

PROPOSAL FOR AN EVALUATION APPROACH OF THE IARC MEDIUM-TERM STRATEGY 2016–2020

Background

1. The Governing Council, during its discussion on the [IARC Medium-Term Strategy for 2016–2020 \(MTS\)](#) in May 2015, highlighted the need for monitoring its implementation and approved a resolution requesting the Director:

"...to make a proposal for an evaluation approach of the Medium-Term Strategy 2016–2020 to the next session of the Governing Council in 2016."

2. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide an assessment of the Agency's progress overall in implementing the MTS by monitoring achievement of results, assessing their alignment with the stated strategic priorities and their contribution to attaining the high-level objectives set out in the IARC Project Tree (see [Annex 3 of MTS](#)). The evaluation during the course of the MTS would identify any changes in direction or in emphasis among the objectives originally specified.

3. This global evaluation of the MTS implementation is complementary to and is supported by the evaluation of individual Sections and Groups, for which the peer-review process remains the primary mechanism for assessing the quality and alignment of the programmes to the MTS. Indeed, one of the main challenges in assessing progress against the MTS is to reconcile the five-year rolling cycle of each Section/Group's peer-reviews with the MTS evaluation, which itself only has a five-year duration.

4. The present document outlines IARC's proposed approach to an MTS evaluation framework for discussion by the Scientific Council. The feedback from these discussions will inform the development of a proposal which will be submitted to the Governing Council at its next session. This will be followed by a more detailed proposal on the monitoring methodology, including the mechanisms for collecting information on specific metrics and indicators, as well as examples of case studies for evaluating impact on policy.

5. IARC already collects data on a number of key performance indicators (KPIs) which are reported annually to the Governing Council by the Director, both through a written report and an oral presentation. The list of standard KPIs has gradually expanded over the years (see Annex below); they are designed to measure variations over short timeframes rather than long-term trends, and not to capture more qualitative outcomes such as the impact of the Agency's activities. Accordingly, an additional evaluation framework focused on the MTS is required.

Proposed approach and process

6. In order to develop an evaluation framework that would allow comparisons and benchmarking with equivalent organizations, a search was conducted for information on similar approaches implemented in other national research agencies and institutes. Remarkably few examples were found of descriptions of the methodology used in these types of organizations. The methodology developed by the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) and the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (CAHS)¹ seemed the most comprehensive attempt to develop a generic impact assessment model. Even though this was initially aimed at providing an assessment of “return on investment” for funding agencies, its final scope was broader and some of the proposed indicators are relevant for a research institution such as IARC.

7. Any process for evaluation of the MTS must encompass the full range of activities of the Agency and take account of the organization’s particular mission as the cancer agency of the WHO. The MTS comprises three broad areas and our proposal is to structure a review of the MTS implementation around them, as follows:

- Advancing knowledge for cancer prevention through research (with three sub-categories: describing the occurrence; understanding the causes; evaluating and implementing prevention and control strategies);
- Increasing the capacity for cancer research (again with three sub-categories: increasing human resources; developing new methodologies; providing the resources and infrastructure to support and enhance research);
- Providing strategic research leadership (including shaping the international cancer research agenda and enabling and supporting the efficient conduct and coordination of research).

8. While the proposed framework for evaluating the MTS implementation would be centred on these three areas, different metrics would be selected for the objectives under consideration. The following three paragraphs provide a first indication of the types of analysis which could be performed once the MTS evaluation framework is agreed.

9. The research conducted by the Agency aims to advance knowledge for cancer prevention and this may be assessed in three principal ways. First, through contributions to the scientific literature, including bibliometric analyses of publications in scientific journals, monographs, working group reports, technical reports, etc. Second, examination of the ability to attract extra-budgetary funding as an indicator of research competitiveness. Third, the progress achieved in the ongoing Sections/Groups’ activities measured against the specific objectives set out in the Implementation Plans within the MTS.

10. Increasing capacity for research will be assessed through a range of metrics including metrics on Fellowships, other trainee opportunities, courses, publications (e.g. of training manuals, guidelines, etc.) and support to the development of infrastructure capacity (e.g. laboratory platforms, biobanks, cancer registries, etc.). IARC’s contribution to

¹ CIHR – <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/40470.html> and <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/43016.html#s5>
CAHS – http://www.cahs-acss.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/ROI_FullReport.pdf

strengthening local research capacity and development of collaborative networks in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) would be assessed through analyses of the collaborative research agreements that IARC establishes with organizations worldwide and by the degree to which IARC publishes in conjunction with scientists in these regions.

11. Strategic leadership can be assessed in a number of ways. One is the participation of IARC in international initiatives, such as the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force or the WHO Global Coordinating Mechanism for NCDs. Another level is the degree to which IARC supports national and regional policy development and decision-making through participation in national cancer control planning, steering committees, working groups etc. A third level is the contribution of the Agency to the global cancer research community through coordination of scientific networks, consortia or participation on key committees. Communication of scientific findings to key stakeholders would also be an essential element of this component of the MTS. The assessment of the policy impact of the Agency's research is primarily of a qualitative nature and would be illustrated through case studies.

12. To conduct the evaluation, as with the approach adopted for the development of the MTS, the Agency will convene a Joint Working Group composed of six members of the Scientific Council and four members of the Governing Council.

13. The IARC Secretariat would prepare a report structured around the three areas mentioned above, including key performance indicators and other metrics to be decided: advancing knowledge through research, increasing research capacity and strategic research leadership.

14. This evaluation would be carried out mid-way through the MTS implementation, i.e. in mid-2018, and the conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group will be submitted to the Scientific and Governing Councils the following year. This would permit the Agency two years to implement the MTS before preparation of the report for assessment by the Joint Working Group.

Questions to the Scientific Council

15. The Scientific Council is asked to comment on the proposed approach, specifically on the establishment of a Joint Working Group and its composition, and to discuss the broad outline of the structure of the review and types of analyses proposed.

16. The Scientific Council is asked to share information on approaches used in their research institutes or elsewhere in their countries for equivalent assessments of the implementation of strategic plans, and insights into their application.

ANNEX – Standard Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
included each year in the Director's Report to the Governing Council

Analysis of IARC's scientific publications output

- Total numbers of papers published by Agency staff:
 - peer reviewed articles
 - letters to the Editor or comments
 - invited reviews
 - editorials/news and other contributions
- Proportion of IARC papers published in top 20% of journals in their subject category
- Comparison of IARC's research output ranking with that of other research institutes:
 - NI – Normalized Impact – ratio between the average scientific impact of an institution's publications and the average impact of all publications of the same type and subject
 - Q1 – High Quality Publications – proportion of an institution's publications in journals ranked in the top quartile in their categories
 - IC – International Collaboration – proportion of an institution's publications whose co-author affiliations include addresses in more than one country

Publishing and information dissemination

- Volume of and revenue from sales of publications
- Access to IARC's online publications and resources:
 - Volume of visits to IARC's websites
 - Volume of downloads from IARC's websites

Voluntary contributions to IARC (grants and contracts)

- Extrabudgetary funding secured:
 - Total value of signed contracts
 - Value attributed to IARC
 - Voluntary contribution expenditure
- Proportion of extrabudgetary funding:
 - As a percentage of the overall Regular Budget
 - As a percentage of the Regular Budget for scientific programme

Education and Training

- Number of IARC Fellowships awarded and proportion awarded to fellows from LMICs
- Number of Senior Visiting Scientist Fellowships awarded
- Number of IARC courses organized, number of participants and proportion of courses held in LMICs