

**PARTNER SATISFACTION WITH IDRC'S
MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION
OF
CO-FUNDED PROJECTS**

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Acknowledgement

The consultants express their sincere appreciation to all those who took part in the survey. Their openness and frankness was a testimony to the excellent relationships which IDRC has developed with its partners. We recognize that some of the quotations may represent misunderstandings and contradictions, but the quotations are faithful to the interviews. They underline the need for better communications among partners. We accept responsibility for any errors in fact or interpretation.

Rodger Schwass
Mary Schwass
March 28, 1996.

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Sylvain Dufour of IDRC approached us in early January, 1996, to request a proposal to undertake a survey of IDRC's partners and co-funders of projects to determine their level of satisfaction with research management and advisory services provided by IDRC.

IDRC generates about 16% of its annual budget from non-parliamentary sources. To date, the following sources of revenue have been tapped:

- o debt swaps and investment (interest) income;
- o co-funding;
- o research management and advisory services;
- o proceeds from the sale of any new products or services;
- o other program-related income (publication sales, royalties & license fees).

Some of the potential revenue streams have practical limits as to how large they can become and how fast they can grow. For the foreseeable future, it appears that much of the Centre's revenue diversification will have to come from co-funding and from the sale of research management and advisory services. The Corporate Development Office is currently reviewing revenue opportunities related to:

- o proceeds from ventures, soft loans or equity investments that the Centre may make; and
- o fund-raising.

Over 80% of the revenue diversification comes from contracts; co-funding (research management & advisory services). At present, nearly all contract funding comes from the following sources:

- o Canadian sources more or less directly linked to the Federal Government (CIDA 79%, Foreign Affairs, Health and Welfare and Industry - 1%);
- o USAID (5%);
- o Scandinavian and Dutch bilaterals (5%);
- o international financial institutions (4%);
- o private foundations (2.5%).

IDRC sought the services of an external consultant to;

- o survey the level of satisfaction of its main partners with its technical project management and financial administration;
- o determine whether the clients would be likely to repeat their business with IDRC under similar circumstances; and
- o if so, to identify what these opportunities might be.

The chosen consultant was to travel to New York, Washington, The Hague, Copenhagen, Stockholm and contact Manila. No internal staff were to be interviewed as the focus was on IDRC's partners.

A proposal was submitted in mid-January and approval was given to proceed on February 7, 1996. Initial meetings with IDRC began on February 8, 1996. A representative sample of IDRC's principal partners was identified, an interview schedule [Appendix 2] was developed and a travel schedule was approved. To save money, it was agreed that communication with Manila would be by E-Mail and Fax, and that Copenhagen would be added to the list of cities to be visited. It was agreed that a draft

report would be prepared by March 18 and a Final Report by March 31, 1996.

The plan called for meetings with approximately 30 of the individuals responsible for projects involving co-funding by IDRC and its partners. Canadian institutions included CIDA and Health Canada. European institutions included SIDA [Sweden], DANIDA [Denmark] and MFA [Netherlands]. Other international institutions included the Asian Development Bank, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development [World Bank], USAID, UNDP, UNOSC, UNESCO and the Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations.

To prepare for the study, IDRC compiled a list of all co-funded projects, with sources of funding and responsible officials [Appendix 3].

The interviews were conducted between February 9, 1996 and March 8, 1996. A list of those interviewed is attached [Appendix 1].

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Development institutions and aid agencies are under extreme budgetary pressure from their governments. Pressure from government and donor agencies is forcing greater attention to program/ project accountability and project accounting. There are increased demands by donors and partners to be involved in discrete projects or specific sections of programs with recognition for the donor. The availability of loosely-defined funds for long-term developmental work, especially at the local level, is very limited.
2. Extensive studies and reviews are being conducted to determine how to redefine North/South, South/North and South/South relationships, to focus aid dollars more carefully and to develop new ways of connecting North and South. IDRC is generally seen as an innovator with great flexibility. Regional Offices are seen to be the keys to identifying promising local individuals and organizations and for setting up essential networks which can link North and South.
3. There is emphasis on building capacity in the South. This will be a slow process, requiring the identification of good people, projects and institutions. The Regional Offices were perceived as the best place for this work to be done.
4. IDRC's extensive networks, including electronic networks, were cited as models for the future and many suggestions were received for new networks. However, the networks should soon be independent of IDRC, so they may not represent a long-term source of income.
5. There was frequent discussion in Europe about less expensive alternatives to the identification and nurturance of young research talent in the South, and praise for the International Foundation for Science, which is perceived to be an efficient mechanism for this purpose.
6. There were criticisms of IDRC's management and administration systems and of its communication with partners. There appears to be a need for a central clearing house for information in Ottawa, as some partners complained about lack of information on demand. IDRC needs to communicate to its partners its new theme areas and emphasize its continuing attention to such fields as Agriculture & Food, Health, Biotechnology, Fisheries and Coastal Zone Management.
7. Special attention needs to be given to the relationship with CIDA. While some projects are going very well, there was considerable criticism of IDRC, most of which seems to be attributable to incompatible accounting and management systems and lack of information.
8. People spoke with regret about the "loss" of agriculture and health programs at IDRC, not realizing that current themes cover these areas.

9. There was enthusiasm for IDRC's work on major projects such as the Micronutrient Initiative and the NEAP Implementation in Vietnam. A number of projects of a similar kind were suggested for the future.
10. Although IDRC is just beginning to work with departments of the Government of Canada, there seems to be satisfaction with early initiatives and many suggestions for expansion of this work. It was suggested that IDRC should become a member of the Capital Project Action Committee and that it expand links with Canadian NGOs and the private sector.
11. There appears to be a potential conflict within IDRC's strategic plan between IDRC's role as a co-funder and its role in international research co-ordination. It must recognize that different rules apply and that public spending cannot be expected except on a fully competitive basis. This could bring IDRC into competition with universities, research institutions, private corporations and private consulting companies which could lay claim to IDRC's core funding.
12. IDRC has the ability, stature and trust to continue to be a leader in defining the role of science in the development process, including establishing and assessing programs, setting priorities and allocating resources. It has been particularly successful in accomplishing this through seminars, workshops and support to Southern individuals and institutions to address critical issues where research may be the key to finding solutions.

If this remains a priority, IDRC needs to position itself to be on the cutting edge of new areas of research and be prepared to support the research community in those fields. Individuals, small groups and institutions need continuing support. IDRC must therefore lobby with its central funding agencies for expanded support, based on the essential nature of its global services.

3. APPROACH TO THE STUDY

The limited time available for the study meant that the research design was very simple.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

Step One

The first step was to meet with IDRC staff to discuss the evolution of IDRC's contract research activities¹ and to review specific projects in detail. This led to the identification of key contacts in organizations which work with IDRC on these projects.

Step Two

The second step was the preparation of the draft interview schedule [Appendix 2], which was designed to guide the discussion with each interviewee concerning the relevant IDRC projects and the experience of the partners with:

- IDRC's management and approach;
- technical project management issues that have arisen;
- the partner's experience with other partners; and
- approaches to possible future relationships, projects, linkages and opportunities for co-funded² projects with IDRC.

Step Three

The third step was to set up interviews. A total of 31 of these were conducted between February 9, 1996 and March 8, 1996.

Since it was recognized that the discussions would range widely over the current global situation with respect to "development", "aid" and the relationships between and among donors, interviewees were encouraged to examine in detail the future role and place of IDRC in this context. Many of these observations are either quoted directly or summarized in the text which follows.

As a condition of the interviews, the consultants promised that no quotations would be attributed

¹ Contract research, undertaken by what is now called the Corporate Development Office, includes co-funded activities and research management and advisory services as defined by IDRC Services.

² There are several meanings for "co-funded". In this report, co-funding is defined using the IDRC Services, now Corporate Development Office, definition that the project funds come from two or more donors (including IDRC). All the funds are pooled (i.e. they come to the IDRC bank account) which manages and reports on their disbursement.

directly to individuals. All interviewees participated willingly in the survey and, in many cases, were extremely frank and open in their observations.

After the interviews were completed, the consultants prepared the Draft Report based on the interviews and presented it for review and discussion with IDRC staff. The Final Report was then prepared.

4. PARTNER SATISFACTION WITH IDRC

4.1. The Present Role and Place of IDRC

There is severe budget pressure on international development and aid programs in all countries and in all institutions we visited with the possible exception of DANIDA and IFA, Netherlands. Politicians are exerting much more control both over aid funding and the aid agenda. There is much public and internal questioning of the role of aid and the role of donors.

There was a pervasive sense that Southern countries are working hard and are becoming richer through trade and by their own effort. They are no longer short of capital. Studies by SIDA comparing the development of Bangladesh and Tanzania seem to show that Sweden's extensive aid has not only been wasted, but harmful to sustainable indigenous development. The Swedes plan to reduce aid to a very few, targeted situations and rely on networking and trade for the rest.

Traditional aid was often referred to as counterproductive, since it seems to end up with rich elites through corruption. What does get through to the poor may foster dependency, raise local prices and compete with local producers. Furthermore there is a perception that UN Agencies have lost credibility and direction. FAO and UNESCO, and to a lesser extent WHO, were singled out as having virtually no role. Networks of activists using new technologies, could accomplish their functions more effectively at far less cost.

In Holland, Denmark and Sweden, studies of the long-term prospects for development have been undertaken. The largest is Swedish SIDA's Project 2015, which attempts to envision the world in 2015 and then to examine how Sweden can begin now to make it a better place. In general, the studies support the sense that aid to local initiatives, organizations and people is valuable and capacity building for sustainable development seems to be the current means to achieve that goal. Donors are trying to identify Southern individuals and organizations in the hope that they can collaboratively identify needs, set agendas and implement future projects.

In this context, IDRC is seen as an innovator with great flexibility. Regional offices are seen as the key to identifying promising local organizations and institutions and for setting up essential networks. EEPSEA, BELLANET, INBAR, ATPS and AERC were all cited as models. At the same time, many cautioned that the goal is to encourage local and regional organizations to take full responsibility for the networks as soon as their capacities will permit the transfer and that IDRC cannot expect a long-term role as convenor of such networks.

This role would require identification of the need for the network, identification of key people and institutions who could be involved, provision of equipment and training and initiation of the network. Early events would need to be facilitated and a routine self-evaluation system set up so network members can continue to improve its functioning. After that, if it is serving a purpose, people will keep it going without outside intervention.

Many people spoke with great affection for IDRC, but often with respect to the Agriculture and Health programs which many believe no longer exist. A number of people proposed re-establishing both and adding both Biotechnology and Coastal Zone Management. Fisheries research was stressed as an area of present strength and involvement by IDRC.

There was considerable enthusiasm in Europe for the IFS [International Foundation for Science in

Stockholm] model of networking and capacity building. It is a network of 1100 scientists in many countries, which provides grants, guidance and equipment to young scholars from the developing countries. A small secretariat manages a substantial fund, which comes from various donors including private foundations. Research foci include Aquatic Resources, Animal Production, Crop Science, Forestry/Agroforestry, Food Science and Natural Products. A favourable evaluation of IFS was conducted in 1993 by a team including Ivan Head, former President of IDRC.

IFS appears to have grown out of the Pugwash Conference in 1971. It has not developed in-house research teams but retains scientists [many of whom are volunteers] as required. Funds, equipment and supplies come from many donors, including Sweden, the US, France, Britain, Germany, Japan, Singapore, Netherlands and Argentina.

A similar role is being played by many universities, foundations and research centres in both the US and Europe.

However, even from dedicated friends of IDRC, there was a strong vein of criticism. It is best conveyed by direct quotations:

"Until three years ago, IDRC was a leading funder in the world from several points of view: integrity, support for indigenous collaboration, quality of research, support for top-flight researchers and good staff. They worked in a relationship of respect and earned world-wide respect for that. If I could collaborate with IDRC, that would open any door in research communities. This was very much to my advantage and the projects we worked on."

"This has changed. IDRC has lost its impeccable reputation as it has become a fund-seeker and compromised its standards. The programs are not as interesting. Personnel have changed. New people don't understand how long things take to design and build. This could dissipate their reputation very quickly."

"There is lack of enthusiasm. They don't appear to be on top of the issues and have drawn back from cutting edge issues. Perhaps they could have scaled down with a tighter focus on their specific areas of expertise. Agenda 21 was supposed to be focussed but ended up very broad and diffused".

"They are not looked to for the same types of partnerships. It is not so much the amount of money but they are not using their leverage with small amounts of money in innovative ways nor to support the high profile issues."

"There are excellent people at the regional offices. "

"IDRC should return to its traditional strengths such as agriculture, health, health sciences, health sector reform, and scientific and technology research in an international context."

"Donors want to see what their money buys .. they want their label on projects, especially if they are successful. Donors are really squeezing overheads down and increasing the scrutiny of financing matters and evaluating to determine whether the project is fulfilling its mandate. This kind of spirit was largely ignored by IDRC. A day with them is very pleasant but they insist that they get the dollars and do what

they like with them. Their financial breakdowns cannot be understood especially in relation to the workplan. However, under pressure, IDRC did come around with a workplan and financial outline."

4.2 Evolution of Co-Funded Projects

One of the factors that contributes to the perception that IDRC is "flexible and can turn on a dime", is the remarkable number and variety of co-funded projects in which it is involved.

i) IDRC Originated

Many of the most substantial networks seem to have originated from IDRC's own research. IDRC usually provided initial funding and then involved other donors.

In general, these projects seem to have been going well, although some donors complained about IDRC's pressure on them to fund new ventures. There was also concern about IDRC's tendency to hang onto projects for too long. Regional Offices were frequently praised for their effectiveness and sound management.

A good example is the Micronutrient Initiative Secretariat, which was started and largely funded by IDRC. It has since attracted co-funding from the World Bank and is managed by IDRC. This is regarded at the World Bank as an excellent project and perhaps a model for the future and IDRC was praised for its initiative and good management.

However, several interviewees suggested that this is a good second choice.

"The first choice is an independent implementing agency in the South to which all donors relate as equals. The International Foundation for Science in Stockholm is an excellent model, but it should be headquartered in the South".

Many interviewees were critical of co-funded projects because they usually imply a "donor driven approach".

"When the donor takes an important design role, it tends to push away or dominate Southern stakeholders".

Most European aid agencies now favour South-based organizations as implementing agencies and indicate that their support will go increasingly in that direction. At the same time, they stressed the need for further integration of both Northern and Southern scientific knowledge.

ii) Donor Initiated Projects

A good example would be the NEAP Project in Vietnam financed by the World Bank. The Bank has developed the idea of a National Environmental Action Plan, and has hired consultants to complete such plans in many countries in the South.

It asked IDRC to provide important leadership to the implementation of the Vietnam NEAP and this has been undertaken largely by the Singapore office.

World Bank is so satisfied with this project that it hopes to follow a similar approach with future NEAPs. Discussions are underway for the implementation of the Cambodia NEAP.

iii) Co-funding Agreements

This form of agreement is usually initiated by IDRC and funded by a donor.

In general, co-funding agreements were seen as an effective way to initiate projects in a wide variety of sizes and types, some of which would be well beyond IDRC's financing limits. Some agreements are with a single donor such as CIDA, while others may involve several donors.

CIDA's and SIDA's budgets are shrinking rapidly. Interviewees described this as a process of "entering a funnel". Many of the commitments for project funds are coming to an end and will not be renewed even though the projects are well researched and workable. Senior officers described their budgets as having been reduced by half in the past five years. The call is for new approaches to doing more with less.

Even with reduced budgets, however, CIDA has areas of priority which are being given increased support [Eastern Europe]. Thus, the Environmental Management Development for the Ukraine (EMDU) project in the DNIPRO river basin, appears to enjoy ample funding and strong donor support. Apart from what CIDA perceives as frequent changes of personnel, IDRC gets high marks for this project.

On the other hand, ODA budgets in Holland, Denmark and Norway remain at 1% of GDP or higher. Because of the low international value of the Canadian dollar, Canadian experts and institutions appear to be very good value and IDRC has an excellent reputation for its recent work on multi-donor projects.

The same is true at the World Bank, where bank profits are used to fund major projects such as the Micronutrient Initiative. There is a high level of satisfaction with this arrangement and it appears that similar projects in other fields could be proposed, provided that IDRC can support them with dedicated and experienced senior staff.

Two interviewees were concerned that heavy dependence by IDRC on Contribution Agreements with CIDA might be seen as "slipping the noose" of reduced Treasury Board funding. IDRC might be wiser to turn to private sector partnerships to leverage resources. The goal could be to provide IDRC's research and leadership resources to lead major projects. One result could be to increase Canadian procurement of expertise and goods, which would be of interest to the Canadian private sector. The IFI Procurement Task Force Report was cited as a useful source.

Other interviewees cited large projects such as a hypothetical World Bank proposal to build 50 hospitals in Vietnam.

"CIDA's role on such a project could be to provide intelligence to support policy, institutional development, etc. The Canadian private sector could do the work. IDRC could provide research strength to support the private sector. However, it needs to be represented on the Capital Project Action Team set up by the Government of Canada."

There are obvious contradictions between the following opinions but they show the range of views we heard about the future of IDRC.

"IDRC should get on the team and begin to work with CIDA, DFAIT, Industry and others from the private sector to assist in working out future Canadian country strategies.

"IDRC's strengths are its excellent contacts, its effective work with NGOs and its independence from government.

"Its weaknesses are that it is not part of government-to-government discussions. It is too research oriented to be a team player; its contacts may not be interested in a wider agenda than research; many of its best people have been hired away; it lacks business linkages; it has not shown much ability to use open bidding systems and it seems to be outside the Canadian Government's planning and information loop."

iv) Locally Initiated Projects and Capacity Development

The first choice of many donors seems to be locally initiated and managed projects in the South. Such projects meet locally identified needs and build capacity among local leaders and institutions. IDRC's Regional offices have clearly been effective and received extensive praise for their identification of regional and local leadership, regional and local organizations, promotion of locally generated projects and their management of regional and local networks.

One European donor described the process this way:

"If you want to provide this kind of support, you need ten to fifteen years. Start with a three-year term. In this period, the good people emerge. Progress will be slow. The key is finding people whom you can trust. Once they are identified, you place a great deal of confidence in them.

Local authorities then identify projects, establish criteria for project screening, develop annual workplans and budgets, engage in intensive policy dialogue annually with donors, develop progress reports and evaluation frameworks.

Scientific capacity in the South is increasing and this changes the relationship between Southern and Northern institutions, including IDRC and donors. Since the Northern institution always dominates the Southern one, it is most important precisely how the relationship is established."

In this way, capacity is developed. The final stage is reached when the local organization is encouraged to evaluate policies as well as projects. This might include issues like the quality of research, the participation of non-researchers, dissemination of findings to the public, etc. The local organization can then develop new work programs for funding.

"Donors have no scientific capacity but are merely there to push money and to operate at the policy level. As money and scientific capacity are brought together, it is up to Southern organizations how to make use of the money."

In this context, IDRC is needed as a strong research organization which can support this kind of evolution of local organizations.

"Right now, IDRC has a critical role in bridging the gap between donors and Southern organizations and helping the Southern groups to form and strengthen. Once they are strong enough to define their own needs and to manage their projects, IDRC will be finished with this job. Capacity building makes outside organizations merely funders."

v) Networks

Many of the interviews centred on co-funded networks which have been launched by IDRC. Almost without exception, these were praised by those involved in them.

"This role requires: identification of the need for the network, identification of key people and institutions and perhaps provision of equipment and training. IDRC would initiate the network and facilitate early events and would set up a mechanism for continuing self-evaluation. IDRC's role would then be to turn over the network, once it is functioning well."

EEPSEA, the Environment and Economics Programme for South-East Asia, was described as a:

"perfect example of how networking among stakeholders in North and South should be arranged. The project is considered to be extremely well managed and is supported by the shared interests of committed scholars in North and South".

"EEPSEA supports research in the region, for the region and is designed by people in the region. The system is driven by grant applications, so the process of managing and working with scholars is the key."

"EEPSEA has helped SIDA to develop courses, teacher training, seminars for Ministers and overall capacity in target countries like Vietnam and Laos. It has been used to target women and their organizations and many women now take part in the network."

"EEPSEA does not move faster than the rate that all stakeholders can cope with and has been steadily evolutionary in its development. There is a continuous process of self-evaluation. All the partners, particularly IDRC, are very experienced."

EEPSEA grant applications are adjudicated by a team of distinguished environmental economists who choose the winners. A year later, researchers present their findings at a workshop of their peers, together with several members of the selection panel. Presentations are held twice yearly. This gives the researchers an opportunity to present their ideas in a distinguished international forum and to receive suggestions to improve their research. The event also includes a major expert presentation on an issue of high relevance to the region.

This project and others like it were referred to approvingly by nearly all of those interviewed and were seen as major initiatives and opportunities for IDRC. Similar projects should be launched in Latin America, and in parts of Africa and Asia where EEPSEA does not go. The Montevideo office was referred to by several people as a possible location for an Americas network.

In another interview, we were told that IDRC does have a Latin American network, originated and managed in the Montevideo Regional Office; the Network of Networks. It became clear to us that even the friends of IDRC are not aware of current developments and networks.

This led to discussion of the need for Network Directories and other information materials from IDRC.

A number of interviewees hope to be brought up to date by a workshop sponsored by the University of Gothenburg in May for 20 world specialists on capacity development. Many donors will be represented, including IDRC [David Glover] and it is hoped that the proceedings will include a Directory of individuals and institutions currently involved in capacity building through networks.

Similar positive remarks were directed to other IDRC networks such as BELLANET [Bellagio Network of senior scientists and donors]; INBAR [International Network for Bamboo and Rattan]; ATPS [African Technology Policy Studies Network]; UNCSTD [UN Committee on Science and Technology Policy Development]; CIERCEA [West African Organization of Economic Faculties] and AERC [African Economics Research Consortium].

"We should have Bellanet-initiated electronic networks everywhere. There is a need to assign a project officer and IDRC should get on with setting up operational networks. A short list of topics, along with preliminary lists of individuals and institutions should be developed immediately. Topics should include marine biology and coastal zone management research, agricultural research, post-harvest research, drylands research, population research, global environmental change research, health research and gender and development research".

4.3 Technical Project Management and Administration

It is difficult to form conclusions about the quality of IDRC's management and administration, because comments ranged from "excellent" to "unsatisfactory". Most criticisms came down to lack of staff continuity, loss of senior staff, unclear financial accounting procedures, late reports and for at least one US donor, the inability of USAID staff members to read reports in French!

A major problem with CIDA seems to be lack of communication. While project co-managers were generally cautious, a few CIDA employees were extremely critical.

"No one in Ottawa seems to be on top of the file so it is hard to raise questions. They lack a "desk officer". Since the agreements are iterative, if I go back to the annual file, there doesn't seem to be a systematic approach to planning for allocation of funds, cash flow allocations, workplans and accountability. The administration process is slow, authority to spend money rests in ... the reporting is through head office here .. leading to issues of management and timeliness. Accuracy is a problem .. cash flow, reporting and a few financial inaccuracies. Their system is hard to understand."

"There are cultural differences between IDRC and CIDA. This project had many meetings with IDRC sending a team of about 15 to each meeting. CIDA would send one, since they expected IDRC to report, manage and develop. They didn't/couldn't do proper reporting; they have their own financial system which we couldn't interpret. Only when IDRC decentralized to the office in ... things did get better. In the end, things got better."

"IDRC doesn't have to compete like a Price Waterhouse. If we use them like a contractor, we get into layering. IDRC will have to work without layering". [This relates to the need for several "layers" of overhead to be charged on a multi-donor project.]

"IDRC has earned a high international reputation. It is very embarrassing. IDRC said the UN is very rigid and inflexible but IDRC won't put things on paper. In the grant business, project documents are the basis for implementation. IDRC didn't work well with multi-donor situations. We have not seen their accounting ability as yet but it was difficult to get figures."

"We never use their research; we never develop their ideas. It seems to be very difficult to use each others' data base."

"They need to focus and decide what their strengths are and what their mandate is. Right now their focus is too broad. They are becoming responsive instead of proactive but that is difficult with so many countries. CIDA must also be more coherent in our goals and objectives. We don't have a clear program of our own".

i) Satisfaction With Technical Project Management and Administration

In general, most interviewees praised IDRC for innovation, flexibility and entrepreneurship. However, IDRC was criticized for leaving important fields like food, agriculture and health; for having lax reporting and administrative standards; and for "heavy-handed" selling to some donors.

(Since IDRC has not in fact left the fields of agriculture and health, we assume that the problem is caused by lack of clear communication. The perceived "loss" of senior IDRC program officers may also reflect their value to the CGIAR system, where many of them now are working).

Regional offices were generally praised for their Southern perspective, their efficiency and their effectiveness at identifying new individuals and individuals around which to build new networks. Others wondered about their cost.

Some donors see IDRC as a potential implementing agency for projects such as National Environmental Action Plans, which must be developed and implemented in the South.

"IDRC has been very impressive, with minimum bureaucracy. It can turn on a dime. It occupies neutral ground but can be operationally effective when necessary. This contrasts sharply with either Bilateral donors or with the UN agencies. Canadians are more acceptable than either UN agencies or Americans with many countries."

"IDRC involved a lot of foundations and UN agencies. IDRC is an honest broker .. it doesn't have an axe to grind. It is a consensus place. It can provide a fully capable Executive Director, a full Board or a Steering Committee representing all donors. This gives the institution a lot of flexibility and power".

However, there were criticisms.

"If IDRC wants to be the key to expert advisory groups, it will need new VPs in key

roles. Staff turnover and reorganizations have been costly. The loss of the Health Services Group is very serious. They have lost Agriculture and Health .. two critical areas. If they want to highlight network functions, they must provide key people in substantive areas of work."

"The Micronutrient Initiative has worked with the government of Bangladesh, helping them to develop national strategic plans on nutrition and vitamin problems. India wants to replicate the Bangladesh project. IDRC could be the catalyst for this kind of project in many countries, but a first-class Executive will have to be assigned to each project."

ii) Project Design, Workplans, Budgeting and Scheduling

Many interviewees spoke approvingly of IDRC's approach to project design, which frequently incorporates all stakeholders in design workshops held in the South. These are often followed by the formation of a Steering Group of stakeholders, perhaps chaired by a Southern leader, which guides and frequently self-evaluates the project or program as it evolves. This process is seen to be the model for future project work involving both North and South.

It is also the key to the development of workplans which respond to the needs of stakeholders of the South and which evolve as goals are achieved and new ones are defined. Evaluation can be undertaken frequently. If goals are not being achieved, the reasons can be identified and dealt with. Schedules and budgets can then be re-drawn as required.

Some donors [notably in Europe] are extremely complimentary to IDRC for the adoption of this approach. Regional Offices are especially effective, they feel, in helping projects and programs to adapt and evolve to meet the needs of the stakeholders.

Other donors, while praising the principle, find the practice virtually unworkable and at the least, opaque. They complain of frequent changes of IDRC personnel: the lack of specific Ottawa contacts for many projects in the South, [often being run out of a Regional office]; changing workplans and budgets; late reports; the lack of a rigorous project management system. The quality of reporting seems to depend on who is in charge of the project.

Unfortunately, declining funds have made donors even more sensitive to these issues. CIDA is introducing "results-based management", which will introduce a new layer of requirements for "better baseline and update indicator data". These may make flexible and responsive programs even less compatible with new requirements. Several UN agencies and US private foundations are further tightening their budgeting and reporting requirements, such as charging interest on unspent balances, etc.

5. FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Once the discussions shifted to new directions, there were many suggestions for IDRC. Very often, they related to the roles IDRC had played in the past, on projects with which they were familiar. For example:

"IDRC has been a flexible, very effective, very helpful partner. The only problems have been continuity and communication. IDRC should do things that aren't being done in areas where Canada has strength; for example, the application of telemedicine in developing countries. Canada has strengths and lengthy experience in this field. IDRC should investigate where and how this experience might be useful, what barriers there might be and then develop a plan to proceed with a project."

"Their advantages are that they allow CIDA to work with NGOs or government departments without tight Treasury Board rules. They are more flexible; the partner has more latitude; the projects get going quickly; they avoid a lengthy selection process; they rely on teamwork to put the agreement together quickly and efficiently; they allow for more local input from NGOs who know what is going on in the country and have years of experience".

"IDRC should value its top quality staff and have confidence in their intellectual strength and judgment. They must retain their ability to co-fund. They should be active in project/program identification and then seek funds which could lead to a role as broker. If they become competitive in the Third World setting, we are not interested in working with them .. it would be a conflict of interest."

"They should keep their regional strengths and push them down to the local level. This regional/local presence gives access to ideas and can give value added for institutional strengthening and capacity development. IDRC has been a leader in network strategies and did it right .. in the 1970s. It was a model for all of us".

"Their disadvantages are that they give CIDA less financial and administrative control; they rely on the experience and integrity of the partner institution; they assume that the partner is very carefully selected for the project; they may overload weak organizations; they raise political concerns about CIDA's apparent bias away from the private sector; they create accountability problems since "ownership" of the project is often not clear. They may also lack the institutional orientation to work as contractors."

"Everyone recognizes the need for IDRC to expand its funding. IDRC has to learn to work collaboratively without competing with the university community for funds. Reorganizations [within IDRC] have made it much less transparent to outsiders. It needs a communications strategy. Where did Agenda 21 go? What happened to the funding? Where is the Environment Department? Perhaps IDRC should publish a Guide to IDRC for Canadians each year, including themes, priorities, programs and the role of regional offices. IDRC's President should do a tour of Canadian universities."

These random quotations illustrate the tremendous range of interests in, speculations about and

commitment to the work of IDRC. As could perhaps be expected, they reflect IDRC's current projects and their commitment to them. Some of them expand further the current approach of IDRC. Where other models were cited, they are noted.

5.1. Communications

There were many suggestions for improving communication, ranging from general encouragement to networking with partners to the suggestion that "the President should visit every Canadian university in the next year, to discuss IDRC's work".

Recommendation 1

IDRC needs to establish consistent two-way linkages and communication mechanisms for different levels. These should include:

- *internal communications within IDRC which can:*
 - i) *develop an interactive data base containing the research abstracts and specific competencies within IDRC; and*
 - ii) *provide a system which provides "real-time" personnel and project information to all partners.*
- *communication among Team Canada/ Government of Canada/ CIDA/ Agriculture Canada/ Health/ Environment/ DFAIT/ Transportation;*
- *communication with Canadian NGOs and the private sector;*
- *communication with international donors; and*
- *communication with the international scientific community.*

Recommendation 2

IDRC should set up a Donor Advisory Board, with members from participating donors, which can assist IDRC to develop new links with funding agencies and to identify problems and solutions. Possible partners could be DANIDA, MFA Netherlands, SIDA, NORAD, IBRD, UNDP, ADB, IADB, etc.

Recommendation 3

IDRC needs to put out a report on networking activities, including its accomplishments to date, potential for the future, project officers responsible, etc. It could be made available all over the South and to selected institutions in the North, so interested potential members could sign on.

"IDRC has one of the best Web sites around. It needs to expand it and use it to advertise its activities".

Recommendation 4

IDRC should circulate to all partners its new organization chart, list of personnel, telephone, fax and E-Mail directory and other contact materials.

5.2. Collaboration with Canadian Agencies

Health Canada spoke glowingly of the collaborative arrangement with IDRC on the International Tobacco Initiative and proposed a Steering Group for this and similar projects to share information, undertake evaluation and give overall policy direction. With such a structure in place, collaborative projects could be developed in health research, community health delivery, decentralized health care systems, telemedicine systems and an International Disease Surveillance Network could be launched.

Recommendation 5

Collaborative practices and arrangements should be established with Capital Project Action Committee: "Team Canada" including meetings with partners [Health, Environment, DFAIT, CIDA] to develop new project ideas.

Recommendation 6

Relationships with strong Canadian and international NGOs such as AUCC, etc should be fostered with a view to collaborative programming and projects, co-venturing and joint resource use.

5.3. Large Project Management

There appears to be a conflict within IDRC which develops from IDRC serving as a co-funder on projects while hosting a secretariat for the administration of the same project. IDRC is seen as a strong co-funding partner but may come into competition with other management units in the competition to secure the secretariat function.

We interviewed several individuals at the World Bank and attempted to gain some insight into projects co-funded by the Asian Development Bank and IDRC.

Overall, these institutions expressed a high level of satisfaction with IDRC as an initiating and collaborating partner. World Bank staff described the difficulty the Bank is having as it attempts the transition from megaprojects to small-scale capacity building. It is looking for relatively large projects such as the Micronutrient Initiative, which can be funded by the Bank but managed by an institution like IDRC which can be trusted with South-oriented, responsive, multi-stakeholder projects.

Another Bank officer praised IDRC's role in the Micronutrient Initiative and suggested that a similar approach should be taken with an international forum on health research and development. It was noted that the successful projects have been assigned senior leadership by IDRC. Some concern was expressed about the availability of "Vice-President level" [senior] leaders at IDRC to head large and complex projects in the future. This issue may need to be addressed.

IDRC's work on the NEAP implementation process for Vietnam was praised by the World Bank representatives. The next step would be for IDRC to assist the World Bank with a generic NEAP Implementation Process which might be followed in a number of countries. The Bank has assigned a project officer to pursue a NEAP implementation for Cambodia, modelled on the approach developed for Vietnam.

"Large projects are needed to deal with health and agricultural issues such as post-harvest food preservation and storage, food preparation and biotechnology. Global shortages are looming and the World Watch warnings are probably correct this time."

Recommendation 7

If IDRC wishes to be a leader or host for international Secretariats and project administration, it must strengthen operating systems, which include accounting systems tied to appropriate workplans. Alternatively, it could adopt an appropriate project accounting system and adapt its accounting and financial system to it.

Recommendation 8

International standards of accountability, workplans, communication among donors, project evaluation and assessment systems and lines of responsibility must be better defined and adhered to. An internal training program may be required for new staff members.

5.4. Expansion of Network Services

Recommendation 9

IDRC should, at an early date, develop plans to build on and publicize present successes. IDRC should produce a report on networking, including accomplishments to date, potential for the future, project officers responsible, etc. Such a report, guide, directory [various interviewees saw it in different ways] should be made widely available in both North and South, so interested potential members could sign on.

Recommendation 10

IDRC might consider launching electronic journals on selected topics which fall within its areas of priority research and networking. For example, IFS has launched one on animal husbandry which seems to be highly successful. Similar journals are needed in such fields as health, nutrition, biotechnology, food storage, aquaculture, etc.

Recommendation 11

IDRC has supported and should continue to support NGOs such as the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, which exchanges agricultural, health, nutritional and other information among broadcasters, journalists, extension workers and teachers in the South. It is estimated

that the scripts used by this network reach over 700 million people in the South. IDRC has assisted in its decentralization from Canada to Regional Centres and with CIDA support, has contributed to its range and effectiveness.

Recommendation 12

IDRC should develop or assist with the development of:

- *networks modelled on BELLANET, EEPSEA, ATPS and AERC;*
- *a data base of Southern individuals and institutions engaged in research;*
- *support systems for promising young scientists, using donor funds;*
- *an assessment process for Southern individuals and institution which could assist both Southern and Northern universities and institutions and private sector consultants.*

5.5. Regional Offices

Most interviewees spoke very highly of the Regional Offices. They were seen as the key to local services, including the conduct of workshops on critical issues, the development of direct contacts with local individual researchers and institutions and the centre for delivery of a variety of programs. They are particularly essential for the creation and management of effective local and regional networks.

Regional Offices have gained the trust of local individuals and organizations and understand cultural and social issues. They can identify the formal and informal leaders and can interpret information both from Canada to the region and from the region to Canada. This has apparently been especially valuable in areas like South Africa and Eastern Europe.

Recommendation 13

There was general agreement that, while Regional Offices must be costly to operate, they represent the very foundation of IDRC's global operations and should be strengthened through the widening of local professional networks.

5.6. Building Global Science Capacity

"The South has seen tremendous expansion in science capacity in the past two decades. However, it is a grave-yard for scientific equipment and matching scholarly talent. Money and equipment are major problems".

Science "capacity building" was identified as a challenge, for which IDRC is ideally suited. Indeed, many people see this as its original and continuing mandate and give it great credit for its accomplishments in this area.

IDRC is regarded as the pioneer in global science and developmental networks, but several interviewees feel that it should explore new approaches and relationships to increase efficiency and reduce costs.

For example, the Regional Offices probably have data bases on individuals and institutions in their regions. A central data base might open up extensive networking possibilities and would be a valuable asset in IDRC's work with both the scientific community and with donors. If such a database already exists, its existence should be more widely known, because it could be a valuable tool for many agencies. It could also provide a valuable introduction to Southern individuals and agencies, to Canadian experts, reports and processes.

Recommendation 14

IDRC should:

- ***develop global networks of scientists capable of rapid, flexible responses to issues [diseases, tobacco, nutrition, biotechnology, etc.];***
- ***develop small workshops on leading edge issues [capacity building, aquaculture, after-harvest food processing] in specific countries or smaller regions.***

Recommendation 15

Several European interviewees suggested that IDRC should collaborate with IFS on the development of a Global Science Network.

We recommend that this opportunity be assessed.

5.7. Developing Linkages with the Private Sector

Partners have the impression that IDRC has largely ignored the private sector. Whether this is true or not, the perception is that many new opportunities are opening up to collaborate with private sector proponents and executing agencies. IDRC could provide the scientific elements in such projects, while sharing management with other partners.

Linkages with science-based organizations would seem to be the place to begin.

CIDA envisions an expanded role for private sector companies as Chief Executing Agencies for projects which involve inputs by research organizations, universities and others. Several interviewees suggested that IDRC could play an important role as supplier or co-ordinator of research and at times as co-funder or co-manager.

Recommendation 16

IDRC should support joint ventures with the Canadian private sector by;

- ***involving private sector partners in the design, development and implementation of large projects;***

- *developing linkages with experts in the private sector;*
- *supporting private sector involvement in the provision of expert input and guidance to international projects; and*
- *providing private sector partners with access to and involvement in IDRC's global data bases and networks.*