

### 3.4

## Changes at IDRC and its Position



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**B**efore 1992, IDRC's principal activity was direct support to researchers and institutions in developing countries for research on a wide variety of topics targeted to resolve problems affecting the poorest populations in these countries.

This was carried out through a number of divisions:

- Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Sciences (AFNS)
- Information Sciences
- Health Sciences
- Social Sciences
- Earth and Engineering Sciences
- Communications
- Fellowships and Awards
- Human Resources.



Each division had a number of programmes with programme staff who identified, developed, and monitored projects according to set criteria defined by each. These programmes essentially were organized by discipline.

AFNS is probably the most familiar of these original divisions. Its six programmes included Crop Production Systems, Animal Production Systems, Fisheries, Forestry, Post Production Systems, and Agricultural Economics. AFNS had a staff of approximately twenty-seven and an annual budget of approximately CAD 25 million.

Most AFNS staff members were based in regional offices, with a representative of each programme in most offices.

Due to continued budget limitations and a decision to implement a new, broader interdisciplinary strategy, IDRC now has six divisions:

- Environment and Natural Resources (ENR)
- Information Sciences and Systems
- Health Sciences
- Social Sciences
- Cooperative Affairs and Initiatives
- Administration

ENR is the product of a merger between AFNS, Earth and Engineering Sciences, and the Environmental Policy programme of the Social Sciences Division. Of the division's thirty positions, only nine are related to the new programme of Sustainable Production Systems (in which agricultural research can be funded); four are based in regional offices and another five in Ottawa. One of these positions is primarily concerned with crops. The new division's budget is on the order of CAD 4 million.

This means there has been a major shift at IDRC, in terms of both budget and staffing, from support for purely agricultural production research. It is assumed that this area will be covered by strengthened national programmes and other donors who have continued their support for this area.

The mission of the new Environment and Natural Resources Division, within which research in the agricultural sector is still feasible, is as follows:

*The Environment and Natural Resources Division is dedicated to supporting research to enable people, especially those that are resource poor, in developing regions of the world to meet their needs and objectives for sustainable and equitable development.*

Within this broad mandate, the division will focus on management, conservation of, and access to natural resources, particularly land and water; food security, increasing opportunities for employment through local "value-added" enterprises based on natural resources and waste management, and environmentally sound technology to avoid further degradation of the natural resources base.

The division will be looking for innovations in research and new combinations of nontraditional partners in mounting interdisciplinary systems research that includes policy and private-sector stakeholders and bridges the elusive micro-macro implementation gap.

### **Implications of Change for the Oilcrops Research Network**

With significantly reduced resources—of both funds and staff—for agricultural research and a strategy that demands a shift toward support for innovative research processes and new partnerships to achieve more rapid results and knowledge that will have an impact on people, IDRC is unable to continue supporting the Oilcrops Research Network.

Resources for purely breeding agronomic research essentially have been cut. IDRC can only support such research in collaboration with other donors and in cases where this component has been identified as a priority for improving systems so as to increase the benefits to employment, income, health, etc.

Hence, IDRC is now turning to support of innovative processes aimed at gaining understanding of systems, such as oilseeds production-to-consumption systems research (PCSR) in all its forms, identifying necessary interventions, and following up with research and action and monitoring of their impact. IDRC's limited funds imply that support for PCSR development and applications will be the centre's only avenue of support for oilseeds systems development.

Since VOPS in Kenya has broken ground in developing PCSR approaches, and initial attempts to replicate these approaches in other parts of the region have begun, IDRC's oilseeds PCSR will target the East African region only. This will be a disappointment to

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many other Oilcrops Research Network members, but this difficult decision has been necessary. The network, of course, wishes to continue a broader effort and can attract support from other donors. IDRC can at least ensure that the East African activities continue as a link in the network.

This is one of many difficult decisions IDRC has had to make after many years of building relationships with dedicated researchers throughout the developing and developed world. It is important to understand that this decision is not based on any negative evaluation of the Oilcrops Research Network, its members, or its activities.

IDRC encourages each of you to see this development as an opportunity to demonstrate that the centre's support over the years has contributed to the development of a useful association of oilseeds researchers—an association that can now decide its own future and secure sufficient resources, from within member institutions and externally, to carry on.

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# **Oilcrops Research Network**

*Proceedings of a  
Steering Committee  
Meeting and Workshop  
held in Nairobi, Kenya  
August 11-14, 1992*

Edited by  
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Organized by  
**International Development Research Centre  
Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office**

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2.8	Oilseeds Status and Potential in the WANA Region	Aktar Beg	137
2.9	Perspectives Following Review of the Indo-Swedish Collaborative Research Programme on Cruciferous Oilseeds, 1979-1990	Ingvar Ohlsson	146
2.10	Coconut Research-and-Development Activities in Tanzania	A. Mpunami, G. Chipungahelo, and A. Kullaya	153
2.11	The Status of the Sesame Germplasm Collection	Amram Ashri	163
3	Special Reports		
3.1	Minutes of the Oilcrops Research Network Steering Committee Meeting, Kenya, 14-18 January 1991	Abbas Omran	167
3.2	ORN Evaluation: Summary Report	Neil Thomas	171
3.3	Summary Report on PCSR and the Oilcrops Research Network (Special Study)	Kenneth Riley	177
✪ 3.4	Changes at IDRC and Its Position	William Edwardson	182
4	Analysis and Recommendations		
4.1	Proceedings of the Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Oilcrops Research Network Held in Nairobi, Kenya, 13 August 1992	Abbas Omran	189
4.2	Workshop Highlights and Issues Review	Amram Ashri	193
	Appendix I: Workshop Participants		199
	Appendix II: Workshop Programme		204
	Appendix III: IDRC Response to the Steering Committee		208