

IDRC

# Guidelines to elaborate an ICT impact evaluation framework

---

**Kemly Camacho and Katherine Reilly**

2000

Guidelines to elaborate a framework to analyze the social impact of ICT. It is based in a online discussions between experts around the world.

## **Group 1**

### **WHAT TYPE OF EVALUATION IS THE FRAMEWORK FOR?**

**DEPARTURE POSITION:** Evaluation is a continuous process that allows for constant feedback throughout the different action phases undertaken by social groups. It is useful for general betterment and for permanent learning.

It would be ideal if processes that involved ICTs could be permanently monitored, as continuous information collection would provide for constant feedback on the development and adoption of ICTs in the targeted social group. Monitoring systems are more useful than punctual/isolated evaluations because they allow for continuous learning. Ideally, follow-through systems should be running, producing data that would be used in isolated evaluations and evaluation of impact. This imperative should be undertaken by IDRC, but it is not always possible to achieve continuous evaluation.

There are many different types of evaluation, each with specific characteristics that must be considered in relation to the construction of a framework that will guide them. However, there also exist some elements that are common to all types of evaluation, which we need to try to define at this workshop.

The elaboration of a useful framework for monitoring and follow-up should incorporate an additional section on information systems as a basis for ongoing monitoring. This should specify what indicators are going to be compiled, when, who will do the work, how the information will be analysed, what type of information should result, how often, and for whom, among other things. It would be ideal if all processes of ICT adoption in social groups were constantly monitored to identify the positive and negative consequences of the new tool for the group. The information generated could be used after the fact for more focused evaluations and for impact evaluations. However, this would be the ideal situation. In reality, there exists very little possibility of committing resources to the conception and development of monitoring systems.

In the same vein, an impact evaluation framework should elaborate on instruments and methods for comparing before and after scenarios. In the case of ICTs and social groups it is difficult to find documentation or data on the 'before' situation, and as a result, one must be very creative in evaluating pre-ICT circumstances. IDRC should require that ICT projects gather baseline data before starting as a point of comparison against which to define ICT impacts.

On the other hand, there are many ways to incorporate ICTs into different social groups (through telecentres, schools, civil society, community groups etc.). We wish to evaluate all of these through our framework. Specific characteristics should be reflected in the development of each framework for each specific project.

Overall, the proposal here is to employ a lens made up of the common ICT evaluation elements to create the framework. Our work should be centred on these common areas so that we generate a framework for the evaluation of ICTs.

**PREVIOUS MESSAGES:** *Here are some observations that have been made on this issue.*

- ⇒ Our original intention was to create a framework for ICT impact evaluation, but with discussion we have added other concepts (such as monitoring, learning evaluation, and continuous evaluation).
- ⇒ The framework should address evaluation as a collective learning process.
- ⇒ Perhaps we need to distinguish how appropriate the framework is for: end-of-initiative or mid-term evaluations, longitudinal evaluations (i.e. a series of evals, or a continuous eval of the same initiative through a period of time), continuous evaluation (i.e. an evaluation-learning cycle that both precedes and outlives individual initiatives, usually implemented as a corporate process). I think the framework we are discussing (so far) is in the context of "end-of-initiative or mid-term" evaluations. Is this the case? Should it be? Does it matter?
- ⇒ I don't think one can separate monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment (irrespective of the definitions one chooses). This is an interdependent continuum; one should know where one fits and what has happened upstream or will happen downstream.
- ⇒ The problem lies more in specifying if we are talking about an isolated "evaluation", or a continuous evaluation process. Of course the two cases exist. In the second, monitoring and data quality are critical for evaluation. In the first case, you have to deal with the monitoring data as it is, if it exists at all.
- ⇒ Evaluation, monitoring and impact assessment are inseparable concepts.
- ⇒ It would be ideal if monitoring and evaluation could always be part of a continuum, but this is often not possible.

**Questions:** *Here are some questions that will help guide your thinking.*

- ? How do we define / understand each type of evaluation and the relationship between them for the evaluation of ICTs?
- ? Can the same framework be used for various types of evaluation (impact evaluation, monitoring, learning evaluation ... etc.)?
- ? Can we construct a framework that would be useful for any type of ICT project?
- ? Is our framework a zoom lens, or a panoramic lens? What is the level of the analysis?
- ? How would the framework differ for various types of evaluation (impact evaluation, monitoring, evaluation)?
- ? **ADVANCING:** *What other questions need to be addressed in this area?*

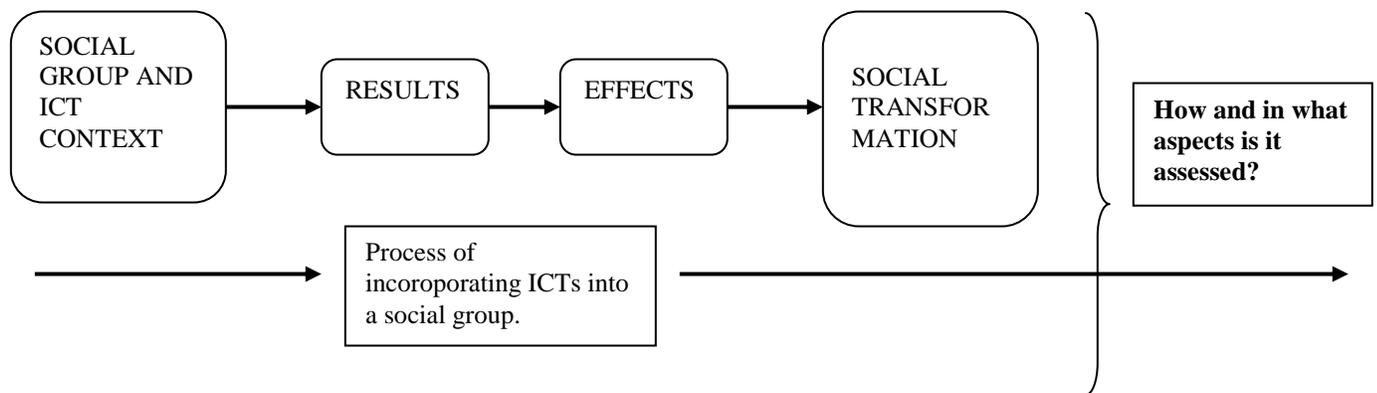
## Group 2

### WHAT WILL THE FRAMEWORK'S ICT EVALUATION FOCUS BE?

**DEPARTURE POSITION:** The focus of ICT evaluation should be in the social transformations that result. ICT evaluation should always respond to the question: what is changing in the society and in the social groups as a result of the incorporation of ICTs?

However, this category of social transformation cannot be left open, because evaluations cannot undertake to explain all the social transformations that result from ICTs. This is especially true given that ICTs as an information and communication tool permeate all the activities of social groups. ICT evaluation should centre on the analysis of the social transformation that ICTs cause, but the framework should place limits on the specific aspects of social transformation that will be considered. These specific aspects will be reflected in the evaluation questions and categories of analysis of the framework. These categories should reflect the process by which each framework seeks to explain how the Internet manages to produce social transformation.

The frameworks produced by IDRC projects should include an explanation of how the process, starting with incorporation of the Internet and ending with social transformation, will be understood and analysed. Starting with the context of the social group(s), the conditions of the incorporation of ICTs into this reality, the impacts of this process, the results and finally the positive and negative transformations that ICTs have provoked in the social group and society in general.



**PREVIOUS MESSAGES:** *Here are some observations that have been made on this issue.*

- ⇒ The Internet and evaluations can be part of a process of social transformation. The framework should address social transformations that result from ICTs.
- ⇒ Many projects include ICTs, however only a subset of these use ICTs as a tool for social transformation.
- ⇒ People look for solutions to their problems, not for “information”. Everyone’s problems are a combination of issues and the context in which the person finds him/herself. They are not a series of specialised and self-contained questions. The value of information lies in trust, and trust itself lies in direct acquaintance, actual application, replicability and cultural acceptability. All other conditions being equal, irrespective of the quality of information available, it is the “quality” of people which makes the difference. Unprepared, unfit, unwilling people cannot make effective use of the best information.
- ⇒ The object of an evaluation is made of several layers: 1) ICTs and people’s use of them, 2) the information (and underlying knowledge) accessed and people’s use of it, 3) the resulting social activities, 4) the resulting social transformations. These layers are interacting. They are dependant on common but also specific background social characteristics. The focus of the evaluation can be on any of these layers. I would prefer a focus on the last layer, in which the 3 others are treated as condition (or independent variables).
- ⇒ Would we include in the social transformation, the transformation in the technological infrastructure after people, somehow, appropriate these tools?
- ⇒ We believe and/or want to test the hypothesis that ICTs have a greater potential than many other "development" tools to change the (dynamic) structures of underdevelopment. That means changing the social (.economic, cultural, organisational, individual) exchange patterns and relations between countries, social groups, communities and people that cause and maintain domination, poverty, exploitation, inequality, lack of justice and freedom, etc.. Not just alleviating were its hurts too much and keeping same social patterns. That's one thing we definitely need to evaluate/determine with.
- ⇒ The framework should be action oriented. It should have a set of fundamental rules and form an ethical platform.

**Questions:** *Here are some questions that will help guide your thinking.*

- ? Where will IDRC put its emphasis when working in ICT evaluation?
- ? Should the IDRC framework focus only on social transformation resulting from ICTs, or should it analyse the process of social transformation resulting from ICT incorporation?
- ? How do we understand social transformation resulting from ICTs and what types of things should be incorporated and analysed under the heading “ICTs and Social Transformation”?
- ? What will be incorporated and analysed within the process of placing ICTs in a social group?
- ? **ADVANCING:** *What other questions need to be addressed in this area?*

### **Group 3**

#### **WHAT KIND OF FRAMEWORK ARE WE DEVELOPING?**

**DEPARTURE POSITION:** The majority of evaluation frameworks that are developed are academic exercises that are not used to conduct evaluations. They remain a vision of experts or become a requirement of donor agencies.

A fundamental difference would arise from the incorporation of the visions, needs and interests of all actors. It would be ideal, but not always possible, if the content of the framework could be produced through participatory processes in which all the involved actors are represented. Just as evaluation is a learning process, the construction of a framework also provides an opportunity for capacity building. The framework is not just a document, but also a guide for understanding the phenomenon that is being restructured and redefined as the work is realised.

We have had a discussion around these very reflections, and we will take it up again in this workgroup.

#### **What Characterizes a good framework?**

We have defined four characteristics that a good framework should possess

1. Is an emergent and dynamic mental map: A framework is a way to interpret reality that helps us to delimit the scope, to prioritise issues to be addressed, and to organise ideas and tasks for the implementation of research.
2. Supports flexible, participatory learning: A good framework is supportive of flexible, ongoing learning that, when implemented, facilitates action. It balances the choice of methods with responsiveness to the needs of stakeholders. It encourages and promotes an open-minded attitude to learn and explore. It allows for boldly going where no one has gone before. A good framework is an initial proposal which will be practically implemented, and which is constantly refined during its application. A good framework is thus also one of the resultant products after the evaluation is complete.
3. Proposes and designs practical and relevant methodologies: In this sense a framework provides a guiding blueprint for the evaluation, defining the relations between the analytical model, research questions, categories of analysis, variables, indicators, and the proposed methods and techniques for investigating these in real terms. A good framework takes into consideration theoretical and analytical underpinnings and allows comparisons, and the identification of commonalities and uniqueness.
4. Promotes effective exchange and dissemination of information. A good framework allows researchers to share and complement the work of others working on similar topics. It makes visible examples and good practices and proposes ways to disseminate results widely and accessibly.

**PREVIOUS MESSAGES:** *Here are some observations that have been made on this issue.*

- 
- ⇒ An evaluation framework could be highly centralised, structured and top-down, it could be decentralised and participatory, or some combination thereof
  - ⇒ How can we ensure that methods and forms of analysing the Internet are not carried out from the perspective of “experts”? Such a process for producing frameworks would not empower ICT users. The vision of “experts” is not the same and does not take into account that of the common person.
  - ⇒ Evaluations need to be carried out by the actors involved, and need to take stakeholders into consideration or include them in the process. Both the process of producing frameworks, and ICT evaluation should be participatory.
  - ⇒ A framework as a set of predefined and exclusive steps, criteria, and procedures is not of much use. But a set of principles, domains and boundaries, if it is inspired and clear, is a must.
  - ⇒ A key reason for creating a framework is to aid in gaining an understanding, or learning. Logical frameworks are dreadful. Mostly a nice fiction, especially when it comes to "verification means". It seems the "controllers" are only interested in the internal coherence of the document. Whether its content does or not reflect any tangible reality is at best secondary. Yet they can be helpful as a guide for formulating a project. Thus again, the issue behind is ethics and values.
  - ⇒ Ideological vagueness can undermine the goals of a framework by counteracting learning and change.
  - ⇒ The framework needs to be of practical use to the people working in the field. In order to be both useful, and widely used, it needs to be both specific and flexible to local realities and needs.
  - ⇒ A framework is a tool to help draw linkages between the abstract and the concrete.
  - ⇒ Frameworks are academic exercises that don't get put into practice. They are not developed collectively, so they become an intellectual exercise.
  - ⇒ A good framework should establish goals. Our goal is that results be turned into useful tools and instruments useful to the people doing the work.
  - ⇒ The process is as important as the result. Evaluation should not focus on indicators to the exclusion of environment, or on analytical process to the exclusion of indicators.
  - ⇒ Specific areas of ‘extension’ should be created within the framework to address regional issues or topics. The framework should be ‘extensible’.
  - ⇒ The framework should be action oriented. It should have a set of fundamental rules and form an ethical platform.
  - ⇒ Monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment should be built and conducted as a collective learning process.
  - ⇒ The framework should be extensible and modular. Extensibility means that, as new ideas emerge, they can be implemented by any user of the framework (and added to it) without having to change the core framework. Extensibility permits the core framework to be simple and the overall framework to address all types of ICT uses in all contexts.

**Questions:** *Here are some questions that will help guide your thinking.*

- ? What makes IDRC's evaluation framework distinct from other agencies' frameworks?
- ? What is the purpose of the framework?
- ? How do we build the framework?
- ? How can the framework be used such that it is a useful tool for the execution of evaluations?
- ? What is the ideology behind the framework?
- ? How can we transcend the theoretical approach of a framework?
- ? How do we propose to assure that all interested actors will be represented in the framework?
- ? How can the framework respond to and represent reality?
- ? What is our concept of a framework? A set of steps, criteria, and procedures, or a set of principles, domains, and boundaries? Inspiration and clarification, or calibration?
- ? How are stakeholders / how should stakeholders be included in the process of designing frameworks and carrying out evaluations?
- ? What research needs to be included in / done for the development of the framework?
- ? What research needs to be done to support ICT evaluation or to facilitate the implementation of the framework?
- ? **ADVANCING:** *What other questions need to be addressed in this area?*

**Group 4****WHAT DIFFERENTIATES AN ICT EVALUATION FRAMEWORK?**

**DEPARTURE POSITION:** There are not substantial differences between ICT evaluation and the evaluation of other social phenomenon. The theory, the tools, methods, and instruments that are used for social evaluation are perfectly applicable to ICT evaluation. We know this given the fact that we understand and analyse ICTs as a social phenomenon, not as a technical phenomenon.

A very important challenge in the evaluation of ICTs is the delimitation of the object of study; to be able to respond to the question: What is going to be evaluated? This is always important in any evaluation of a social phenomenon, but in the case of ICTs, it is especially important because the influence of the Internet as a communications and information tool is immense and rapidly changing in society.

In the listserv, the difference that ICTs make as a tool for evaluation of ICTs has been discussed. It is certainly the case that ICTs have an impact on evaluation, and not only ICT evaluation, but also evaluation and research in general. The theoretical and methodological discoveries that we can make around the use of ICTs for evaluation will apply to any area of social evaluation and vice-versa.

But also, it is certain that we could evaluate ICTs perfectly well without using ICTs. Obviously this would disadvantage us, as it would any other group of evaluators, but this assertion is methodologically valid and possible

ICTs affect both the tangible and the intangible. For example, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, or empowerment can be taken into account within the model that we use when we talk about the evaluation of ICTs.

**PREVIOUS MESSAGES:** *Here are some observations that have been made on this question.*

- ⇒ ICTs affect all aspects of the activities of a social group. Thus in ICT evaluation, the creation of questions and analytical categories becomes very important. There is a methodological challenge in that it becomes necessary to clearly define what is going to be evaluated.
- ⇒ When evaluating the impact of ICTs, ICTs will invariably be used. There is a question of *sources* of information and *methods* of analysis. Often ICT use itself will automatically generate data.
- ⇒ I agree that they are ICT evaluation and using ICT for evaluation are separate in terms of purpose, but blurred in terms of what evaluators need to learn, how to do, to design, and to implement.
- ⇒ Evaluation using ICTs is a field of study unto itself.
- ⇒ Information may transform not only objective behaviour, but also intangible assets such as intellectual and social capital.

**Questions:** *Here are some questions that will help guide your thinking.*

- ? Are there fundamental differences between evaluation of ICTs and evaluations of other social phenomenon?
- ? Does evaluation of ICTs necessarily use ICTs? How does this impact the evaluations?
- ? How do we know if a change is as a result of the technology, the information, the learning process, communication, or some other factor?
- ? How can / should ICTs be used in conducting evaluations?
- ? Do ICTs have greater potential than other development tools?
- ? **ADVANCING:** *What other questions need to be addressed in this area?*

**Work Session 2, Group 2**  
**CONDUCTING EVALUATIONS**

**Points of Departure:** *Here are some observations that have been made on this question.*

- ⇒ Evaluations need to be carried out by the actors involved, and need to take stakeholders into consideration or include them in the process. Both the process of producing frameworks, and ICT evaluation should be participatory.
- ⇒ When evaluating the impact of ICTs, ICTs will invariably be used, either because they will generate some of the data being studied, or as tools in the evaluation process.
- ⇒ The visions of stakeholders need to be incorporated into evaluations.

**Questions:** *Here are some questions that will help guide your thinking.*

- ? How can / should ICTs be used in conducting evaluations?
- ? How are stakeholders / how should stakeholders be included in the process of designing frameworks and carrying out evaluations?
- ? What research needs to be included in / done for the development of the framework?
- ? What research needs to be done to support ICT evaluation or to facilitate the implementation of the framework?
- ? Do ICTs have greater potential than other development tools?
- ?
- ? **ADVANCING:** *What other questions need to be addressed in this area?*

### Work Session 2, Group 3

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE FRAMEWORK

**Points of Departure:** *Here are some observations that have been made on this question.*

- ⇒ Analytical categories should reflect the process by which each framework seeks to explain how the Internet manages to produce social transformations. The analysis of social transformation due to the Internet involves understanding the process that manages to deliver this social transformation. This should be reflected in the analytical categories.
- ⇒ Analytical categories should include definition of context (\*national, organizational culture), and definition of impact.
- ⇒ A good framework should allow for the use of case studies but avoid concentrating too heavily on isolated cases without comparing them with other examples. By comparing various cases in a structured analytical model the user will be able to look beyond specific isolated cases of success within a few individual groups.
- ⇒
- ⇒ There is a need to distinguish between core/generic components and contributions which address limited needs or singular priorities.
- ⇒ A framework for ICT evaluation should include a concise core set of guidelines on concepts, methods and sources, a real world methodology, a shared system for reporting of evaluation results, and definitions of impact and impact evaluation.
- ⇒ The link between proposal formulation, proposal evaluation, project design, project monitoring, project evaluation, and impact evaluation should be addressed.
- ⇒ The evaluative framework must be composed of questions, categories of analysis, variable, indicators, and most importantly the interrelations that exist between them. What is most important is the construction of an interpretative model, not the creation of specific indicators.
- ⇒ We may want to accompany the framework with research or background materials (beyond specifically applicable examples or references) that will makes its implementation more successful.

### Work Session 2, Group 3: Structure of the Framework Continued

**Questions:** *Here are some questions that will help guide your thinking.*

- ? What is the most effective structure for ensuring that the framework is not a bureaucratic exercise, that it is *accessible and used*?
- ? How can the framework be structured such that it can evolve with the rapid changes in ICTs? Can it be extensible and modular?

- ? What is the best structure to ensure that the framework is applicable to a wide range of groups?
- ? How will the use of ICTs in ICT evaluation be incorporated into our ICT framework?
- ? **ADVANCING:** *What other questions need to be addressed in this area?*