

January 2000

**AN ASSESSMENT OF TWENTY YEARS OF  
RESEARCH COLLABORATION  
BETWEEN CHINA AND  
THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE**

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## **PREFACE**

The International Development Research Centre in Canada has provided funding for research in Chinese institutions for twenty years. It was decided to mark this anniversary by carrying out an assessment of the lessons to be learned from these twenty years of partnership. It was also decided that this should be a joint undertaking between the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) in China and an IDRC appointed team.

The assessment was not meant to duplicate project and programme evaluations that are usually carried out by professionals in the respective research fields. Rather it was meant to assess the process of the collaboration to date to see whether changes should be made to this process. It is hoped that the assessment will be a valuable input to the thinking about future IDRC/China relations. But it is also hoped that the review might be useful more generally both for IDRC and for MOST in their relationships with other countries (IDRC) and other donors (MOST). Finally it is hoped that these 'lessons learned' will be valuable for China in its thinking about its own support for research in lesser developed countries.

The field work for the assessment took place in October 1999, and this report was prepared when members of both the Chinese and IDRC teams met in Beijing in mid January 2000. A further volume containing the translations of the fifty Chinese reports from institutions that have received IDRC support will be prepared by mid summer 2000. These reports contain more detailed evidence of the considerable impact that IDRC supported projects have had on Chinese development over the past 20 years.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND STATISTICAL REVIEW

#### **1 Background**

The International development Research Centre (IDRC) is a public corporation created by the Canadian government to help communities in the developing world find solutions to social, economic, and environmental problems through research. IDRC connects people, institutions, and ideas to ensure that the results of the research it supports and the knowledge that research generates, are shared equitably among all its partners, North and South. Since its foundation, IDRC has supported many research projects in developing countries all over the world and through this support and its style of delivery IDRC has become a well respected and important development research organisation.

The science and technology co-operation between China and IDRC started in 1981 when an agreement of science and technology co-operation was signed. The Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) (previously the State Science and Technology Commission) is responsible for the co-ordination and management of the IDRC supported projects in China. During the past 20 years, IDRC has supported about 150 collaborative research projects in China with a total funding of 25 million Canadian dollars. The research in China supported by IDRC has covered a wide range of scientific disciplines such as agriculture, forestry, health, environment, resources, information, economy and social development. IDRC projects in China also covered a wide range of geographic areas, from Shanghai in the east to Tibet and Xinjiang in the west. The IDRC projects have encouraged collaborative research both within China and between Chinese and foreign teams. They have also funded participation in international conferences, workshops, training courses etc. The benefits and outcomes of these collaborations have been documented in a number of reviews, evaluations and end of project reports.

However, a complete assessment of the projects has never been done. Such an assessment would help both the MOST and the IDRC to improve their future co-operation, to help the MOST to improve its program delivery and project management efficiency, to develop its future science and technology co-operation with underdeveloped countries. To mark the 20 years of successful collaboration between the MOST and IDRC, it was decided to carry out a review and assessment of all the IDRC projects conducted in China.

#### **2 Aims of the review**

The objectives of the assessment are several fold: 1) to summarise all IDRC projects in China conducted in the last 20 years, in order to find problems and lessons learned in the management

and implementation of IDRC projects and this will be used as references by the MOST in designing and managing its future international science and technology co-operation; 2) to strengthen the information sharing and exchange among the host institutions of IDRC projects and project administration organisations. As a results of this goal, information on China-IDRC co-operation and projects will be launched at the web site of MOST; 3) to provide help for IDRC to develop its policy for future relations with China; 4) to help both sides to improve their efficiencies in future planning of research programs; 5) to provide experiences which can be helpful for China to develop overseas S&T development programs less developed countries

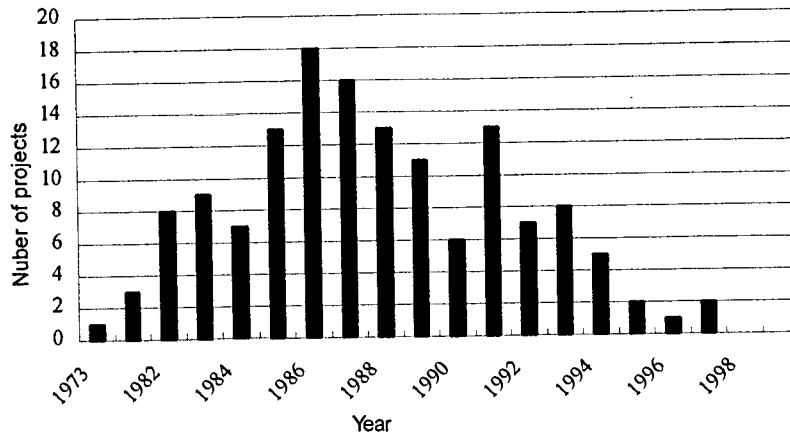
### **3 Methodology of the assessment**

The assessment was carried out in a variety of ways. It was organised as a multiple level project review. The IDRC-China projects were reviewed at project level, where project leaders and team members were asked to reassess their projects. Projects were also assessed at institutional level, in which the projects were categorised according to project fields which are usually managed by relevant institutions such as the Chinese Academy of Forestry, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences etc. At the State (MOST) level an overall summary of the IDRC-China projects and general review was conducted by the review team organised by the MOST which consisted of experts and programme officers. In parallel IDRC appointed its own Review team which conducted an assessment based on IDRC files, project evaluations, and a questionnaire which was sent to all IDRC programme officers who had helped develop projects in China. The two review teams interacted closely in all aspects of the assessment. Small workshops involving both the review teams and key project leaders and other research staff, were held in several typical and representative institutions. These included the Chinese Academy of Forestry, the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Qinghua University, the Jiangsu Academy of Social Sciences and other institutions in different parts of China. The Chinese project team will also visit IDRC headquarters in Ottawa at the completion of the assessment to finalise this report and prepare it for publication in English and Chinese.

### **4 Summarised statistical information on IDRC projects in China**

#### ***4.1 Number of projects funded by IDRC in each year***

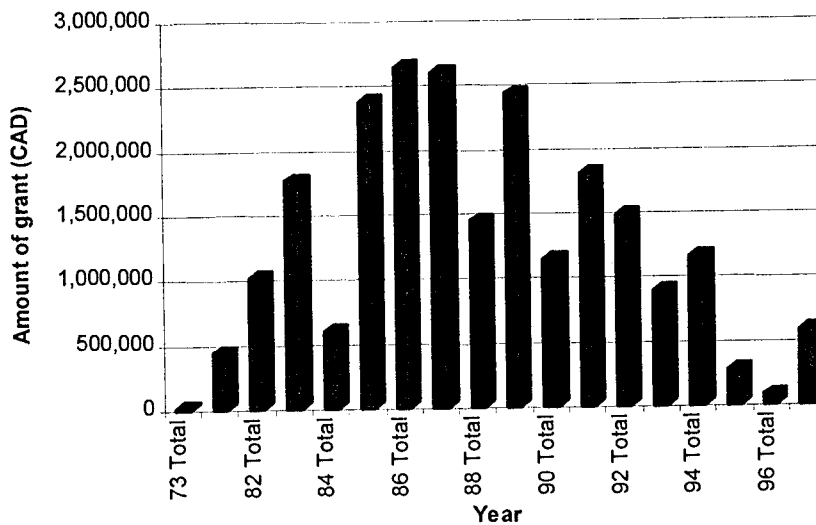
Before the agreement of science and technology co-operation between IDRC and China was signed in 1981, there was only one project of which the research related to China and the implementation organisation was outside China. Since 1981 the number of projects funded by IDRC steadily increased until 1986 in which the number of IDRC projects in China peaked. Since then the number of projects has decreased until 1990, when the number of projects was only 6, after that year there was a rise in project numbers, reaching a total of 13 in 1991. Since then the number has continued to decline until the present. ( Fig.1)



**Figure 1** The number of projects funded by IDRC in China

**4.2 Funding of IDRC projects in China**

The total funding of IDRC projects in China over the past 20 years was estimated to be approximately 25 million Canadian dollars. The amount granted in each of the years has generally followed a similar trend to that of the number of projects. The amount of funds increased from the early 1980s, peaking in the mid-eighties, and since then has continuously decreased. The reason for these changes is not clear. It is possibly due to the overall IDRC budget, changes in its research priorities, and staff changes. The annual allocation of funds to China is shown in figure 2.



**Figure 2** Annual amounts of IDRC grants to China

### 4.3 Sector coverage of IDRC projects

IDRC projects in China have covered a wide range of fields, such as social science and social development, agriculture, health, forestry, environment, information sciences, natural resources, energy, engineering, and earthquake studies. The number of IDRC projects in China has totalled 151, of which 24% were in social science and social development, 18% were in agricultural science, 17% were in health care, and 13% were in forestry. All other fields are under 10%, as demonstrated in figures 3 and 4.

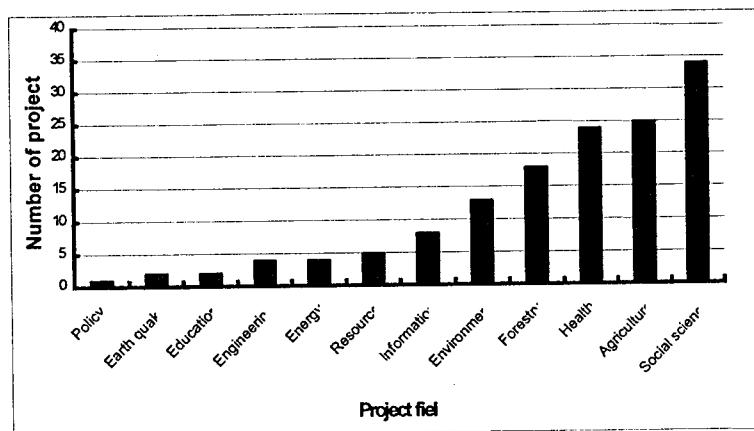
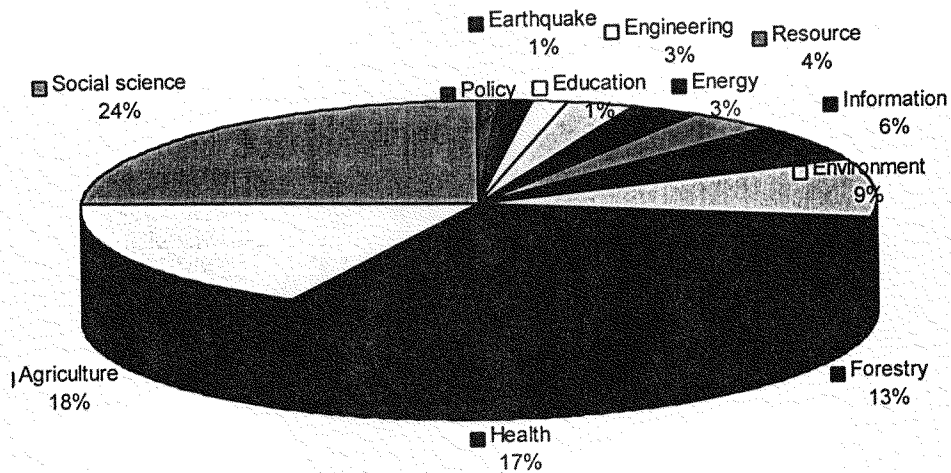


Figure 3 Number of projects in each field of research



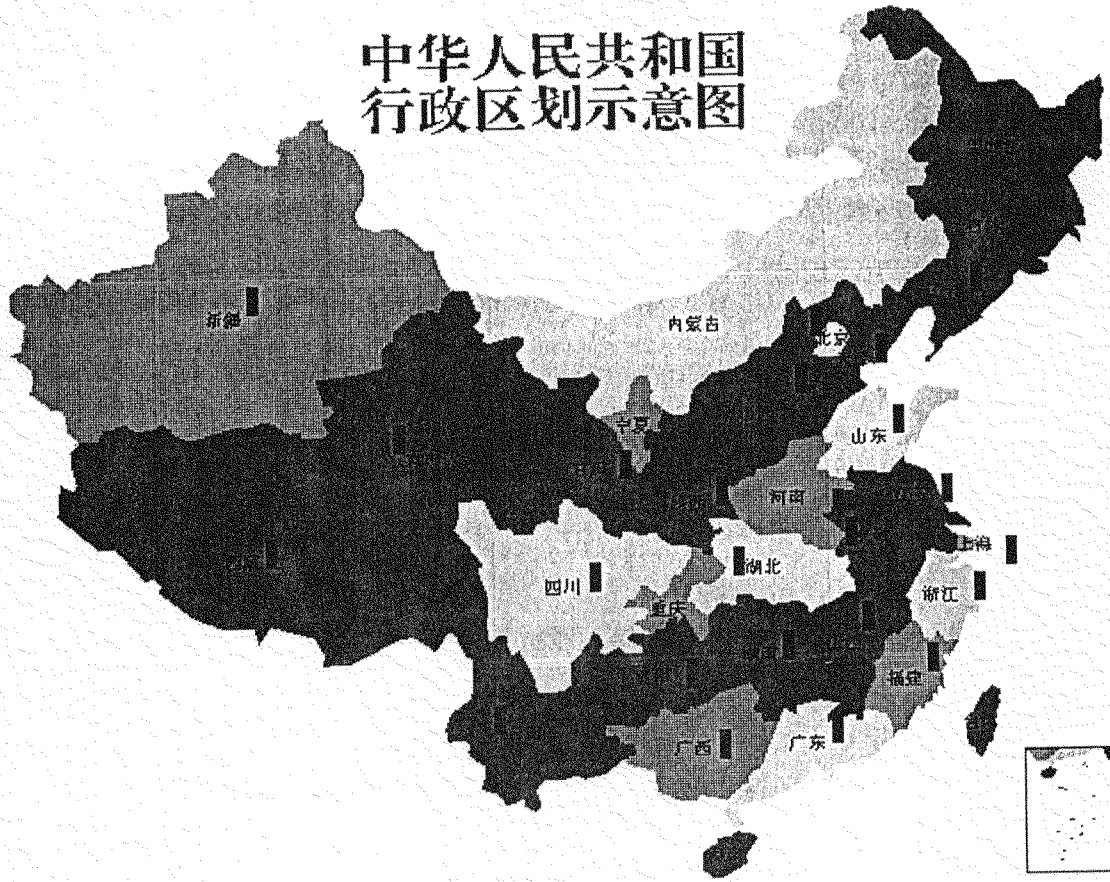


*Figure 4 Proportion of IDRC projects in different fields*

#### ***4.4 Geographical coverage of IDRC projects***

IDRC projects in China have covered a wide geographic area from east to west and north to south, including Tibet and Xinjiang. About 24 provinces and municipalities have been involved in at least one of the IDRC projects. Some places have had several projects, but no projects have been located in north-eastern China, Inner Mongolia and Linxia. (See figure 5)

# 中华人民共和国 行政区划示意图



*Figure5 Distribution of IDRC projects in China*

## CHAPTER 2

### VIEWS OF THE CHINESE RECIPIENTS OF IDRC GRANTS

In this chapter of the report we have summarised some of the main reactions of the Chinese recipients regarding their involvement with IDRC. Their views were expressed either in the interviews, which we conducted in Beijing, Nanjing, Urumqi, and Guiyang, or through written submissions from a sample of 50 institutions that had been the recipients of grants from the IDRC. We have chosen to focus mainly on those comments that related to IDRC's style of work rather than summarise the details of the substantive research achievements of the different institutions.

#### 1. General Reactions to the IDRC

Although the review team anticipated that the recipients of research grants would be basically well disposed to the donor, we were not prepared for the degree of enthusiasm and gratitude that was expressed. The fact that this Canadian aid is given to benefit China rather than Canada was greatly appreciated by the Chinese recipients. One person said, "Canada has helped China improve its bamboo and rattan when it does not itself grow any of these trees. This shows the sincere intention of IDRC to help developing countries".

The impact of IDRC assistance on the lives of individual researchers had at times been dramatic. But it was the heartfelt warmth of the gratitude expressed by a group of ethnic villagers in Guizhou Province that had the greatest impact on the review team. They sang an 'Ode in Praise of IDRC' which documented how a project on the community management of natural resources in their village had totally transformed all of their lives. This was part of a thank you celebration organised by combined Buyi and Miao villagers in honour of a visit by the President of IDRC.

Apart from these and other anecdotal reports there were also many other substantive results of achievements presented to the team. Some of these will be referred to again in a later volume which will contain the reports from the fifty research projects studied by the Chinese review team.

#### 2. Getting in the IDRC Door

A criticism that was made of IDRC's procedures was the difficulty of getting in the IDRC door. Once inside the experience of working with the Centre was considered good. But it seems that the process for breaking into the system was not clear at the beginning. The review team asked the Chinese researchers how they had first encountered IDRC. For several it was a chance

meeting with an IDRC programme officer at a scientific conference. Others had been referred to a particular staff member by a Chinese colleague, or had met a programme officer when they were visiting China.

IDRC staff often call the process of identifying potential recipients 'talent spotting'. To most Chinese researchers this is a hit and miss process. Several preferred the approach followed by other donors who advertise the programme areas for which they are prepared to provide grants, and call for proposals. This was considered to be a more open and transparent process.

### 3. **Benefits of working with the IDRC**

Quite apart from the financial benefits that flowed from an IDRC grant there were many other benefits which came from being associated with the Centre. For example:

- The enthusiasm, professionalism, and commitment of IDRC programme officers were almost universally recognised. "The working style of IDRC programme officers is something we have all learned from", was the comment of one Chinese researcher. One (Stephen Tyler) has been awarded a Chinese national prize for his contribution to Chinese research.
- The greatest assistance has been the help provided in the preparation of project proposals. This was an activity about which most researchers were unfamiliar. They now realise the benefits of having clear objectives and methodologies for the conduct of the research. IDRC staff were credited with having introduced the Chinese researchers to new methodologies. Sometimes it has been necessary to go through five or six iterations in the preparation of the proposal before the programme officer has been willing to submit it for approval by IDRC. At first such 'interference' was resented, but it is now recognised as being a necessary part of a successful project.
- The whole process of project preparation, project management, project accounting, project monitoring and evaluation required by IDRC, has alerted the Chinese to international best practice in research management. This has had a positive spin-off effect as similar approaches are now followed in many national projects.
- IDRC has played a major and positive role in involving Chinese research teams with teams from other countries in regional and global networks. Sometimes the contacts developed in these networks have continued long after the initial project has been completed.
- A similar major role has been played in developing co-operative projects between institutions within China. For example, one project brought together twelve different provincial academies of social science that worked on a single major project. It had taken a foreign donor (IDRC) to bring this about.
- The IDRC has provided a variety of training opportunities with short courses; workshops; and by the provision of scholarships for overseas study.

- It is not only researchers who have benefited from training programmes. Help has also been given to research managers, accountants and administrators. This aspect is particularly appreciated since few other donors have helped strengthen research management.
- IDRC staff have helped find opportunities for the publication of the research outputs in international journals.
- The fact that IDRC provides funds to Chinese institutions for them to disburse and provide accounts, and has been willing to accept some degree of flexibility in the disbursement, was warmly welcomed.

#### 4. **Some problems of working with IDRC**

Although overall the experience of working with IDRC was considered to be very positive there were a number of suggestions for changes to procedures. For example:

- Project monitoring by programme officers is welcomed by some researchers, but for others the visits are disruptive and not constructive. Several people we interviewed thought that once the research was underway they knew far more about the issues than the programme officer who visited for a few days. Yet without a detailed knowledge, and with no Chinese language ability, the programme officer would sometimes require changes to the project. This put the researchers in a dilemma. Should they change the project to ensure continued flows of funds even if they thought what was being proposed was wrong? Or should they ignore the advice and continue doing what they thought was right?
- Accounting and reporting requirements differ between donors. If a project is supported by several donors this can impose a huge burden on the research team. It was suggested that donors might co-operate and consolidate their reporting and accounting requirements. This is not a criticism of IDRC alone, but it was felt that IDRC might take a lead in getting a rationalisation of reporting requirements among donors.
- The main criticism of IDRC came from agricultural researchers who found it difficult to understand why agricultural research had been abandoned as a supportable theme by IDRC.
- Some researchers thought that IDRC's project cycle was too short. There was not enough time, or resources, to enable the researchers to go on to the demonstration or pilot phase. They thought the Centre hindered the development of innovations by stopping funding when only the research had been completed.
- There was disappointment about how little feedback was provided on any evaluations that IDRC carried out of its projects in China.

- Awards and prizes are an important part of the Chinese researchers' lives, influencing such things as pensions and housing benefits. Perhaps IDRC could instigate the process of making awards each year for the best research in different countries funded by IDRC. It would then be considered a major achievement if a Chinese researcher were to win such an award.
- Another criticism was the length of time that it sometimes took to get a response to project proposals submitted to IDRC. We heard of several cases where researchers had been kept waiting for more than six months before they even received an acknowledgement of receipt of the proposal.
- Some Chinese recipients felt that there was a lack of exchange and information flows among the IDRC project teams within China.
- Several people mentioned their concern about the process whereby IDRC identified potential recipients. Once selected as a recipient it seemed possible to receive continued support, but there was a huge barrier to cross to get in the IDRC door.

## **5 Research output from IDRC supported projects**

Every project team consulted provided the review team with a long list of research outputs. These included reports written; papers published in Chinese journals; papers published in international journals; papers presented at conferences; patents applied for; prizes received; and briefing papers prepared.

The review team considered the possibility of collating all these facts and achievements, but decided against doing so on the grounds that this would provide little information which was directly relevant to this assessment. It is sufficient to note that all of the teams seemed to be aware that their research results had to be disseminated widely to academic and policy making audiences as well as other potential beneficiaries of their research. It was not sufficient only to prepare a report for the IDRC.

## **6 Comparison with other donors**

Recipients were asked to compare the approach followed by IDRC with that followed by other donors in the hope that IDRC may be able to benefit from this comparison. This question usually (but not always) led to praise for the IDRC approach as compared to other donors. The following are some of the comments made:

- IDRC supports Chinese researchers to solve Chinese problems. Some other donors get Chinese researchers to collect data in China for analysis by researchers in the donor's country.

- IDRC permits Chinese research teams to administer their research grant. Not all donors do this.
- IDRC provides technical inputs and support throughout the entire project. Only a few donors do this.
- IDRC provides training not only for researchers but also for research managers. Few other donors do this.
- IDRC provides a variety of mechanisms for training according to the local needs. Such a variety is not usually forthcoming with other donors.
- IDRC has enabled Chinese research teams to interact with teams in many other countries. They are able to be, and feel to be, a part of the international scientific community. Other donors only facilitate interaction with researchers in their own country.
- IDRC has more onerous reporting requirements than most donors, but respondents were divided in their opinions as to whether this was an advantage or a disadvantage of working with IDRC.
- Other donors were considered by some respondents to have more open and fairer procedures for identifying potential recipients.

## CHAPTER 3

### VIEWS OF IDRC PROGRAMME OFFICERS AND CONSULTANTS

As part of the assessment the review team sent a questionnaire to all the IDRC programme officers who had been involved in projects in China. A few consultants who had worked in China for IDRC were also sent copies of the questionnaire and invited to respond. The questionnaire is reproduced as an Appendix

A total of 30 programme staff was identified as having been involved with projects in China over the past twenty years. Many of these no longer work for IDRC, and some had only a minor involvement with projects in China. There were ten detailed replies, but since these included all of the staff who had substantial involvement in China the responses are judged to provide useful insights.

The principal responses to the questions posed in the questionnaire are summarised below.

#### 1. **The role played by SSTC and MOST**

The State Science and Technology Commission (SSTC) and its successor, the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) have the formal responsibility of approving all Chinese projects submitted to IDRC. Their role is also to help identify new research partners and to facilitate the collaboration.

There was general agreement that all of the above tasks had been performed diligently by SSTC/MOST. There was one case where it was felt that the SSTC had over-committed IDRC in what had been intended (by IDRC) as an exploratory meeting, but this was not seen as a serious shortcoming. There were many more comments of praise where it was felt that SSTC/MOST had been extremely helpful in its facilitating role.

For the future it was felt that perhaps a new type of relationship should be developed between IDRC and MOST. The two organisations should consider the need for a clearer strategy where IDRC assistance would be targeted to areas and institutions of greatest priority for China and yet which also met IDRC priorities. This would also mean that MOST would play a greater filtering role only submitting to IDRC those proposals that clearly fitted the agreed strategy. At the present time MOST submits projects which, not infrequently, do not fit into IDRC's Corporate Planning Framework. There is a low success rate within IDRC for this type of



unsolicited project proposal. It was also felt that MOST might do more to advertise IDRC programmes in China, and help identify new potential research partners. The MOST web site will be a useful tool in this regard, although its main purpose is to disseminate the knowledge generated over the past 20 years, and help to advertise the principal researchers as resource persons.. Also when there are only a few projects funded in China each year, widespread advertising on the web site might bring a deluge of proposals and the work involved in processing them may not be worth while.

## **2. The role of the host research institution**

This question was meant to explore the perceived quality of the research management provided by the host research institution. Was the research management appropriate? was there a need for improvement? did IDRC contribute through training programmes to this improvement?

There was almost unanimous praise from the respondents for the quality of the research management of the host institutions. In most cases it had been a real pleasure to work with the management which had been highly skilled and who had been anxious to learn about IDRC's requirements and committed to ensuring the conduct of excellent research. On a few occasions training had been provided and new computer systems installed with IDRC help.

Some Programme Officers commented on the fact that they found it difficult to differentiate between what had been achieved by a research institution as a direct result of IDRC support and what had been achieved overall by the institution. They felt that on some occasions IDRC may be receiving credit for work that was not directly attributable to them.

## **3. Quality of the research staff**

When IDRC began its research collaboration with China, that country was only just emerging from the decade of the Cultural Revolution. Research and higher education had been badly affected, and contacts with the outside world almost totally cut off. It was expected that the quality of the researchers and their knowledge of the foreign methods and literature would have been relatively low.

According to the responses to the questionnaire the IDRC programme officers who worked in China in the early 1980s found that most of the researchers they encountered were surprisingly well trained and competent, even if they were not well acquainted with western literature. There were occasions when the researchers lacked self-confidence when they were involved in international networks. However, once they realised they were as good, if not better, than the other country teams then the self- confidence was quickly restored.

The main difference with researchers encountered by IDRC staff from other countries in these early days was the lack of breadth, but deep specialisation of Chinese researchers. This was more than made up for by a sense of commitment to the research and by the fact that most of the Chinese researchers tended to work full time on the IDRC supported projects. This was in

marked contrast to what happens in some other countries. Where appropriate, training programmes and opportunities for overseas study were organised by IDRC and these always seemed to be highly appreciated.

The situation regarding the quality of researchers in the social sciences was somewhat different. Chinese research in the social sciences had been very theoretical and ideological. There was little knowledge of western methodologies or of the literature on development studies. One IDRC programme officer assessed the quality of Chinese social science ten to fifteen years ago as warranting a grade of 2/10. Now it has improved to 6/10, but it has still some way to go to catch up with advanced international standards.

IDRC has contributed substantially to the improvement in social science research in those areas where it has been active. Some of the main IDRC contributions have been in introducing the Chinese researchers to more empirical research approaches, in demonstrating the need for interdisciplinary approaches to problem solving, and in introducing community based research.

Good social science and policy oriented research is very important in any country, but is specially so in China which is undergoing profound changes as it converts itself from a centrally planned to a market economy. IDRC has had a substantial impact in improving social science research over the past ten years. It would seem important that the organisation continue to play a role in helping to bring social science research in China up to advanced international standards.

#### **4. Links between researchers and potential clients of the research**

The issue of the links between potential clients of research results and researchers has assumed considerable prominence in recent years. This is equally true of the more industrial societies as it is for developing societies. This question was included to assess the extent to which these issues were recognised in China, and taken into account in the design of research projects and in the implementation of their results.

The extent to which clients, or potential clients, are involved in helping to shape research questions seems to be considerable. Where it makes sense to do so most projects, often through IDRC staff encouragement, have found ways of consulting potential clients in the project design.

The uptake of research results also seems to be good compared with other countries although most of the IDRC respondents admitted that they had usually not been involved in this aspect of the research. Some felt that the culture in China today was receptive to the utilisation of research results whether this was in forestry, or in policy research.

#### **5. IDRC programme delivery**

Over the 30 years of IDRC's existence it has developed a unique approach to delivering research assistance to developing countries. This can be characterised by the employment of staff who

are highly professional in the scientific fields in which IDRC operates. These professional staff help identify researchers in the developing world, work with them in designing research proposals, monitor and assess ongoing research, and help build networks. Although projects must fall within the Corporate Planning Framework agreed by the IDRC Board, they are intended to meet the priorities of the developing countries. Once approved by the IDRC, projects are mostly administered by the host institution and a high degree of flexibility is permitted in the execution of the project.

A recent internal IDRC document identified fourteen characteristics of the IDRC approach to programme delivery<sup>5</sup>. We asked the recipients of the questionnaire to comment on the importance of each characteristic to the success of their projects in China.

Almost all of the respondents thought that the fourteen characteristics had been important in their work. Some thought that the provision of linkages to Canadian expertise had been important, but for others this had been an irrelevant part of their project.

Some thought that talent scouting had been a necessary part of the project development, but for others this too was irrelevant.

What was clear from the responses is that the IDRC programme staff are highly motivated professionals who think that the delivery mechanism evolved by IDRC is basically a good one which is highly relevant to the success of projects in China.

## 6. Changes in IDRC priorities

During the 1990s there have been major changes in IDRC programme priorities. These followed a decline in the funding allocated by the Canadian Government to the IDRC and a view following the Rio Environmental Conference that more of IDRC's funding should be directed to environmental issues, and to solving a limited number of the key development problems. These changes were encapsulated in successive Corporate Planning Frameworks (CPF) which defined the new priorities and orientations. The questionnaire included a question designed to assess the impact of the CPF on the development of projects in China.

There was a general recognition that the change in IDRC priorities had been damaging to IDRC's reputation in China. Many programmes, especially in agriculture, were terminated. This caused much disappointment and frustration among the Chinese recipients. There seems to have been a failure of communication between the Centre, the SSTC, and many of the Chinese recipients, on the reasons why IDRC changed its approach, and the opportunities that the CPF provided for new initiatives. The existence of a CPF made it easier for programme staff to explain why certain programme activities were no longer permissible. But the Programmes Initiative approach also meant a longer time had to be devoted to working with recipients to develop a project proposal which was acceptable to IDRC.

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Earl and Terry Smutylo. *Supporting Development Research: An assessment of the specifics of IDRC's approach to programme delivery.*

## **7. Particular issues of working in China**

This question was added to tease out any issues which were not covered by the other questions, but which might be significant.

There was a strong consensus that, as noted earlier, one of the biggest problems for IDRC staff working in China was their lack of Chinese language capability.

The lack of Chinese language capability within the programme staff has made it difficult for them to make sound assessments of the research capabilities and knowledge of the Chinese research teams. They had found it possible to work with the Chinese teams to design research projects through the use of interpreters. But for the most part they had found it difficult to have in depth technical discussions using interpreters. If IDRC is to continue to support research in China in a major way it will be important to resolve this issue either by giving fewer responsibilities for programme staff, providing them with Chinese language training, recruiting new staff with Chinese language capabilities, or making greater use of consultants with Chinese language capability.

Another issue raised was how IDRC might increase the use of Chinese strengths in such areas as traditional knowledge, and appropriate livelihoods in regional and global networks.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

The time and resources that were available for this assessment did not permit a thorough evaluation of the impact of IDRC on either China's research system or on China's development. What it has done is to identify a set of issues which, in the opinion of the review team, deserve further consideration by both MOST and IDRC. They should provide the basis for thinking about the next phase in the relationship between IDRC and China.

The assessment revealed a high level of satisfaction with the IDRC/China partnership on both the Chinese and IDRC sides. There were some criticisms made, but most of these were constructive and have led the review team to make some suggestions for changes to the way the partnership should work in the future.

The IDRC support has led to some notable research successes, especially in agriculture and forestry. The economic returns, reported to the review team, from some of this research is quite remarkable. Also, the help provided to strengthen social science research in China has had a noticeable impact. But some of the Chinese institutions had become heavily dependent on continuous IDRC support. Even today, the Chinese Academy of Forestry depends on foreign funding sources for 40% of its research income.

It is interesting to note that the changes which occurred in Canada in the late 1980's and early 1990's and which led IDRC to become more responsive to market needs, coincided with the Chinese reforms which pushed Chinese research institutions in the same direction. This has, in fact, been a global trend and has resulted in research institutions world wide having to become more responsive to the needs of society.

Now that China has a strong scientific base in many sectors, its relationship with IDRC needs to be rethought. We suggest that over the next 5 to 10 years IDRC should continue to work in China concentrating its efforts on a few programme initiatives which are of particular importance for China. Within these IDRC might especially continue to help bring Chinese social science research up to international standards; help promote networks of research teams within China, especially linking more experienced teams with those less experienced; continue to promote the formation of inter-disciplinary teams necessary to solve development problems; include Chinese teams in international networks (in these cases the costs of the Chinese teams might be met by MOST).

We have built on this general approach to make some specific suggestions for consideration by MOST and IDRC. These suggestions follow our general conclusions and also pick up on a number of specific suggestions made during the course of the review.

### **Suggestions:**

1. IDRC continue to support research in China, focusing especially in those areas of great importance for China, but where China's research strengths are not yet up to international standards. This would include policy research and the management of innovation. This suggestion is made in order to utilise the IDRC strength of providing technical support as well as financial support.
2. MOST and IDRC meet (perhaps every two years, alternatively in China and Canada) to agree on a strategy for their partnership in China. This strategy would need to take into account both China's priorities and IDRC's Corporate Planning Framework.
3. MOST and IDRC consider setting up a new joint venture where each contribute to the support of research in third countries and participate in research networks. The joint venture might eventually have a measure of independence of each organisation with its own board. To begin, however, a specific research topic might be chosen and a mechanism found for the sharing of costs. Additionally, MOST might fund the research of Chinese teams that participate in international networks.
4. MOST be more proactive in helping to identify Chinese partners at both national and local levels to work with IDRC on projects which contribute to the new strategy.
5. MOST do more to disseminate information about IDRC, and its Corporate Planning Framework, within China. The MOST web site is a good start.
6. MOST and IDRC co-operate in organising a workshop in China for all current recipients of IDRC grants. The review team found a strong sense of loyalty to IDRC among different research teams even though they were working on totally different topics. Some expressed the view that they would welcome such a meeting so they could share experiences. It might lead to the definition of best practise in research support.
7. IDRC continue the practise of employing technically qualified programme officers who help in project design and proposal writing. Consideration be given, however, to using Chinese speaking consultants in project monitoring and evaluation. Some of those consultants might be from Chinese institutions.

8. IDRC consider a more open and transparent process for choosing potential partners. Some of the grants might be awarded following a process of open competition. This process could be advertised widely on the internet. In particular, the MOST web site could be very helpful.
9. IDRC provide more feedback to Chinese research teams on any relevant project evaluations that it carries out.
10. IDRC consider making annual awards for excellence in research supported by IDRC.
11. IDRC to expand the practise of linking experienced Chinese researchers in centres of excellence with less experienced researchers in the remoter and less developed regions of China.
12. IDRC do more to inform researchers in developing countries about its changes in priorities and the reasons for making them.
13. IDRC to organise a workshop on the links between policy research and policy making. This is an important topic in China and is a subject on which there is considerable interest worldwide. Chinese researchers and policy makers would benefit from learning about international experience on this topic.
14. IDRC to consider organising training programmes for the mangers of international research networks. Chinese researchers have observed that IDRC has a lot of experience at running networks and in observing how successful networks are managed. Can this experience be codified? What are the attributes of a successful network manager, and can managers be trained to acquire these attributes? If so, MOST would like to send selected Chinese research leaders for such training.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Questionnaire sent to IDRC Programme Officers who have worked in China**

#### **ASSESSMENT OF 20 YEARS OF IDRC COLLABORATION WITH CHINA**

1999 marks the twentieth anniversary of the start of IDRC/China research collaboration. To mark the occasion the Ministry of Science and Technology in China propose to carry out an assessment of this collaboration. One purpose is to help the MOST to plan future collaboration, another is to help IDRC in its thinking about future relations with China. A third objective is to help the Chinese in their thinking about a possible enlarged programme of research support to lesser developed countries. They want to identify the particularly beneficial aspects of IDRC support so that these can inform the design of any future Chinese programme.

I have been asked to participate in this assessment and will be spending three weeks in China working with the Chinese team. Tan Say Yin from IDRC's Singapore office will also participate in the assessment. The main objective will be to identify the characteristics of IDRC support which have been particularly well received by the Chinese recipients and also any characteristics which not been well received. The review team will wish, wherever possible, to learn about the impact of IDRC supported research on Chinese development, but that is not the main purpose of the assessment.

The IDRC office in Singapore, and its headquarters in Ottawa have provided the Chinese and myself with project documentation for a selection of projects, spanning different subject areas and different geographic regions in China. The projects were chosen following consultation between the Chinese and Randy Spence.

I have been reading this voluminous documentation and in the course of this have identified a number of IDRC programme officers who were involved in developing or monitoring projects in China. Some of these staff are still with IDRC, but others have moved on to other jobs or have retired. The assessment team thinks it will be useful to contact as many as possible of IDRC staff and consultants to solicit your views about the characteristics of IDRC support which you believe to have been most and least appreciated by the Chinese research teams.

We would also appreciate your own assessment of the performance of the Chinese partners. We have some information from project completion reports, but these are not available for all projects. It would be easiest if you could provide your responses in electronic form, and return it as an attachment to me. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

#### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

##### **1. The role of the Ministry of Science and Technology (Previously SSTC )**



To what extent did you find MOST/SSTC helpful in facilitating Collaboration between IDRC and the Chinese research partners. Do you have any suggestions of what more they might do in the future

**2. Role of other “facilitating “ organisations such as the Chinese Academy of Forestry.**

To what extent did you find the CAF helpful in facilitating co-operation between IDRC and the Chinese research partners?

**3. Role of host research institution.**

Please comment on the quality of the research management provided by the host institution. Did you find that this changed over the lifetime of the project? Did any IDRC actions contribute to these changes? What actions were most important?

**4 The Chinese research teams.**

What, in your view, was the quality of the Chinese research teams with which you worked? How did their quality change over the lifetime of the project? To what extent did IDRC actions contribute to those changes. ? What were the most important actions? Were there any noticeable differences between the quality of the Chinese research teams and those of other teams in other countries?

**5. Views on the links between the research teams and potential clients of the research.**

To what extent were potential clients or users of the research involved in the research design, or monitoring. To what extent, to your knowledge, were the results applied. Please give examples.

**6. The IDRC approach to programme delivery: the case of China.**

A 1998 IDRC report on “Supporting Development Research: An assessment of the specifics IDRC’s approach to programme delivery by Sarah Earl and Terry Smutylo

identified fourteen characteristics of the IDRC approach. These were :

1. Talent Scouting and Spotting
2. Flexible and Responsive Funding
3. Motivating for Research Quality
4. Collegial Relationships with Research Partners
5. Linking Research to the Development Context
6. Institutionalization of Research for Development
7. Research Networking
8. Donor Linkages
9. Access to Canadian Expertise
10. Targeted Capacity Building
11. Supportive and Comprehensive Monitoring
12. Expert Technical and Methodological Input
13. Intense Professional Commitment
14. Corporate Level Issues.

Which of these were particularly important, in your view, in your dealings with China, and Chinese researchers. Which were not relevant or were unimportant.

#### **7. Changes in IDRC approach to Programme Delivery**

Over the past five to ten years IDRC has spent much time in developing its own priorities and formulating its Corporate Planning Framework. How has this affected programme delivery? For example in the case of China has the existence of CPF 2 and a more focused programme made it:

- i) More difficult to identify projects which meet IDRC's and China's priorities.
- ii) Has it made it necessary for programme officers to help recipients write project proposals so as to 'fit' IDRC requirements

And , in your view:

- iii) Has the time to prepare and approve projects been lengthened in recent years

iv) What have been the benefits for China of IDRC having a CPF.

8. Were there any particular difficulties in working in China which you would wish to bring to the attention of the Assessment team. How might those difficulties be overcome.

9. Please provide any other comments which might be relevant to this assessment.

Thank you for your help.

Geoffrey Oldham