

IDRC in Eastern and Southern Africa

For nearly 40 years, Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has helped researchers and innovators in developing countries find new ways to improve health, reduce poverty, and promote democracy. In sub-Saharan Africa, IDRC has funded more than 3 500 research activities.

To deepen its involvement in the region, IDRC opened a regional office in Nairobi in 1975. Today this office coordinates the organization's work in 23 countries. In 2008-2009, IDRC pursued more than 280 research activities in sub-Saharan Africa, worth more than CA\$23 million. Many of these activities involve research networks that span several countries.

Over the years, IDRC's ties with the region have been strengthened by the participation of eminent Africans on its 21-member Board of Governors. Numerous citizens of Eastern and Southern Africa have served on the Board, most recently Norah Olembo, biochemist and professor at the University of Nairobi.

MEETING DIVERSE NEEDS

IDRC's work in Eastern and Southern Africa concentrates both on identifying new technical, institutional, and policy solutions to the region's challenges, and on creating platforms where multiple players can collaborate on confronting these problems.

Its programming reflects the diverse needs of the countries in the region.

IDRC seeks:

- to understand the causes and consequences of violent conflict, and to strengthen transitions from conflict to lasting peace;
- to reduce vulnerability to disease and natural disasters, and improve the management of natural resources and the environment; and
- to increase opportunities for sustainable economic growth and equitable access to basic social services.

In pursuit of these aims, IDRC funds applied research on pressing problems. It focuses on studies that will influence policy and practice. And it develops research capacity among individual Africans as well as institutional capacity to support them.

Here are examples of the research supported by IDRC in the region.

Environment and Natural Resource Management — *Adaptation to change*

In the coming years, the entire African continent will face major effects from climate change. These will include food and water insecurity, declining public health — including increased incidence of HIV/AIDS — widening and deepening poverty, and ineffective governance. To help Africans adapt to these shocks, IDRC has joined with the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) in a \$50 million, five-year research program on Climate Change Adaptation in Africa (CCAA).

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One of CCAA's many projects is underway in the highlands of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, where warming has allowed malarial mosquitoes to move upland into territory previously too cool for them. Here, the incidence of malaria increased between 146% and 300% over the baseline average for 1995-2002. Local health systems have been unprepared for these outbreaks, leading to untold suffering and many deaths. IDRC supports the Kenya Medical Research Institute in an initiative that combines climate observation with medical research to predict highland malaria outbreaks so that officials can better confront them.

IDRC also fights malaria in Kenya by mobilizing its pioneering "ecohealth" approach. This method recognizes the complex dynamic between environmental and human health, and seeks to improve the management of ecosystems in ways that are sustainable and safeguard human well-being. Thus, IDRC-funded researchers have investigated how farmers can modify their agricultural practices to reduce their exposure to the mosquito vector of malaria.

Another ecohealth initiative, the Regional Network on HIV/AIDS, Rural Livelihoods and Food Security (RENEWAL) was launched in 2001 in six countries to explore the links between HIV/AIDS and security in food and nutrition. This research has mapped the vicious downward spiral linking disease and hunger: people suffering from AIDS are too sick to till their farms, so they grow less food and weaken further; meanwhile, poor people, desperate for income, engage in transactional sex and become infected with HIV/AIDS.

Since the early 1980s, IDRC has funded research on urban agriculture to improve food security and health, find ways to recycle waste and wastewater, and stimulate livelihoods in the region. Worldwide, IDRC has supported innovative projects in selected "focus cities," linking urban poverty alleviation, environmental management, and natural resource use to promote food, water, and income security. In Kampala, Uganda, a research team helps residents combine waste recycling and "city farming" by developing alternative agro-enterprises, reusing wastewater, and introducing sustainable solid-waste management.

Information and Communication Technologies for Development *Exploring new frontiers of knowledge*

IDRC was among the first of many development agencies to recognize information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a key means to foster development and reduce poverty. In this region, IDRC has supported the application of ICTs in health systems. Since 2003, for example, Ugandan researchers have been testing a telemedicine network that relies on low-cost wireless technologies. This system is cheaper and more efficient in providing information and education to healthcare professionals than conventional means. It also makes broad health surveys possible. Industry Canada supports a third phase of this project.

An initiative called Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment (GRACE) explores how poor women use modern communication technologies, like mobile telephony or the Internet, to improve their lives. The ultimate goal is to remove the obstacles that women entrepreneurs, artisans, students, or local leaders may encounter in accessing these essential tools. Meanwhile, the program has begun building a self-sustaining research network, focused on gender and ICT issues in Africa that will pursue these enquiries in the long term. GRACE provides training and support to research teams from 12 countries, including seven in Eastern and Southern Africa.

IDRC also fosters the development of public policy on ICTs in several African countries. Local researchers are connected through Research ICT Africa, a network of centres committed to providing to policymakers the data and analysis they need to carry out effective governance in the public interest. The network, launched with seed funding from IDRC, is hosted by the EDGE Institute in Johannesburg.

In another effort, the Rwanda Education and Research Network is one of the five founders of an IDRC-supported African alliance of national research and education networks that collaborate to buy bandwidth, thereby reducing connectivity costs. Computers for Schools Kenya, an initiative

funded by IDRC in partnership with Industry Canada, boosts the number of computers in schools by training students to refurbish used equipment. Its success led Uganda's government to launch its own refurbishing program.

Innovation, Policy and Science *Mobilizing knowledge for progress*

Science and technology (S&T) contribute substantially both to economic performance and social development. Whether in the private sector, academia, government, or civil society, S&T give people and organizations the tools to reach their goals and fulfill their responsibilities. Since S&T can be powerful weapons against poverty, IDRC encourages research on policies that foster creativity and innovation.

In 2005, the Government of Mozambique created a new Ministry of Science and Technology, and asked IDRC for support in formulating a strategy for using scientific innovation to help create wealth, reduce poverty, and increase people's well-being. Working with the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), IDRC has brought expertise from Brazil and South Africa into the planning process, with priority given to sectors such as health, agriculture, energy, and construction.

An initiative led by the World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ) and funded by IDRC, DFID, and Sida helps science reporters in developing countries tackle the challenges of isolation and the shortages of training, resources, and support. The WFSJ has engaged seasoned science journalists to share their knowledge and expertise with their less-experienced colleagues in the Middle East and Africa (including journalists from Eastern and Southern Africa). Thanks to modern communications links, the journalists can readily join in "peer-to-peer mentoring." Early results have included published articles, further online resources and lessons, and expanded networks in the Middle East and Africa. The program involves nine associations of science journalists from Africa, four of these from sub-Saharan Africa.

Social and Economic Policy *Informing public debate*

IDRC works to strengthen long-term research capacities, support policy-relevant research, and facilitate public accountability. In so doing, it seeks the creation of public policies that can help reduce poverty and enhance social equity in developing countries.

IDRC supports several efforts that share a common concern for policies, research, and systems oriented to ensuring that people get fair access to medical care. Since early 2004, for instance, IDRC has funded research teams in South Africa's Free State province that collaborate with health department officials to boost AIDS treatment, including antiretroviral therapy. This twinning of researchers with research users has led to evidence-based innovations in the areas of nurse training and support, the use of ICTs for patient monitoring, and community outreach — all designed to deliver medical care to the people who need it most.

For most developing countries, tourism is — or is expected to become — one of the most significant sources of economic growth. IDRC supports an investigation by UNCTAD into the economic potential of tourism in the region, with a special focus on the complex role of foreign direct investment. Researchers have examined issues like licensing and franchising, the rise of South-South ventures, and the role of South Africa as a major source of outward investment. Among the key results of this project will be enhanced research capacity and an Africa-based network of tourism experts.

Poverty and armed conflict often go together. IDRC funds research that seeks to resolve conflicts, in particular by involving local actors in the reconciliation process. For example, IDRC has supported public consultations by the Africa Peace Forum, Project Ploughshares, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development leading to the creation of a regional security framework for the Horn of Africa. The study

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BETTER HEALTH FOR AFRICANS

- In Tanzania, a groundbreaking healthcare management program supported by IDRC helped reduce under-five mortality rates by 40% in two districts.
- In South Africa, 3 750 nurses in 540 clinics in Free State and Western Cape provinces have received PALSA Plus training so far.
- Thanks to IDRC-funded research, health-care workers in remote parts of Africa use “personal digital assistants” to access information that helps them diagnose and treat patients.

addressed issues such as the roles of the military and of non-statutory armed groups, the proliferation of small arms, and border arrangements. Once implemented, this framework should help mediate emerging disputes and prevent more armed conflict in the Horn.

The Think Tank Initiative is a major collaborative program of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and IDRC to support independent policy research institutions — “think tanks” — in developing countries. The program aims to strengthen these organizations so that they can produce high-quality research and analysis on social and economic policy issues related to growth, equity, and

poverty reduction in their own countries. An initial five-year phase began in 2008, focusing on Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Uganda in East Africa, and on six countries in West Africa. Following a highly competitive selection and assessment process, the first group of 24 institutional grantees was announced in May 2009.

As in other parts of the world, the rights of women and girls in this region are often disregarded by people in power. In South Africa, for example, researchers discovered that while national authorities might support women’s rights, local elites tended to obstruct them. IDRC’s response has been to support analyses of political and administrative decentralization with respect to the rights of women and girls. The findings of these studies should help inform similar future reforms so that these rights will be strengthened.

For further information on IDRC’s work in specific countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, visit www.idrc.ca/esaro Or contact IDRC’s Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa:

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For nearly 40 years, Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has worked in close collaboration with researchers from the developing world in their search for the means to build healthier, more equitable, and more prosperous societies.

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