

IICD was established in 1997, to assist developing countries to realise sustainable economic development by harnessing the power of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The approach to ICT and sustainable development, in which IICD acts as a catalyst, is based on three core activities:

1. ICT Roundtable Processes;
2. Knowledge Sharing, and;
3. Capacity Development.

The combination of ICTs and development aid is a new and unknown area and it is essential that IICD's activities and the effectiveness of the institution are monitored and evaluated in order to learn from past experiences.

In the next chapter, background information on Monitoring and Evaluation methods is provided including the results of a comparison of evaluation methods used by important development agencies including DGIS, IDRC and the World Bank. The following chapter describes the instrument in detail, on the basis of the joint development and testing of the instrument with project partners in Tanzania and Ghana. A detailed test has been realised in the case of the Environmental Information Network project and the Global Teenager project in Ghana.

The instrument is part of a more comprehensive system currently developed to monitor and evaluate the activities of IICD. The method IICD currently uses for evaluation is the project scorecard evaluation tool. A description of the project scorecard is presented in Appendix 1. The scorecard will be completed based on four dimensions: Project and owner success; Project's development impact; IICD's financial contribution, and; IICD's effectiveness: role and mission.

The input for the dimensions 'project and owner success' and 'project's financial contribution' is delivered by the progress reports produced on a quarterly basis by the local Project Managers. In addition, a local consultant will execute a traditional evaluation of the project (project output, planning, etc.) at the end of the project's lifetime.

The input for the dimensions 'Project's development impact' and 'IICD's effectiveness' is more complicated and this instrument is therefore being developed with Project Partners in Ghana and Tanzania.

BACKGROUND ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Back in the 1960's and 1970's economic and cost-benefit analysis pre-dominated in evaluation and there was this view that development is something essentially tangible and measurable. Within this view of development, evaluation is seen as a means of control, focusing on pre-determined aims in as objective a way as possible. This approach relies heavily on the measurement of quantitative data (numbers of things that can be counted) with only minimal allowance for qualitative aspects (less tangible aspects of development that need to be described through views and words).

At first, traditional evaluation approaches and methods were adopted by non-governmental organisations (NGO's) involved in development, but over years they have often been found inappropriate in terms of scale, cost, and the underlying technocratic view of development. Resistance to evaluation has built up in response to inappropriate use of these methods (Rubin, 1995).

Today, NGO's face a challenge that demands a re-assessment of evaluation and its potential uses. As there is some scepticism about the results of development aid, NGO's need to be able to prove that they are effective. They must develop the ability to evaluate their work, in order to demonstrate the positive change their efforts are helping to bring about and to use the results of evaluation to learn how to improve their work.

In developing a strategy on how to evaluate projects, it is important to ask the following questions:

- What should be evaluated?
- How should evaluation be done?
- When should evaluation be done?
- Who should do the evaluation?

What Should Be Evaluated?

In order to be able to formulate indicators of development impact, the first step is to formulate a definition of development impact. Development impact in IICD's projects is defined as development in terms of socio-economic effects, the target group as formulated in the project proposals experience as a result of the project. It is not aimed to measure the development impact of the full country, but of the end-users of the project on an individual level (and their close surrounding).

Evaluation can fulfil different functions and can be carried out in different ways. One function evaluation can have is to learn from experience and as a result to improve the project. Another is a legitimacy function, for donors to determine if the project objectives have been achieved and therefore whether the project can be continued or not. Furthermore, there is the distinction between evaluation and monitoring. Monitoring has a management function which uses a methodical collection of data to determine whether the material and financial resources are sufficient, whether the people in charge have the necessary technical and personal qualifications, whether activities conform to work plans, and whether the work plan has been achieved and has produced the

original objectives (IOV, 1993). Evaluation is described as an assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of an ongoing or completed project or programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors (OESO, 1992).

Function	Legitimacy	Improvement
Evaluation	Project review Operational and policy aspects Qualitative and quantitative according to plan? Legitimacy function Independent experts	Project evaluation Learn from experiences Determine impact on target group Evaluate project execution, support policy making Project internal experts
Monitoring	Project external monitoring Supervision External experts IICD's current evaluation tool?	Project internal monitoring Information gathering Project owner Describe in project proposal

Table 1: Subdivision of evaluation

Indicators

- An indicator is a piece of information which communicates a certain state, trend, warning or progress to the audience. When identifying indicators, IDRC formulated the following characteristics that are useful to keep in mind (Sander, 1997):
- Indicators are context-specific;
- Ideally indicators assess the direct issue. Most of the time, however, an indirect indicator is more feasible and therefore more reliably monitored;
- Indicators are expressions of the values of those who chose the indicator. Both the selection and acceptance of an indicator depends on values;
- Indicators often work best and sometimes only in combination - a single indicator does not necessarily tell you enough, and;
- Indicators are transitory or sometimes seasonal - they need to be reviewed and adjusted. Over the course of the programme conditions change, objectives are altered or better indicators are discovered. In these instances, it may be appropriate to change the indicators you are monitoring.

IDRC did not give indicators for development impact and as can be concluded from the above, it is not possible to give general indicators for development impact but they should be formulated for each project separately within a certain context. The focus points in the evaluation of the Netherlands Development Programme with Bangladesh were policy relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

How Should Evaluation Be Done?

At IDRC, to the extent possible, evaluation adopts participatory methodologies, which makes the evaluation transparent and stronger. Involving the participants, beneficiaries and users of the information in the evaluation process gains their interest and allows for integration of their information needs in the evaluation. Stakeholders put at risk by the evaluation have a right to active involvement in the process (Sanders, 1997). In deciding on which method to use, the following paragraphs describe the pros and cons of the most important participatory methods.

Participant Observation

One of the most common methods for qualitative data collection, participant observation is also one of the most demanding. It requires that the researcher becomes a participant in the culture or context being observed. The literature on participant observation discusses how to enter the context, the role of the researcher as a participant, the collection and storage of field notes, and the analysis of field data. Participant observation often requires months or years of intensive work because the researcher needs to become accepted as a natural part of the culture in order to assure that the observations are of the natural phenomenon.

Direct Observation

Direct observation is distinguished from participant observation in a number of ways. First, a direct observer doesn't typically try to become a participant in the context. However, the direct observer does strive to be as unobtrusive as possible so as not to bias the observations. Second, direct observation suggests a more detached perspective. The researcher is watching rather than taking part. Consequently, technology can be a useful part of direct observation. For instance, one can videotape the phenomenon or observe from behind one-way mirrors. Third, direct observation tends to be more focused than participant observation. The researcher is observing certain sampled situations or people rather than trying to become immersed in the entire context. Finally, direct observation tends not to take as long as participant observation. For instance, one might observe child-mother interactions under specific circumstances in a laboratory setting from behind a one-way mirror, looking especially for the nonverbal cues being used.

Unstructured Interviewing

Unstructured interviewing involves direct interaction between the researcher and a respondent or group. It differs from traditional structured interviewing in several important ways. First, although the researcher may have some initial guiding questions or core concepts to ask about, there is no formal structured instrument or protocol. Second, the interviewer is free to move the conversation in any direction of interest that may come up. Consequently, unstructured interviewing is particularly useful for exploring a topic broadly. However, there is a price for this lack of structure. Because each interview tends to be unique with no pre-determined set of questions asked of all respondents, it is usually more difficult to analyse unstructured interview data, especially when synthesizing across respondents.

Questionnaires

In principle, all human behaviour can be translated into numbers and is therefore amenable to quantitative analysis. Nevertheless, it is easier to envisage how to quantify and analyse the progress of road construction, than the progress in empowerment. Numerical systems are nevertheless often used to assess complex human behaviour. When any aspects of qualities are somewhat abstract and it is thought that they may vary in degrees, the rating scale is probably the best method to use. The numbers thus each represent a quality (e.g. 1 to 5 qualities from good to bad). Once numbered, different statistical exercises can be applied (Groot, Stuijt & Boon, 1994).

In the IICD evaluation, on one hand the information to be collected should offer as much information as possible and on the other hand there is only limited time and human resources for evaluation. Questionnaires give only a limited amount of information but are easy to use versus interviews. Interviews are much more time consuming but give a lot of information. Therefore, questionnaires should be the basic and where questionnaires do not give sufficient information, semi-structured interviewing through focus groups will be used.

When Should Evaluation Be Done?

Basically, there are two possible ways to evaluate a project as a series of events and actions:

- The fixed interval time-line approach, and;
- The event-based time-line approach.

The fixed interval time-line approach requires from the participants that they describe actions and events at regular time intervals. The advantages of this approach are: 1) it simplifies the cross-comparison of various projects; 2) it facilitates the standardisation of data processing, and; 3) the abundance of data makes it possible to 'reconstruct' cases. The disadvantages of this approach are: 1) an excess of (irrelevant) information, and; 2) the consequent need for the database manager to filter and edit all the data gathered.

Alternatively, one might use the event-based time-line approach. Participants are required to record only those events and actions that they deem to be interesting or relevant to the success of the project. The advantages of this approach are: 1) the pre-processing of data by the participants themselves; 2) the division of a single 'project-study' into a number of smaller 'case-studies', and; 3) a higher response rate. The disadvantages are: 1) forced reliance upon the 'common sense' or insight of the participants; 2) difficulty to find out whether a possible lack of data is caused by a non-response or really 'nothing happening', and; 3) participants selecting those events and actions that make them and their organisation 'look good'.

It is important to integrate evaluation in the project life cycle from identification onwards but it will be too time consuming and costly to continuously analyse the data. Therefore, the analysis should be done annually, preferably prior to IICD's annual report, so the findings can be used. When evaluation is done on annual basis it will be possible to make a comparison through the years.

Who Should Do the Evaluation?

The main issue on who should evaluate a project is whether it should be an internal or an external evaluator. In this respect, two types of evaluation may be distinguished: 1) an internal evaluation in which relative insiders such as programme staff, fieldworkers and the intended beneficiaries are involved, and; 2) an external evaluation, carried out by relative outsiders such as donors or officials (Groot, Stuijt & Boon, 1994). An internal evaluator knows the organisation and programme and therefore may be able to better interpret the results. On the other hand, an internal evaluator may avoid negative conclusions. An external evaluator may be more objective, free from organisational bias and may contribute fresh perspective. One and the same person should analyse the questionnaires and organise the focus group sessions. The requirements of this person differ per level, and those requirements are explained in table 2.

Country level	Sector level
Evaluation knowledge	Evaluation knowledge
(Relatively) independent	(Relatively) independent
Knowledge of the social and cultural context of the concerning country	Overall knowledge of IICD's projects and aims
Knowledge of the projects	Knowledge of the sector
Suggestion: Local hosting organisation	Suggestion: IICD

Table 2: Suggestions for who should do the evaluation

IICD MONITORING AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENT

In the previous chapter an answer was given to the 'how', 'what', 'who' and 'when' questions of evaluation. When an evaluation is actually going to be carried out, the objectives and the pre-conditions set by the concerning organisation, determine which form of evaluation is most appropriate. This paragraph describes the objectives and the pre-conditions of IICD's evaluation. Currently, IICD pays much attention to evaluation of its activities through the following tool (table 3).

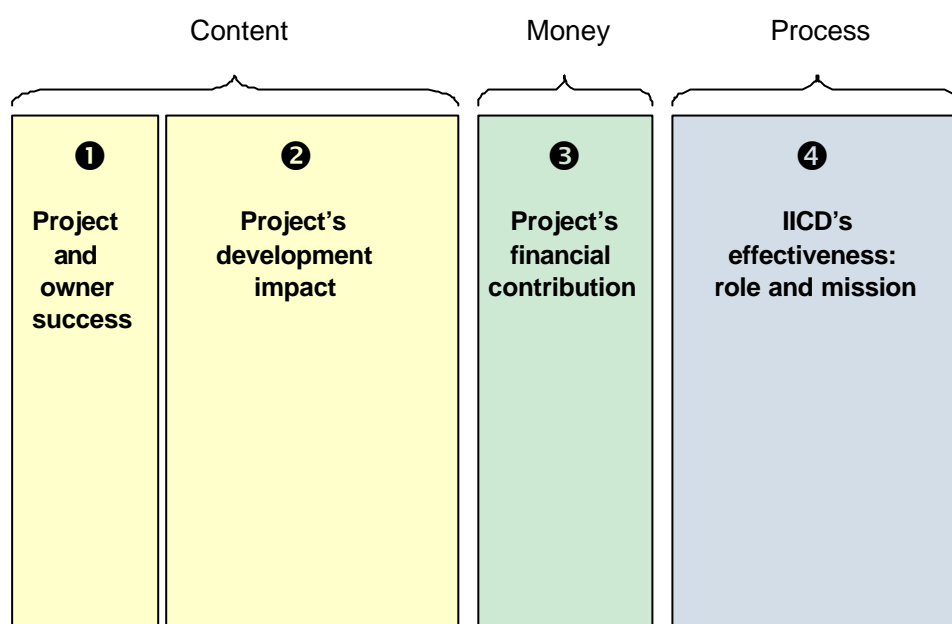


Table 3: IICD Monitoring and Evaluation scorecard, four dimensions that comprehensively evaluate projects and processes

The project scorecard evaluation will be completed on the base of four dimensions:

1. Project and owner success;
2. Project's development impact;
3. Project's financial contribution, and;
4. IICD's effectiveness.

Obviously, there are pre-conditions within which the evaluation can be carried out. The evaluation should be easy to carry out and to analyse, and it may not be too costly. The instrument makes it possible to compare projects in different sectors and countries and through the years. Preferably, there is one instrument that can be used for all the projects and it should provide insight in how to improve on the project. For this, IICD has developed a Monitoring and Evaluation database, which collects data on all four dimensions. The database allows for the analysis of cross-country and cross-sector analysis on all projects. The overall analysis will be presented in an annual Monitoring and Evaluation report. The following paragraphs describe the Monitoring and Evaluation methods applied to each of the four dimensions.

Measuring Project and Owner Success

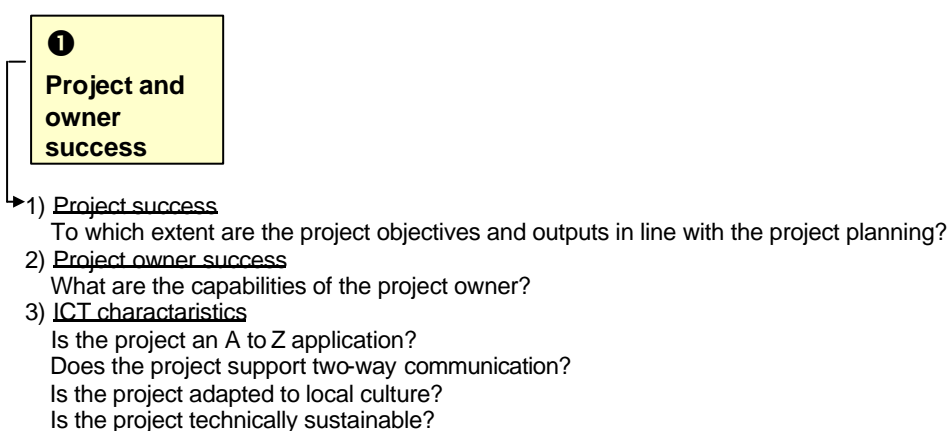
The project and owner success is to measure the project performance in terms of:

- Project objectives, output and planning;
- Management capacity of the project owner in the areas of human resources, technology, finance and politics, and;
- Sustainable ICT characteristics.

The success will be measured on the basis of quarterly progress reports delivered by the local project managers to IICD.

In addition, a local consultant will be selected to execute an evaluation of the project and owner success at the end of the projects' lifetime. This evaluation is merely based on the comparison of progress reports and actual performance of the project owner and actual delivery of project output on the ground. In principle, the local consultant must be independent from the project owners, but must be familiar with the IICD country programme and the IICD process.

The basic project and owner success indicators are included in the generic Monitoring and Evaluation database, managed by IICD. The results of the analysis of the progress report and evaluation will be included in an annual project report.



Monitoring and Evaluation through progress reports by local managers and through external evaluation by local consultants

Table 4: IICD Monitoring and evaluation scorecard, dimension Project and owner success

Measuring Development Impact

The development impact is measured with help of a questionnaire and a focus group session.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires apply a summated rating scale because it is searched for abstract understanding of processes and projects. A number of sector relevant statements are formulated and each of these statements measures a small part of development impact. The respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the statement on a 7-points scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). The results of the questionnaires are sampled in the Monitoring and Evaluation database at local and IICD level.

All questionnaires consist of two generic parts: Personal information and user satisfaction. The personal information collects demographic information. With this information it is possible to see the characteristics of the project's beneficiaries (rich/poor, men/women, adult/child, urban/rural etc.). User satisfaction gathers subjective opinions of the project's end user on how to improve the project (price/quality relation, kind of service etc.).

The tool is developed to measure the development impact on an individual level of direct and indirect beneficiaries - the respondent is asked to which degree this statement applies to him/herself. The tool does not measure the development impact on national or macro level because the projects are too small to be able to measure the impact on national level, and/or too many external factors would distort any measured impact of the project. In terms of the measurement of development impact of projects it was earlier stated that it is not possible to give a general overview of indicators for development impact. The indicators should be context specific and formulated in detail. During the discussion with project partners it appeared that it was important for ICT specific projects to make a distinction between four dimensions:

- *Awareness*: the extent to which the project has resulted in awareness of ICT opportunities in development. As ICT in development countries is still very new, and many people do not even know what it can mean for them, awareness is already an important impact. Awareness is seen as the first stage of impact because from this point other action can and is likely to be undertaken by the beneficiary;
- *Empowerment*: the extent to which the end user can actually use ICT in his/her situation. Once somebody is aware of the opportunities of ICT, a step further is to actually apply ICT in his or her situation. Hereby it is assumed that using ICT will empower people in different areas. Through statements it is measured in which areas ICT empowers people;
- *Social effects*: the extent to which the project has led to actual differences in socio-cultural areas. In this level, different statements attempt to measure which social or cultural effects awareness and empowerment have contributed to, and;
- *Economic effects*: the extent to which the project has led to actual differences in economic area. In this level, different statements attempt to measure to which economic effects awareness and empowerment have led. Obviously, without awareness and empowerment, economic or social effects through ICT projects are not likely.

2
Project's development impact

- 4) Awareness
Are users more aware of the possibilities of ICT?
- 5) Empowerment
Do the users feel empowered through the project?
- 6) Economic impact
Did users gain or expect to gain economic benefits (income, employment, etc.)?
- 7) Social/cultural impact
Do the users experience social and/or cultural effects?
- 8) Catalytic effect
Does the project stimulate the development of other projects?

Monitoring and Evaluation through progress reports by local managers and through external evaluation by local consultants

Table 5: IICD Monitoring and Evaluation scorecard, dimension Project development impact

To address the sector differences in projects, a separate questionnaire is developed for the end users in each sector (education, environment, good governance, global teenagers, capacity development). The questionnaire on the development impact of projects measures specifically the impact of projects on the individual level of end users of the project. The respondent is asked to which degree this statement applies to him/herself and not in general or for a country because the projects are too limited to be able to say that the projects have impact on national level. Besides, too many external factors would influence the project.

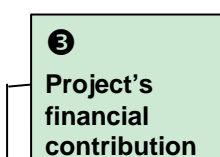
Focus Group Sessions

The purpose of a focus group session is to gather qualitative data from a select group, in a social setting, in a relatively short period of time. During the focus group sessions, the project managers will discuss the most striking results found after analysis of the questionnaires. The focus group gives advice on areas of improvement of the project.

If successful, the focus groups can also be organised for the project owners of projects in different countries on sector level. In that case, for example, all project owners of education projects will discuss the results of the questionnaires in education. In this case, the focus group session will be organised through an electronic discussion. It is expected that this focus group approach will provide an interesting series of lessons learned.

IICD's Financial Contribution

Projects assisted by IICD involve resources of IICD in terms of staff time, external consultancy or starting subsidies. At the same time, projects can bring in limited resources through a partial compensation of resources by other financiers. It is advised to assess the investment in each project on the basis of a series of questions. This will be realised on an annual basis by IICD. Where possible, a limited set of data on this issue is collected in the monitoring and evaluation database.



9) Financial revenues and costs IICD
What are the financial costs and revenues for IICD?

Monitoring and Evaluation by IICD

Table 6: IICD Monitoring and Evaluation scorecard, dimension Project financial contribution IICD

Effectiveness of IICD

The effectiveness of IICD's role in the Roundtable Process is indicated by a questionnaire and a focus groups session with the local project managers.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires measuring the development impact, like the questionnaires to measure the effectiveness, apply a summated rating scale because it is searched for abstract understanding of processes and projects. A number of sector relevant statements are formulated and each of these statements measures a small part of development impact. The respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the statement on a 7-points scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). All data are collected in the Monitoring and Evaluation database.

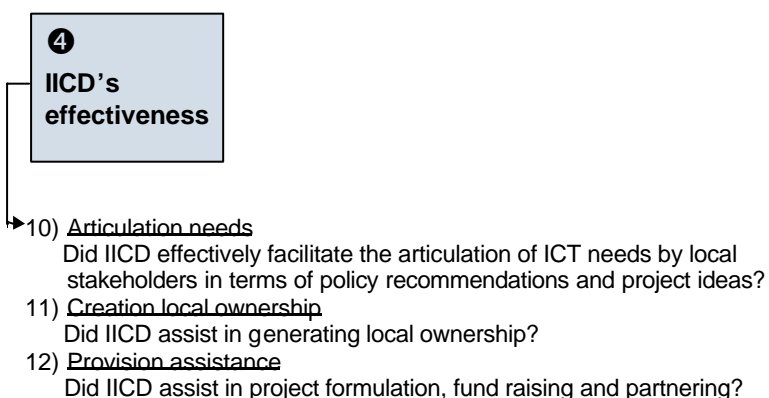
The questionnaires measure the satisfaction of project partners in terms of the key elements of the role and mission of IICD:

- Articulation of local needs: whether the Roundtable workshop contributes to the articulation of local ICT needs;
- Local ownership: the extent in which local partners feel that they are owners of the Roundtable Process and resulting projects, and;
- Assistance: IICD's quality and quantity of assistance provided in project formulation, fundraising and partnering.

The Roundtable questionnaires are presented to all participants of the Roundtable workshop and the project managers during the project formulation and fundraising phase and in the project implementation phase.

Focus Group Sessions

The questionnaires are complemented by an annual focus group session with the local project owners. The purpose of a focus group session is to gather qualitative data from a select group, in a social setting, in a relatively short period of time. At the focus group sessions, the project managers discuss the most striking results from the analysis of the questionnaires. The group also advises on areas of improvement of the project.



Monitoring and Evaluation through progress reports by local managers and through external evaluation by local consultants

Table 7: IICD Monitoring and Evaluation scorecard, dimension IICD's effectiveness

Testing the Instrument

To find out if the respondents understood the instrument, two projects were selected to pre-test the questionnaires. The testing focused on the most complex element of measurement of the development impact. The instrument has been applied to the Environmental Information Network project and the Global Teenager project in Ghana.

The end users as well as the project team of the projects that were in a further developed stage were asked to complete a questionnaire. The evaluator was present while they completed the questionnaire and it was stressed that the respondent could ask any questions if anything was not clear. A question served as useful information for the evaluator because that means that some points are not clear to the respondent and therefore it should be changed.

The target group of respondents were the beneficiaries, but in some projects there appeared to be two groups of beneficiaries, namely the end-user and the project teams themselves. When measuring project impact, obviously one wants to know all impact, therefore the project teams as well as the end-users were asked to complete the questionnaire and an extra option has been added to the questionnaire to be able to make a difference between the two groups.

It appeared that some of the statements were not well understood by the respondents. Therefore, some have been removed and some have been reformulated. In general, the length of four pages for the questionnaire was perceived to be appropriate. Furthermore, while analysing the questionnaires it appeared that there was only limited variation in the indexes of the different indicators. An explanation for this was the 4-point scale and therefore it was decided to change it into a 7-point scale.

A factor and reliability analysis has been done in order to verify if the statements actually measure the constructs awareness, empowerment, and economic and social aspect as they are supposed to. The number of 56 questionnaires appeared to be too limited to get reliable results from factor analysis. It is therefore advisable to do a factor analysis again after more questionnaires have been completed. The reliability analysis shows that some statements should be excluded in order to get a good general correlation.

- Factor awareness has a general correlation of .74 if statement 3 is excluded;
- Factor empowerment has a good correlation of .85;
- Factor economic effects: if statement 6 is being excluded the correlation increases to .79, and;
- Factor social effects: good correlation of over .78.

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IICD PROFILE

The International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) assists developing countries to realise sustainable development by harnessing the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The driving force behind IICD activities is that local 'change agents' themselves identify and develop proposals for realistic ICT applications - local ownership forms the essential basis for sustainable socio-economic development.

Acting as a catalyst, IICD's three-pronged strategy is mainly delivered through a series of integrated Country Programmes.

First, IICD facilitates ICT Roundtable Processes in selected developing countries, where local stakeholders identify and formulate ICT-supported policies and projects based on local needs.

Second, working with training partners in each country, Capacity Development activities are organised to develop the skills and other capacities identified by the local partners.

Third, IICD draws on its global network to provide information and advice to its local partners, also fostering local information exchange networks on the use of ICTs for development. The best practices and lessons learned are documented and disseminated internationally through a Knowledge Sharing programme.

In support of these activities, IICD invests in the development of concrete partnerships with public, private and non profit organisations, thus mobilising knowledge and resources needed by IICD and its local partners.

Country Programmes are currently being implemented in Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Jamaica, Mali, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.