Capacity Building at IDRC: Some Preliminary Thoughts

Prepared for IDRC's Evaluation Unit

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April 2005

Executive Summary

Over its many years of supporting researchers in the south, IDRC has gained considerable knowledge and experience in supporting and facilitating capacity building activities, projects and programs. Capacity building at IDRC tends to focus on the development of individual and organizational capacities. Sometimes this also includes other types of organized groupings such as networks, communities, or sectors. Still, there remains a need to better articulate what the Centre means by "capacity building", and to examine how it has performed, what works, what doesn't work, and what work remains to be done. As a result, IDRC's Evaluation Unit is carrying out a strategic evaluation that will investigate these **four key questions**:

1) Whose capacities are being built?

2) What capacities are being built?

3) How are these capacities being built?

4) What factors contribute to or inhibit capacity building objectives in Centre-supported projects?

Universalia was commissioned by the Evaluation Unit to carry out two key elements of this study: (1) the development of a conceptual framework and; (2) using the conceptual framework to identify the results reported in a sample of IDRC projects. This paper responds to the first element (Phase I).

The methodology for Phase I consisted of two key pieces: documents and people. Prior to this study, IDRC commissioned several background studies as part of this strategic evaluation. These studies provided IDRC with a variety of empirical, descriptive and conceptual information about capacity building activities carried out by the Centre. These works were integrated into this study to supplement the data and to assist the consultants to address the questions identified in the TORs. Additional documentation was sought both within and outside IDRC to complement the work already done. Internal documents include: PI Prospectuses (2000-2004), CSPF 2000-2004, CSPF 2005 – 2010, and CAF documents. For this phase of the study, Universalia limited its work in file reviews and analysis.

Building on the work of Gillespie (2005) who conducted 17 interviews with staff and managers, an additional 27 interviews were conducted with individuals from all parts of the Centre[1]. The intent of these interviews was to gather the various views and perspectives on capacity building within the Centre, and focused on the way IDRC staff and managers understand capacity building, and how they operationalize that understanding in their work. These interviews also provided the consultant with an opportunity to solicit possible projects to include in the purposeful sample for Phase II (i.e., looking at the results).

Using a "theory of change" approach, we looked at IDRC's "espoused theories", that is what they say they do, and the theories of action, that is, the capacity building projects and activities that IDRC actually invests in. We explored how IDRC staff understand the concept of capacity building and how they use this understanding to develop projects. In this section, we used the data from interviews to try and understand the IDRC talks about capacity building. What are their definitions, strategies, approaches, underlying assumptions and major hypotheses that IDRC staff

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[1] For a list of people interviewed, please see Appendix II.

and managers have about how change occurs in relation to building research and research-related capacities in the South.

Our findings from a review of the literature suggest a number of central features underlying important changes and trends in international development. Four of these include: globalization, decentralization efforts, global development initiatives (e.g., NEPAD, MDGs) and new funding arrangements (e.g., SWAps). Of these, globalization, along with the advent of ICTs, is the most influential and enduring change process most frequently mentioned by donors. The use of ICTs and their influence on capacity building objectives cannot be underestimated: they affect what, where and how development is delivered. In addition, many of the new funding initiatives require different capacities within developing countries' public sectors, including the capacity to use research for decision-making.

Our preliminary findings from the interviews and project data can be grouped into the following areas for consideration:

Definitional Issues:

- There is no commonly understood definition of capacity building within IDRC to help guide staff in carrying out their work. While some felt comfortable with capacity building as an umbrella term for their project activities, others found this broad conceptualization problematic. Although a corporate definition of capacity building may not be useful for staff or managers in their work, a shared understanding of what capacity building entails is critical if the Centre wants to make a serious intellectual effort to master the subject.

- Related to the above, is that a lack of a corporate level understanding of capacity building also results in an inconsistent approach to categorizing capacity building work at IDRC. This makes file reviews, analysis and learning difficult. It also makes tracking and monitoring "building indigenous capacity" for the CAF as a result area for SMC to report on extremely challenging.

Who's Capacities, What Capacities, What Activities Used?

- IDRC talks about change occurring from capacity building from the point of the problematique and the research area, rather than changes at the institutional or systems level. Capacity building in this context is about building up the field of research and creating a critical mass of indigenous capacity to carry out research in a particular field (i.e., ecohealth research). For most IDRC staff, the entry point for change is at the individual level; however, despite the individual-to-individual bias, a significant number of those interviewed wanted to focus at the institutional and organizational level. Moreover, most of the corporate level documentation speaks to institutional strengthening as a Centre objective towards contributing to capacity building in the South.

- IDRC's approach to capacity building is normally instrumental or functional in nature and focuses on professional competencies, capabilities and the tools needed to conduct research. When targeting individuals, IDRC talks about capacity building in terms of "the ability to do something" that was missing before.

- Although staff and managers identify a wide range of activities they use to build capacity, no process, or set mix of activities, were identified that would indicate an approach to capacity building. In addition, many of those interviewed think that IDRC needs to re-establish its foundational support to Masters and PhD degrees as a key tool for building capacity.

Factors:

- Flexibility and persistence were mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews as the two most compelling factors associated with IDRC's comparative advantage. It is not only that the Centre supports research in the South, but also how that research support is delivered that IDRC staff and managers see as the Centre's niche.

Concluding thoughts:

For the most part, what interviewed staff espoused to support in terms of their capacity building work seems to be what they actually fund in projects. Many staff do, however, seem insecure about their work in this area. They try to increase their security by engaging in technical areas of work that they know. While this adds to their sense of security, it narrows the scope of IDRC's capacity work.

The question facing IDRC is: how do they want to move these issues forward? And if they choose to move towards organizational capacity, what will their approach be? Some suggestions are:

- Do nothing new. While staff would prefer to be more comfortable with capacity building, our review indicates that capacity building work is still operating as an "art form" and that the science of capacity building is still at an early stage. IDRC might wait until capacity building is more developed as an interdisciplinary field.

- IDRC may choose to work more closely with others within the donor community (e.g., Rockefeller Foundation, Carnegie, Ford Foundation) in order to help the Centre better understand the state of the art/and science in capacity building.

- IDRC may choose to build internal capacity by either hiring or developing a cadre of experts, who reflect, study and support the organization's capacity building ambitions.

- IDRC may choose to create an internal group to provide more guidance on an agency-wide approach to capacity building.

Acronyms

ACBF	African Capacity Building Foundation
AERC	African Economic Research Consortium
AFNS	Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Sciences
CAF	Corporate Assessment Framework
CFP	Cities Feeding People
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CSPF	Corporate Strategy and Program Framework
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
ENRM	Environment and Natural Resource Management
ESARO	Eastern and Southern African Regional Office
FAC	Foreign Affairs Canada
FY	Fiscal Year
GAD	Grant Administration Division
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ICT4D	Information and Communication Technologies for Development
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
INASP	International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications
ISNAR	International Service for National Agricultural Research
ISP	Internet Service Provider
IXP	Internet Exchange Point
KPFE	Swiss Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NEPAD	New Partnership for African Development
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PI	Program Initiative
PO	Program Officer
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper(s)
RBM	Results Based Management

RMAF	Results Based Management and Accountability Frameworks
SEP	Social and Economic Policy
SISERA	Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa
SMC	Senior Management Committee
SWAp	Sector Wide Approaches
TOR	Terms of Reference
UA	Urban Agriculture
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
WARO	West and Central Africa Regional Office

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Appendices

1. Introduction to the Study

1.1 Background

Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) supplies, among other things, funding and technical assistance to researchers in developing countries to carry out applied research on the problems and issues that southern researchers and policymakers have identified as crucial to their communities. The IDRC Act (1970) is the framework within which the Centre operates. The Act mandates the Centre *"…to initiate, encourage and conduct research into the problems of the developing regions of the world and into the means for applying and adapting scientific, technical and other knowledge to the economic and social advancement of those regions…"*

The mission of IDRC is *"'Empowerment through Knowledge', or to promote interaction, and foster a spirit of cooperation and mutual learning within and among social groups, nations and societies through the creation and adaptation of the knowledge that the people of the developing countries judge to be of greatest relevance to their own prosperity, security and equity"* (CSPF 2005 – 2010, p14).

To operationalize this mission, and fundamental to its approach to research for development, one of the Centre's strategic goals is to *"strengthen and help mobilize the local research capacity of developing countries…"* (CSPF 2005-2010, p.16). Understanding what capacity building is and means, both as a development process and as a development result, is critical for the Centre to achieve its mandate.

Over its many years of supporting researchers in the south, IDRC has gained considerable knowledge and experience in supporting and facilitating capacity building activities, projects and programs. Capacity building at IDRC tends to focus on the development of individual and organizational capacities. Sometimes this also includes other types of organized groupings such as networks, communities, or sectors. Still, there remains a need to better articulate what the Centre means by "capacity building", and to examine how it has performed, what works, what doesn't work, and what work remains to be done. As a result, IDRC's Evaluation Unit is carrying out a strategic evaluation that will investigate these **four key questions**:

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This strategic evaluation is being done in stages with **three key milestones**. The first milestone consisted mainly of collecting, analyzing and reporting on existing Centre documentation on capacity building. This involved examining the underlying theories and/or assumptions as well as the intent of Centre-supported projects to build researchers' capacities. This activity generated several background studies (see Box1).

The second key milestone was to synthesize the background studies and to integrate central pieces from the existing literature on capacity building and capacity development. A review of the capacity building activities, projects and programs by other development agencies was also done to provide context for work being done in this area. This synthesis was the foundation for the development of the conceptual framework on the Centre's approach to capacity building.

The third milestone is to use the conceptual framework to identify the results reported in a sample of IDRC projects. This is the next step in the study, which will be initiated in May 2005.

The strategic evaluation is intended for use by:

(a) **IDRC senior managers**, in their monitoring of indigenous capacity building as part of the Centre's Corporate Assessment Framework (CAF) reporting and in supporting a corporate environment conducive to the Centre's capacity building efforts;

> **Box1: Background studies commissioned by IDRC for the strategic evaluation on capacity building**
>
> Bernard, Anne (2005a). Adult learning and capacity building in IDRC: A concept paper, Evaluation Unit, IDRC, Ottawa.
>
> Bernard, Anne (2005b). Mapping capacity building in IDRC, Evaluation Unit, IDRC, Ottawa.
>
> Bernard, Anne and Greg Armstrong (2005c). Framework for evaluating capacity building in IDRC, Evaluation Unit, IDRC, Ottawa
>
> Bernard, Anne (2005d). References to the field of adult education and learning, Evaluation Unit, IDRC, Ottawa.
>
> Bernard, Anne (2005e). Situating Capacity Development in IDRC: Some Policy Considerations, Evaluation Unit, IDRC, Ottawa.
>
> Gillespie, Bryon (2005). Exploring IDRC understanding of capacity building and identifying "theories of change": Background study to focus a review of literature on capacity building. Draft report prepared for IDRC's Evaluation Unit, February 2005.
>
> Maessen, Odilia (2005). Intent to Build Capacity through Research Projects: an examination of project objectives, abstract and appraisal documents, Draft Report, prepared for IDRC's Evaluation Unit, April 2005.
>
> Maessen, Odilia. (2004). Characterization of the Capacity Building Content in Twelve Evaluation Reports: Tables and Remarks, Report prepared for IDRC's Evaluation Unit, November 2004.

(b) **IDRC staff and managers**, in designing, supporting and monitoring projects and activities intended to build capacities.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

Universalia was commissioned by the Evaluation Unit to carry out two key elements of this study: (1) the development of a conceptual framework and; (2) using the conceptual framework to identify the results reported in a sample of IDRC projects. This paper responds to the first element (Phase I).

The purpose of Phase I was to produce a paper that elaborates, builds on and synthesizes the existing background documentation to the study as well as to place IDRC's approach to capacity building activities in a wider context in relation to what other organizations are doing in this area. Specifically, this paper had the following objectives:

1. To identify what the Centre says it is doing (as manifested in the existing background documentation and interview data);

2. To identify what the Centre is actually doing (as manifested in the "intent" documentation);

3. To develop a typology and/or a (number of) framework(s) that provide(s) a picture of the types and levels (i.e., individual, organizational, systems/societal) of capacities that IDRC supports;

4. To create a common language and understanding that will help Centre staff and managers (both senior and otherwise) to better articulate what they do, who they do it with, and how they do it in relation to capacity building activities;

5. To contextualize IDRC's work by describing what other development agencies/organizations are doing in relation to capacity building activities;

6. To establish the conceptual groundwork for **Phase II**, which will report on the results of IDRC's contribution to capacity building in developing countries.

1.3 Organization of the Report

This document represents the draft report for the first phase of this study. Following this introductory section, the report is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 provides a description of the methodology used in this phase of the study;

Chapter 3 presents a brief description of the development context and the important changes that occurred over the past 10-15 years and that affect developing countries, donors and capacity building initiatives;

Chapter 4 provides a brief description of IDRC's structure and presents some initial findings regarding what IDRC says it's doing, based on our review of the documents as well as our interviews with staff and managers;

Chapter 5 presents some findings based on a review of project data from O Maessen's report;

Chapter 6 offers our initial conclusions and thoughts about a possible conceptual framework for consideration as IDRC moves forward in its work on capacity building;

Appendix I presents a review of the literature on capacity building/capacity development and provides a brief overview of what other development organizations and donors are doing in this area;

Appendix II gives a list of people interviewed;

Appendix III gives a list of the organizations reviewed;

Appendix IV provides a profile of the consultants;

Appendix V presents a list of the findings;

Appendix VI gives the bibliography.

2. Overall Methodology

The methodology for Phase I consisted of two key pieces: documents and people. The design of the methodology used was a collaborative effort between two Officers from the Evaluation Unit (D. Deby and K. Kelpin) and the two Canadian consultants who carried out this phase of the study (C. Lusthaus and S. Neilson). Since the intent of this report is to present how IDRC conceptualizes its capacity building work, and how capacity building activities, projects or programs are implemented, there were no intentions to build capacity as a part of this evaluation process.

Additionally, the key stakeholders and intended users of this report (IDRC staff and managers) participated simply as "interviewees", although a few Centre staff/managers who are members of the capacity study "reference group" also provided additional information as well as clarifying the use of this report to the consultants. Data collected from the interviews was kept confidential by the two consultants, and the evidence used to support our findings (i.e., quotes from people interviewed) cannot be identified or associated with any one particular person.

2.1 Background studies at IDRC

Prior to this study, IDRC commissioned several background studies as part of this strategic evaluation (Box1). These studies provided IDRC with a variety of empirical, descriptive and conceptual information about capacity building activities carried out by the Centre. These works were integrated into this study to supplement the data and to assist the consultants to address the questions identified in the TORs (Appendix VII).

Additional documentation was sought both within and outside IDRC to complement the work already done. Internal documents include: PI Prospectuses (2000-2004, CSPF 2000-2004, CSPF 2005 – 2010, CAF documents). References to the work outside IDRC are found in our bibliography. Finally, funders of research and research centres in the developing world are beginning to look more closely at the issue of capacity building as it relates to their funding interests. For example both the The InterAcademy Council and the Rockfeller Foundation have completed studies in the last year looking at capacity building in various research related areas. For this study, beyond the work of IDRC, Universalia looked at selected literature on capacity building, research capacity building and literature from organizations that fund research capacity building.

2.2 File reviews

For this phase of the study, Universalia limited its work in file reviews and analysis. In the period, 2000-2004 there are approximately 600 approved research projects and 1000+ research support projects. Odilia Maessen examined all 561 research projects in terms of the intent to build capacity. Her analysis included looking at the project objectives, abstract and appraisal. Anne Bernard analyzed over 30 project files for her study. No additional file analysis was done for this work. Through our staff interviews and our own review, we will be identifying a cohort of projects to analyze with respect to results of capacity building efforts for phase II of this study.

2.3 Interviewing staff on their approach to capacity building

2.3.1 Interviews

Building on the work of Gillespie (2005) who conducted 17 interviews with staff and managers, an additional 27 interviews were conducted with individuals from all parts of the Centre[2]. The intent of these interviews was to gather the various views and perspectives on capacity building within the Centre, and focused on the way IDRC staff and managers understand capacity building, and how they operationalize that understanding in their work. These interviews also provided the consultant with an opportunity to solicit possible projects to include in the purposeful sample for Phase II (i.e., looking at the results).

There were a number of criteria used for the selection of the interviewees. Central to this selection is providing regional and program coverage; that is, to speak with staff and managers located in one of six IDRC regional offices (Montevideo, Dakar, Nairobi, Cairo, Singapore, Delhi, Ottawa) and who work in one of IDRC's three broad programming areas (SEP, ENRM, ICT4D). Efforts were also made to speak with staff and managers from some of the Centre's non-programming areas, including Business Development and Partnerships, Policy and Planning, Awards, Communications, Evaluation, Grant Administration, and the Library. Other criteria also included length of time at IDRC. This criterion was used to gather the different perspectives of staff and/or managers who have either recently joined IDRC (less than three years) or those who have been with IDRC for many years (e.g., 20 years or more) and helped the consultants to characterize how people at IDRC come to understand what capacity building is and/or means, and how this understanding has evolved.

It was also important that both staff and managers were selected for interviews to obtain the different perspectives between those "who plan and carry out capacity-building activities" and those who "have a global and perhaps a more 'corporate' perspective" (D. Deby, personal communication, 15 February 2005).

Our interviews were done face-to-face with those staff/managers located in Ottawa, and by telephone with those who are located in the various regional offices. The interviews lasted between 40 – 90 minutes each, and although the consultants did not record these interviews, extensive notes were taken.

Transcripts from Gillespie's interviews were also obtained and incorporated into this report as part of the "synthesis" of people's thoughts, ideas and perspectives. It also provided the consultants with more data and evidence about how staff and managers understand capacity building and how they operationalize this understanding in their work.

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[2] For a list of people interviewed, please see Appendix II.

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	Interviews by BG	Interviews by SN & CL	Total number of interviews
	17	27	44
Who interviewed			
• Executive Directors	1	1	2
• Directors	-	4	4
• Team Leaders	2	6	8
• Senior Program Officer	9	10	19
• Program Officer	2	1	3
• Research Officer	-	1	1
• Regional Controller	2	-	2
• Library Services	1	1	2
What about	IDRC's theory of change • Project level	IDRC's espoused approach to capacity building/capacity development • Project level • Corporate level • Suggest project case examples	

2.4 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Methodology

A key strength to using a theory of change approach is that it allowed us to look at and compare IDRC's espoused theory of how the Centre supports capacity changes, and what it actually supports. The resulting analysis can "*help all concerned understand the reasons for and implications of discrepancies. This 'ideal-actual' comparison can support organizational development to improve effectiveness*" (Patton, 2002). By exposing some of the discrepancies between what the Centre says its doing, and what it is actually funding will assist IDRC staff and managers to understand where some of the underlying tensions within the Centre may be, and what the implications of these tensions are.

Perhaps the main methodological weakness in this study was the fact that the data we received from the Centre's project database (EPIK) is self-reported project information completed by IDRC staff/managers. This was somewhat limiting because we do not know how people determined to code for project sub-type "capacity building". This posits a number of questions: At what point does a project become a "capacity building" sub-type project as determined by the responsible Program Officer? Does each Program Officer/Program Initiative/Program Area use the same criteria to code the projects? Because of the difficulties we encountered in this classification system and the categorization of project sub-types, the project data included in this study was less reliable than we would have liked to have used.

3. The Development Context

Since the early 1990s, the international development environment has undergone some considerable and important changes. The four most central features of this change process include: globalization, decentralization efforts, global development initiatives (e.g., NEPAD, MDGs) and new funding arrangements (e.g., SWAps).

Globalization is perhaps the most influential and enduring change that continues to affect what, where, when and how development is delivered. The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has spread to all parts of the globe, albeit unevenly. But their influence on capacity building objectives and initiatives cannot be underestimated. ICTs allow donors and national governments alike to deliver new knowledge and concepts in a variety of forms, at a variety of levels (including university degrees), to a variety of people located in even some of the most remote areas of the world. Moreover, being connected allows people and governments to be involved and compete in the global economy, which for most developing countries is critical if they are to grow their own economies. Capacity to build, understand and use ICTs is central to this era of globalization.

Decentralization efforts in developing countries have also resulted in donor recognition of the need to build the capacity of the

> **Important Changes in the International Development Environment (adapted from A. Whyte, 2005).**
>
> Globalization, especially the advent of ICTs, is the overarching change process most frequently mentioned by donors.
>
> Globalization also means the North can enter arenas, such as higher education in Africa and compete directly with local universities for students.
>
> The use of ICTs in developing countries at all levels, from academia to communities, is considered critical if they are to compete in the global economy.
>
> ICTs also enable new forms of capacity building, such as regional training institutes (e.g., AERC) and knowledge networks.
>
> Competition for scarce resources and donor funds means that, in some developing countries, universities and NGOs are pooling their resources and undergoing rapid organizational reforms.
>
> Decentralization in many developing countries has resulted in building the capacity of the public sector, especially at the local levels, for effective and efficient delivery of services and public goods
>
> New funding approaches (e.g., SWAps, PRSPs) require new capacities (how to set priorities, allocate resources, implementation, M&E, how to use research).
>
> The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are extremely influential in how the UN and bilateral agencies are approaching development and capacity building.
>
> Many of the global development initiatives (e.g., NEPAD) require capacity building if they are to be implemented.

public sector, especially at the local levels, for the effective and efficient delivery of public goods and services. Such decentralization efforts often go hand-in-hand with new donor approaches to funding development initiatives. With sector development responsibility and accountability more and more in the hands of national governments, they need to have the capacity to set priorities, allocate resources, and the skills for implementation and M&E. Understanding how to use research that feeds into the policy process is also becoming a central factor in capacity building initiatives.

New global development initiatives, such as NEPAD and the MDGs also require new capacities on the part of developing country governments so that they can implement them. Clearly the global context is changing. Each of the items and initiatives identified above generates a need for natural and social science research and research capacity. It is clear that the capacity to do

the research for these and other issues needs to be built and or enhanced in the developing world.

3.1 Context with respect to building research capacity

Clearly, research is essential for the sustained improvement of countries, regardless of their developmental status. Sound research acts as a major tool for the identification of problems, their causes, the demonstration of their importance to a country's development, the formulation of solutions, and the evaluation of progress. Unfortunately, the capacity to do research is seriously limited and these limitations vary with respect to issues of human resources, organizations, institutions and societies. In all cases it is critical to contextualize capacity building.

 The principal objectives of increasing research capacity are to strengthen the ability of targeted groups to respond to national, regional and local research development needs. Capacity building should lead to the development of a research environment capable of engaging in research and renewing the ability to carry on – whether it is in a research establishment, an NGO, a network or some other form.

Developing research capacity may be accomplished in various ways. Whatever the approach taken to develop this capacity, careful consideration should be given to the context within which the capacity is being developed. While disciplinary and interdisciplinary breadth is a crucial technical aspect of capacity building, it is the **context** which determines whether the work developed in the disciplines is used and supported.

A necessary condition for engaging in research is funding. Eighty five percent of the world's resources on research are invested in high-income countries, 10% in India, China and East Asia, leaving only 4-5% for the rest of the world – and most of this on northern agencies undertaking research in the south (KPFE 2001). While research financing is not the only resource required for engaging in research, the figures provided by the Swiss indicate that there is a major imbalance between the North and the South in research investments. This same pattern is true with respect to other research resources – people, equipment, infrastructure, technology and so forth. At the input end it is clear that resources are lacking. On a more positive note there continues to be a commitment on the part of donors to not only continue supporting research, but also to re-orient research efforts towards southern agencies (Grindle and Hindebrand 1999).

As we turn to the results end, there is wide recognition of the contribution of research to development – though it has been difficult to quantify. The assumption is that, investment in building southern research capacity is essential to make progress in the quest to reduce global poverty and create more equality throughout the world; however, translating this general rhetoric into resources has been difficult.

One of the key areas of discourse is how practical or relevant the work of researchers should be to the lives of poor people. This discourse remains quite complex due to the unclear chain that exists between research activity and poverty reduction. Should research be "policy-relevant", despite evidence that policy processes are a complex web of influencing factors only tangentially linked to research results? Capacity gaps in the South are pervasive and capacity building needs tailor-made approaches, based on a good understanding of the context. Research capacity building is long term and requires flexible policies and procedures, linked to the needs and circumstances of the countries they serve. As with most capacity efforts southern

research capacity building requires the South to have control over and ownership of priority and processes. Ownership is key.

How to build this capacity is less well understood. It is clear that the capacity to undertake high-quality and effective research in developing countries includes the development of human, social as well as financial capital. We know that each of these "capitals" have to work together in a system that supports research, researchers and research institutions. It is also clear that to engage in capacity building involves more than investing in a set of activities. Capacity building is a process that is not well understood (Fukuyama 2004). Furthermore, some social science observers are coming to the realization that to be successful in engaging in capacity building, we need to develop a more robust action theory related to capacity building. In other words capacity building needs to be seen as a full-fledged area of social science inquiry (Fukuyama 2004 and Morgan 2005). This is not the case now. For those involved in building it is more of an art than a science (Fukuyama 2004).

As discussed earlier, there is an optimistic side. Recent reviews (Whyte 2005, ODI 2002) have identified almost fifty organizations with "strengthening southern research capacity" described in their mission-statements or high-level objectives (see list in Appendix III). These include UN agencies, Foundations, CGIAR agencies, coordinating agencies, bilateral programs, research institutes, international NGOs and regional NGOs. The internet search which generated the list does not include bilateral or multilateral donor agencies, but do include operational the agencies they have set up to help them manage their programs. In addition to those listed here, there are innumerable other development and research organizations working collaboratively with southern research partners who are, *de facto* involved in capacity-building.

These organizations range from very large programs of over US$500 million to small regional NGOs, and networks. Capacity building is the main activity for some (e.g., ISNAR, INASP, and SISERA), whereas it is a secondary objective for others (e.g., UNRISD). Almost 3/4 is based in developed countries and the rest in developing countries. Only 20% focus on developing countries exclusively, however the rest indicated that they are either world wide or regional specific. The dominance of northern agencies, and small number of agencies identified based, or working, in Latin America and Francophone Africa may be at least in part because the study was based largely on an internet search. About a third support research in development policy and management and another third support research in the social sciences, including economics. The rest support various aspects of natural science research. UNESCO has invested in national university capacity in teaching and research. The CGIAR centres adopt a capacity-building approach within their collaborative research programs. It is important to note that ISNAR (a CGIAR centre) whose purpose was to strengthen southern agricultural research capacity recently closed, in part because of the difficulty it had in showing results of its capacity building effort.

Of interest is that there are a number of specialized agencies, which IDRC has supported, engaging in capacity building, especially in Africa. Some of these, for example the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and Secretariat for Institutional Support for Socio-Economic Research in Africa (SISERA) are large, well funded, and have substantial programs. Others, for example the Africa Economic Research Consortium (AERC) and Association of Development Research and Training Institutes of Asia and the Pacific (ADIPA) are smaller, often networks of southern researchers rather than operational programs. All seem to offer activities that can strengthen southern research capacity.   All struggle with the question of results.

4. IDRC and Capacity Building: What IDRC says It's Doing

> *IDRC's Mandate*
>
> *…to initiate, encourage, support and conduct research into the problems of the developing regions of the world and into the means for applying and adapting scientific, technical an other knowledge to the economic and social advancement of those regions (IDRC Annual Report 2003-04).*

This section looks at what IDRC says it's doing, and uses data from the background studies (A. Bernard, O. Maessen, B. Gillespie[3]) as well as from 27 interviews conducted by the consultants with Centre staff and managers, from both programming (Programs Branch) and non-programming areas (e.g., Evaluation, Grant Administration, Business Development and Partnerships, Communications and Library Services) of IDRC.

The purpose of this section is to identify the theory or theories of change associated with capacity building as articulated by IDRC staff and/or management, either during interviews or in Centre documentation, both at the corporate level (e.g., CSPF, CAF) or at the program level (e.g., approved Program Prospectuses for the last CSPF period).

Important questions to consider are: How does IDRC staff think about capacity building? What are their ideas about how research capacity is built—at multiple levels? What are their ideas about who they are changing (individuals, institutions) and how? What do they mean by building "research capacities" (e.g., analytical capacities, proposal development etc.)? What types of capacity building projects does IDRC support?

4.1 IDRC: It's Structure and How it Operates

IDRC is a Crown Corporation that was established by the *IDRC Act 1970* passed by the House of Commons, with the bulk of its funding coming from an annual parliamentary grant (2004/05 parliamentary appropriation was 119.1 million). As a member of Canada's international policy community, the Centre works collaboratively with a number of federal government departments, including the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC), and Health Canada to name a few. Guided by a 21-member international Board of Governors, IDRC reports to Parliament through the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

IDRC's Programs Branch is structured around three broad programming themes: Social and Economic Policy (SEP), Environment and Natural Resource Management (ENRM), and Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D). These programming

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[3] Project data included in Anne Bernard's background studies consisted of a sample of 30 projects drawn from a list of 150 projects, covering all time periods (1980-2003), all sectors (under former Divisions and current PIs,) and all regions; and another 10 projects from AFNS/ASRO reviewed in 2002 in an earlier phase of the work. Odilia Maessen's scan of evaluation reports consisted of 12 evaluation reports that were submitted to the Evaluation Unit between April 2000 and September 2004, which cover activities supported by the Centre during that period only, and which are not 2003 PI and Corporate Project External Reviews. The data included in Bryon Gillespie's paper was gathered from 17 interviews as well as from a number of documents (e.g., CSPF 2000-2005, CAF related documents). Finally, data were obtained from O Maessen's report on the intent of IDRC projects to build capacity. This data included all 562 Research Projects approved between 1 April 2000 and 30 September 2004.

areas are operationalized through 12 Program Initiatives, which provide the technical support and funding for applied research in developing countries. The Program Initiatives are structured as multidisciplinary teams that managed over 500 research projects and 1000+ research support projects this past CSPF period (2000/04).

During this last fiscal year (FY 2004/05), the average size for a research project was $390,000 and ranged in size from $25,000 to $2 million. Funding for research projects or project phases is generally given for a three-year period, which means that approximately $130,000 is available for each year the project is "active".

4.2   IDRC's Theory of Change: Definitions, Assumptions and Hypotheses

Theories of change begin with the conception that people are designers of action. Actors design interventions (projects) to achieve intended consequences. In their work, these actors construct meaning to which they use to guide future action. Designing action is often done based upon repertoire of ideas, concepts, frameworks, schematics, and strategies, and often not explored by the actor. They are untested assumptions. Sometimes these untested assumptions are part of the discourse of the actor, other times they come out as actions.

Using a "theory of change" approach, we looked at IDRC's "espoused theories", that is what they say they do, and the theories of action, that is, the capacity building projects and activities that IDRC actually invests in. For this section we explored how IDRC staff understand the concept of capacity building and how they use this understanding to develop projects. We used the data from interviews to try and understand how IDRC talks about capacity building. What are their definitions, strategies, approaches, underlying assumptions and major hypotheses that IDRC staff and managers have about how change occurs in relation to building research and research-related capacities in the South.

Finding 1:   While some IDRC staff and managers prefer the term capacity development to capacity building, most see the concept as a broad umbrella housing many of their activities and do not want a semantic debate.

In the development literature there has been an evolution of terms with respect to capacity issues. In the late 80's early 90's capacity building was the term most favoured. In the 90's and continuing today, the concept of choice is capacity development. Recently, the World Bank introduced the idea of capacity enhancement. For some there appears to be a significant difference

> *"I'm very keen on ensuring that our mission, that the IDRC mission is about a capacity building process, not a capacity building one. For a **capacity building** process it is assumed that we bring in the building blocks, but in a **capacity development** process, we know there is already lots of existing capacity, and we're just filling in the gaps".*

However, most of our respondents did not see nor want to get involved in the semantics of nomenclature. The majority of respondents (approximately 76%) saw capacity in terms of the activities they do. In general, capacity building was seen as something that is quite broad in nature, and encompasses a wide set of activities from training in research methodologies or tools to getting partners to think differently about research ("think outside the box") or to do research differently, for example multidisciplinary research, or including gender analysis in natural resource management research.

Some of the respondents referred directly to IDRC's Act and/or mandate when they spoke about capacity building. In this context, they referred to capacity building as supporting people to create their own solutions to the development issues that affect them the most. Others referred to IDRC's Mission Statement "Empowerment through Knowledge" since it *"…directly relates to our notions of knowledge and empowerment through knowledge, and what that actually means. One way of re-phrasing the question 'how do you go about capacity building' is 'how do you go about facilitating the transfer of knowledge and the creation of knowledge in developing countries"*?

> *"Capacity building is more broad than just training – it's how we support development, it's how we work with people in the South".*
>
> *"Capacity building is more than just training. Exposing people to different ideas also creates capacity".*
>
> *"Capacity building is about helping people to think outside the box, how to bring in the social side [into natural resource management research], how to use a participatory approach".*

The issue of how do you "do" capacity building is a theme we heard throughout our interviews. Clearly, many of the staff are interested in making a serious intellectual effort to master the subject of capacity building as it is part of most of the things they do! How IDRC can do this will be explored at the end of this report.

Finding 2:   There is no commonly understood definition within IDRC to help guide staff in carrying out their work.

While many at IDRC felt comfortable with capacity building as an umbrella term for their project activities a number of respondents found this broad conceptualization problematic, "*since with no definition it is challenging to figure out what's "allowed" to be supported, and what isn't"*. Some Program staff discussed having to "*figure it out for themselves*", and hence resolve what capacity building means in their own programming context based on their own definition. These respondents felt that the lack of a corporate definition results in inconsistencies around the Centre and contributes to the "ad hoc" nature of how capacity building is operationalized within the Centre. Some respondents also felt that they had to spend time clarifying what capacity building means to their partners or to those who are inquiring about funding.

> *"I've never seen a definition of capacity building at IDRC. When I first started here, somebody told me to look at a particular workshop report that discussed capacity building and I talked to other senior staff members about it. But I find that it's piece-meal and ad hoc around here".*
>
> *"It's so broad – it can mean everything from providing information to mechanisms we use. It means we have to make it clear to people, make it clear what we are focusing on".*

> *"IDRC does not talk about capacity building. We may have to be more explicit in the future because now we have to support more specific efforts, for e.g., gender training for research in Africa, but our team doesn't have the resources to do the training meaningfully".*

Bernard's paper ***Situating Capacity building in IDRC: Some policy considerations***, also describes some of the issues and challenges arising from a lack of a corporate level definition or policy on capacity development/capacity building:

> *…while the Act and CSPF 2000/05 acknowledge the Centre's capacity building mandate, neither articulates clear strategies or an operational framework for getting it done…policies provide guidance, legitimize resources and make certain demands on staff (e.g., for monitoring). In their development, application and revision, policies clarify, and make more certain the "acceptable" ways and means of providing an intervention action e.g., options for capacity strategies, venues, facilitators and even participants. The CSPF 2000/05 only implies these (Bernard, 2005e, pp. 2-3).*

Finding 3: **While a "corporate definition" of capacity building may not be useful for staff or managers in their work, a *shared understanding* of what capacity building entails is critical if the Centre wants to make a serious intellectual effort to master the subject.**

IDRC's Senior Management Committee (SMC), in collaboration with the Centre's Evaluation Unit, developed a Corporate Assessment Framework (CAF) as a mechanism that supports systematic monitoring and reporting on its progress towards the Centre achieving its mission. As part of the CAF's development process, SMC identified two strategic goals representing the mandate of the Centre, one of which is "***indigenous capacity building***", to monitor and report on.

Box 3: Definition of Good Performance: Indigenous Capacity building

In the projects and programs it supports, IDRC aims to strengthen the abilities of Southern researchers, research institutions and networks to identify and conceptualize research problems, establish priorities for action, and to design, implement, manage and evaluate research projects and programs that address these needs. This process can include devolving activities or functions to existing or newly created entities in the South. The Centre also devotes time and resources to strengthening the capacity of these individuals, institutions and networks to build relationships and linkages with other organizations in order to gain support in achieving their goals and in communicating research results to promote evidence-based change.

Although the CAF provides a starting point to a corporate understanding of, and approach to, capacity building, guidance from the CAF is inadequate. Surprisingly few interviewees acknowledged its existence or referred to it as a source of guidance when thinking about capacity building. In fact, a number of interviewees spoke directly to the Centre's ***lack*** of a corporate understanding, definition and/or approach to capacity building. But here balance is needed. Our interviews also indicate that there is a strong contingent within IDRC that feel that the Centre's strength is in its flexible approach to capacity building. Balancing flexibility and direction is a common theme in many of the interviews.

Similar to our findings in the interviews, the definition of good performance for "indigenous capacity building" provided in the CAF (see Box 3) is strongly focused on the technical capacities of researchers. What is interesting however is that three of the characteristics of good performance (Box 4) focus on "recipient organizations" yet the interviews and data from the research projects suggest that IDRC's actual focus is on **individual researchers.** In light of this, SMC may want to re-visit these characteristics of good performance so that they can monitor and report on what the Centre is actually supporting, and not what it espouses to support in relation to its capacity building endeavours.

> **Box 4: Characteristics of Good Performance: Indigenous Capacity building**
>
> IDRC supports Southern researchers, research institutions and networks by strengthening their ability to identify and conceptualize research problems and establish priorities for action.
>
> IDRC supports recipient organizations in the building of technical, administrative and management capacities.
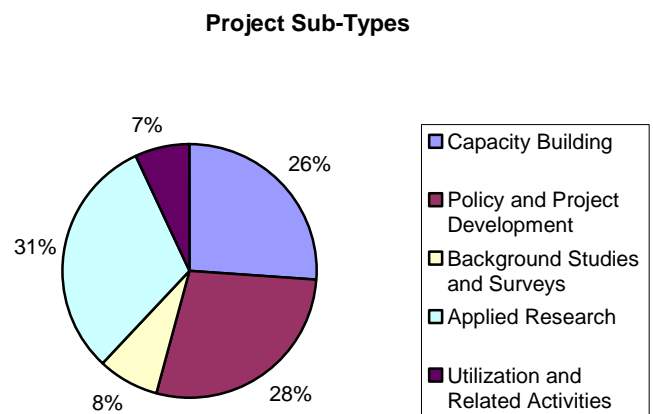>
> IDRC supports a process whereby activities and/or functions can be, when and where appropriate, devolved to existing or newly created entities in the South. In programs which have been devolved, IDRC continues to participate in the sustainability of the program as a donor ensuring that the assets and responsibilities of the program are legally transferred to the new host.
>
> The Centre devotes time and resources to strengthening the capacity of Southern recipient partner organizations and networks in building the relationships and linkages with other organizations that help the Southern partner organization achieve its goals.
>
> The Centre devotes time and resources to strengthening the capacity of recipient partner organizations, individuals, institutions and networks to communicate their research results to promote evidence-based change.

Finding 4: There is an inconsistent approach to categorizing capacity building work in IDRC. This makes file reviews, analysis and learning difficult.

Odilia Maessen's report on the **intent** of IDRC-supported projects to build capacity of Southern partners suggests that the lack of a clear definition of capacity building carries over into the classification systems of IDRC. In reviewing the files Maessen found that 26% of IDRC's research projects are classified as "capacity building sub-type" in its administrative management system (EPIK). In her in-depth qualitative analysis, however, Maessen found that a more realistic proportion of projects with explicit intent to build capacity is actually closer to 76%. As one looks at the classification system it is easy to understand that there are significant overlaps in the categories. It is left up to individual program staff to check the box (and only one box) most appropriate. Clearly this classification issue is one that needs to be addressed if IDRC is to use its project data system for understanding the types of projects it funds.

Project Sub-Types

7% 26% 31% 8% 28%

- Capacity Building
- Policy and Project Development
- Background Studies and Surveys
- Applied Research
- Utilization and Related Activities

Given these significant difficulties associated with IDRC's classification system, an important question for IDRC to consider as an organization is: at what point does a project become a

"capacity building" project? At one level, all projects provide the potential for capacity building, but at what point in this continuum does it become classified as such? What are the characteristics or elements that must be present that permit it to be classified as a capacity building project? Inevitably, this will be a challenging question for the Centre to resolve, but choosing not to address this issue may result in using compromised or incomplete data to monitor and report on "indigenous capacity building" in relation to the Centre's performance towards its mission.

Finding 5:   For IDRC staff, capacity building is a key variable in their approach to development and relationships are key to capacity building.

Capacity building at IDRC is strongly valued within its organizational culture. A number of respondents stated that capacity building at IDRC "*is fundamental and underlies everything we do*". This finding corresponds to Whyte's statement that "*capacity building is more than just another program area for most donors – it lies at the heart of their philosophical approach to international development and development assistance*" (2005, p.ii). In this context, capacity building is central to the Centre's "business model".

> "*Capacity building is the fundamental and absolute principle that underlies how IDRC operates*".
>
> "*In all projects, there's some kind of capacity building objective*".
>
> "*Everything we do is capacity building*".
>
> "*Capacity building is fundamental. It's everything we do. It's what IDRC is about*".

Underlying this model is the notion that development is "people-centred" and is based on the approach that places high importance on partnerships, local ownership and participation as being crucial to sustainability. In reference to what we found in the literature, IDRC's approach to capacity building coincides with the *philosophical approach*, which emphasizes *process* as well as substance. This approach to development embraces the notion "learning-by-doing" and provides the flexibility and long-term commitment that is seen as necessary for change to occur. It is an approach that categorizes how staff and managers work with their partners. Many respondents talked about capacity building in terms of the Program Officer's and/or the program's relationships with IDRC's partners and the importance of building these relationships. Of interest to this study was the importance IDRC staff put on individual "relationships". As one interviewee told us "*we build individual relationships which in turn creates opportunity for work with organizations*". Relationship development seems to be an important part of IDRC capacity building work.

Clearly there are many approaches to capacity building. Some try to do capacity building at the level of the parts (e.g. the structure, staff knowledge, systems, equipment etc.) on the

> "*It's about our approach as much as it is about the substance*".
>
> "*Capacity building is a journey, it's about the journey. Built capacity is not the end state – it's what you're partners do…IDRC's approach is to provide an opportunity for a partner to self-build*".

assumption that such an intervention will produce something called capacity somewhere in the system either at the level of the 'part' or at the level of the system. Others, in contrast, believe that 'capacity' in the form of some kind of *collective* capabilities can be addressed directly. Or put another way, 'system' behaviour can be addressed directly. IDRC seems very much in the

first category and is especially wedded to the value of individual knowledge as the key 'part' of capacity building.

Capacity approaches can take place at a variety of 'levels'. Big funders now work at the sectoral or even national level on the assumption that the macro-dynamics in the context (e.g. governance) is the key to capacity building even at the organizational level. Others i.e. those that are smaller, are at the opposite end of the spectrum and see the individual as the best place to intervene. IDRC is clearly in this latter camp. Indeed, IDRC appears to reverse the capacity logic of the World Bank, DFID and others by assuming that micro change leads to macro change rather than the other way around. This is the 'trickle up' theory. A variation on 'bottom-up' thinking.

Some see 'hard' technical functional issues as key. Others believe that the 'softer' human issues by themselves, e.g. motivation, confidence, identity, trust, relationships, legitimacy lie at the heart of capacity issues. Again, IDRC seems in the first category in terms of its approach. While it may use 'soft' methods in capacity building, the goal is to build 'hard' technical capabilities at the individual level.[4]

Finding 6: IDRC talks about change occurring from capacity building from the point of the problematique and the research area, rather than changes at the institutional or systems level.

In our interviews we were struck by how often interviewees talked about their perception that change happens at the level of the field under study. Centre staff and managers talk about capacity building in terms of working with their partners to conduct better research in their field. Capacity building in this context is about building up the field of research and creating a critical mass of indigenous capacity to carry out research in a particular field (e.g., ecohealth

> "The starting point is the problem not the institution".
>
> "Build up the constituency, get them to develop their own proposals. Build up the field first, then build up the institutions".
>
> "Capacity building at IDRC for me, means to equip researchers to carry out policy relevant, policy analysis research, to develop a critical mass of expertise…shortage of capacity in this field [trade] is very acute".
>
> "About 6 or 7 years ago, CFP [Cities Feeding People] was born. At this time, there was no real knowledge on urban agriculture, so we had to build capacity, build a knowledge base on what is was".

research, urban agriculture research), or using a particular approach to research (e.g., multidisciplinary research, participatory research). The interviews suggest that Centre staff and managers think about capacity building as means to build up research and development skills and competencies at the sectoral level through individuals, rather than institutions or organizations.

While building individual and thematic capacities are a dominant discourse, it is not the only one. Many interviewees, recognized the need for organizational and systems change, but felt that this was difficult for IDRC:

> "*We are not equipped (trained) nor funded to affect change at the level of research institute. Many of us would like to do it but –how?? Most of the organizations we deal with have big problems—many times we are working with researchers from 3 or 4 or more organizations—can we build capacity of them all?*"

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[4] We are grateful to Peter Morgan for insights given in this finding.

In a presentation for the Norwegian Council for Higher Education/Centre for International University Co-operation, Carol Preistly (Director, INASP) compares different approaches to enhance research capacities and suggests that for national capacity to be enhanced, "*a minimal critical mass of research capacity at the individual, institutional and sectoral levels needs to be present before national research bodies can play a significant role, and countries must have expressed a desire for national research policy*" (Priestly, 2003).

Finding 7: For most IDRC staff the entry point for change is at the individual level; however, despite the individual-to-individual bias a significant number of those interviewed wanted to focus at the institutional and organizational level.

Corporate documents indicate research institutions as targets of capacity building support. Interviewees indicate that they support individuals not institutions. They also indicated that this support was for individuals to do better research or to make their research useable.

Several corporate level documents, including the *IDRC Act (1970)* and the Corporate Assessment Framework "Indigenous Capacity building" Performance Area (January, 2004) speak to institutional strengthening as a Centre objective towards contributing to capacity building in the South. Interviewees, on the other hand, indicated that program support is strongly biased towards individuals and not organizations/institutions. Although the funding arrangements are such that program staff are legally required to provide the grants to the partnering institution (e.g., universities, NGOs), "*the default is to then focus on the project leader and the research team – the individuals – not the organization*".

> "*In the projects and programs it supports, IDRC aims to strengthen the abilities of Southern researchers, research institutions and networks…*" (CAF Indigenous Capacity building Performance Area, January 2004).
>
> "*IDRC supports recipient organizations in the building of technical, administrative and management capacities*" (CAF Indigenous Capacity building Performance Area, January 2004).
>
> "*The objects of the Centre are to…assist the developing regions to build up the research capabilities, the innovative skills and the institutions required to solve their problems*" (Excerpts from the *IDRC Act (1970)*, IDRC August 2004).

When asking the question "whose capacities", a review of program level documents (PI prospectuses, 2000-2004), reveals that only one PI does not specifically target "researchers". Moreover, 8 PIs (67%) also specifically identify "policymakers", "decision-makers", "municipal governments", and "African governments" as targets of capacity building activities.

> "*After the Dakar training workshop, our capacity building priorities shifted from only researchers to engaging others as well. Our workshop in Quito included city teams, which involved people from the municipal government. The training, therefore, shifted to how to do research **and** action planning*".

When we asked people to be more specific in relation to the question of "whose capacities", respondents generally talked about support to researchers, although some respondents did talk about "research users", "policy makers", "beneficiaries", and "local decision makers". At least one respondent talked about supporting "medium to high level researchers" since they are "not equipped, have no ground staff" to work with "non-traditional actors". In this case, the respondent discussed how they encourage their partners to work with non-traditional actors or young researchers".

Generally, interviewees discussed support to individuals as being targeted towards strengthening their ability to do research better or to use their research as a tool or vehicle for influencing policy. Respondents spoke of their research partners as "high level researchers" or "experts in their field" who need or want support, training or experience in different or new research methodologies, or getting ideas out and into the right hands to influence changes at the policy level. The policy changes referred to here were changes in sectoral policies (e.g., water policies, conservation policies) related to the research field and program theme. But these intentions are **context specific**. For example, one respondent spoke about the need to

> "One part of our support is to help people to 'think outside the box'. It's not about making a biologist a better biologist, but to build the capacity of the biologist to do gender analysis or socioeconomic analysis".
>
> "We're committed to following good researchers with potential to do great research; with potential to influence".
>
> "Linking research results to policy – this is where IDRC is at the cutting edge, not at the cutting edge of the field, but cutting edge in terms of making research matter".
>
> "We identify individuals that have promise, prominent individuals that have the potential to deliver".
>
> "We are dealing with, for instance, like those [researchers] in the Southern Cone of Latin America, we normally deal with researchers that don't need to be taught how to do a research project. But they may need to strengthen their capacity to stay policy relevant, to be close to the policy process and articulate policy relevant research, and to produce research that is relevant to the policy process. In other countries, our efforts have been more to train researchers in the basic research skills that they need to undertake a project. The specific efforts that we take in each of the specific sub-regions might have a different emphasis or priority".

build the capacity of researchers to conduct research first, before sending out a call for proposals: "*In Africa, experienced researchers won't put in a proposal because it's not in their interest to do so. And because of this, we found that the researchers who did submit proposals, their proposals, the design of the research, the literature review, were not very strong. They needed to be mentored and coached first*".

Many people we interviewed talked specifically about institutional capacities but almost all who did talk about institutional capacities talked about it as a "trickle up" experience. In these cases, the majority of which came from ENRM and ICT4D program staff, discussions revolving around "institutional support" meant supporting individuals with the intent that the individuals would then influence changes within the institution.

> "In our program, we talk about capacity building in terms of institutions, but in the end it's the individuals in the institutions. We work directly with the individuals and hope they influence the institution".
>
> "Many institutions don't have enough people or resources, so in the end we usually rely on one or two individuals within the institution, but that person may leave".
>
> "We start working with one individual or small group, with the intent to influence the institution, then they are capable to solve their own problems".

A few respondents also noted that influencing change in some institutions was easier than in others. For example, respondents remarked that influencing organizational changes within smaller NGOs or research foundations was much easier than in larger institutional settings such as government ministries and departments. They often remarked that because smaller organizations have fewer people, less bureaucracy, and more flexibility they are more open to new ideas about doing research than government ministries or departments, which they see as

wanting to take more traditional approaches to research or having structures or policies in place that make changes within the institution difficult.

According to some of the people we spoke to, individual and institutional capacity building is not just something that happens in the South. A few of the respondents also talked about building the capacity of Canadian researchers, universities and research institutions to work in collaboration with Southern institutions/researchers.

As we reviewed our notes, we noticed that few of those we interviewed, talked about changes to the research environment – the institutional environment for research – as opposed to the specific sectoral theme. Although most respondents are cognizant of the importance of a national culture or policy environment that is conducive to research or evidence, there was little reference in our notes to this aspect of capacity building (e.g., improving levels of funding within developing countries by developing country governments).

The issue for IDRC is how (or whether) to move more of its work from its work at the individual or thematic level to more organizational or institutional capacity building. It is an issue that has been discussed for at least 20 years with some progress (see IDRC, 1987).

Finding 8: IDRC's approach to capacity building is normally instrumental or functional in nature and focuses on professional competencies, capabilities and the tools needed to conduct research.

The discourse around change within IDRC revolves around capabilities, which is seen as a necessary condition to improving partners' capacities. When targeting individuals, IDRC talks about capacity building in terms of "the ability to do something" that was missing before. Many of the interviewees discussed these "abilities" in relation to their partners' competencies and capabilities to do "better" or "higher quality" proposals, or to conduct "policy relevant research".

COMPETENCIES AND CAPABILITIES	INDIVIDUAL	INSTITUTIONAL
Ability to conduct research (from problem identification and project development, to project design, implementation, project monitoring and evaluation)	✓	
Ability to do analysis	✓	
Ability to do financial management	✓	✓
Ability to link with other researchers/organizations/networks	✓	✓
Ability to communicate results to make research matter	✓	
Ability to do research differently (multidisciplinary, participatory research)	✓	
Ability to manage or administer a research project		✓
Ability to report to donors		✓

Several respondents remarked that IDRC is effective at supporting partners' attendance to workshops and conferences, and talked about this as improving their capacity to present their work at conferences. In contrast, one respondent noted that IDRC is ineffective at "convening capacities" – building the capacity of researchers to convene conferences or workshops in terms of having the capacity for planning the logistics to deliver or convene exchange forums (i.e., workshops, conferences). Of interest, in most cases, capacity building took on a skill or capability that was lacking.

In the literature, it is clear that capacity building for some is much broader than functional capabilities. It also involves changes related to norms, values, relationships, motivation – many of the so-called intangibles. While the common theme of discourse revolves around the functional skills and capabilities there is a significant discourse that identifies intangible capacities such as instilling **confidence** to take a leadership role, or giving researchers **credibility through** the **recognition of** their work. In some cases the prestige of receiving funding from IDRC meant that partners could access other sources of funding from other donors. For the most part, much of the invisible benefits appear to come from the **trust** that is built between program staff/managers and their partners. This trust is built on the personal relationships and face-to-face interactions that IDRC has with its partners and which the staff and managers see as being a crucial element in their approach to development, and in their own day-to-day work and project management.

> "They have to opportunity to be recognized, they have the equipment, they have the opportunity to travel, they have something to show the country – we are an enabler of this".
>
> "We give them a profile, which gives them the motivation to continue their work".
>
> "Well, one of the things…is that by receiving money from IDRC to do this kind of work, it gave them prestige, and it gave them the means to go to others and say, 'look IDRC is funding this', and it helped them leverage funds from other sources, and also legitimize the whole area of UA".

The idea of functional capabilities is carried forward in the organizational capacities provided by IDRC. When talking about institutional or organizational capacity, nearly all respondents talked about it in terms of "financial management" or "administrative capabilities". While a few respondents, talked about "organizational learning", it was suggested that this was something done by more "mature" organizations, and was coupled with support from non-programming units such as the Evaluation Unit.

Finally, there are times when IDRC also supports capacity in terms of building the necessary infrastructure (computers for an information centre) or access to infrastructure (libraries, e-libraries). Clearly, these tools add to the potential of a researcher or research organization to conduct better quality research. In our interviews, a few staff noted that providing the necessary infrastructure needed to produce high quality proposals was not systematic or sustainable (e.g., providing libraries) compromising the quality of the work being done (e.g., literature reviews, literature searches). At least one interviewee felt very strongly that if IDRC has high expectations of researchers being able to produce high quality research, then the Centre should consider providing more of the necessary infrastructure on a more systematic and sustainable basis. The point we would like to make is that our interviewees primarily see capacity building as a tangible act within the functional areas of an institution. Most interviewees do not articulate a perspective that is systemic or more normative.

Finding 9: Most interviewees do not feel confident in IDRC's ability to affect change at the institution or organizational level.

Some respondents feel that IDRC is not as effective as they would hope at building the capacities of institutions/organizations, especially related to management or administrative capacities including financial management and project-level reporting to donors. The Centre's Grant and Administration Division (GAD) has implemented a "risk assessment" process whereby institutions are assessed at different levels – high, medium, low – in anticipation of mitigating some of the risks involved when working with weaker institutions. But as one

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respondent noted "*IDRC currently has more than 625 active recipient institutions and we [GAD] don't have the resources or the [human] capacity to assess all 625, only a handful*".

Recently, regional GAD staff have been working with various long-standing Centre partners (e.g., building financial management capacities) by supporting the delivery of short course trainings and workshops on a number of different topics including basic accounting and bookkeeping procedures, as well as assisting them and providing advice on establishing policies within these organizations.

However, are providing training and advice powerful enough interventions to affect institutional change? Interviews with program staff/managers reveal that they feel they do not have the professional expertise to manage large-scale institutional development (capacity building) projects.

Capacity building is an evolving state in most organizations. In most institutions

> "*We don't emphasize capacity building in terms of institutions and financial management, yet we get slammed for that; we over-emphasize the research capacity side of things, but often we're dealing with researchers who know how to do research*".
>
> "*IDRC is not good at supporting this kind of institutional/organizational development [financial management, administration, reporting]*"
>
> "*IDRC is not good at understanding where organizations are strong or weak, or what's needed. We don't have diagnostic tools for that. Being able to do a capacity audit would be really helpful to know what the strengths and weaknesses are*".
>
> "*Another area…and I think increasingly the Centre is realizing this, where our partners need capacity building is in financial administration…so rather than us going back and saying 'we can't work with them because they have bad financial administration' what we want to do is to help them strengthen it*".
>
> "*On the administrative side, we have things in place to help mitigate the risks involved when working with weaker institutions…no such strategy for institutional assessment on the program side. There's no global approach with the Centre. There's no coordination between GAD and Programs Branch for working with institutions. I think we're missing opportunities here*".
>
> "*But I don't think that we as a program have a very clear and articulate strategy to strengthen research organizations in general, or certain types of research organizations. We haven't given priority to one type of research organization over others. We have tried to choose more or less on a case by case basis…but we don't normally strengthen one type of organization*".

there is a constant state of demands. The organization needs to be able to adapt and change (build capacity) to meet these demands. If it doesn't adapt, negative affects might ensue.

Many respondents also talked about the idea that institutional strengthening needs long-term funding commitments that is not always reflected in IDRC's "project approach" to capacity building[5]. High turnover of staff at some of the Centre's partner institutions also creates constraints to institutional capacity building. One respondent spoke directly about the amount of funding IDRC provides as also being a deterrent to institutional strengthening. The relatively small grants that IDRC often provides their partners is not enough: "*can't do capacity building at the institutional level with $50K*".

> "*In terms of our success at institutional capacity building, it's a mixed bag. We don't always know. People change. For example, we've been working with BAIF for 20 years, but we're not working with the same people. It's the same with FRAO*".
>
> "*We have too high expectations for seeing changes at the institutional/organizational level. Two to three years of support are not long enough to see changes*".

---

[5] On the positive side a number of interviewees indicated that one of IDRC's comparative advantage with some institutions has been IDRC's ability to remain in contact with research institutes even after funding is finished. While none downgraded the importance of funding, many pointed to the idea that IDRC's relationship with an institute was in itself a capacity building activity.

But the tide may be turning for IDRC in terms of targeting its capacity building towards institutions. As one respondent remarked, *"I have a sense that people are thinking more about the institutional environment"* while others are supporting projects which "*aggregate experience at specific institutions*". Now that some institutions are maturing, there could be more demand for institutional support beyond the usual project support that IDRC provides. This reinforces the idea that capacity building is an evolving state or condition.

4.3   IDRC's Approaches to Capacity building

Finding 10: Although staff and managers identify a wide array of activities they use to build capacity, no process, or "activity mix" or set of mixes are identified that would indicate an approach to capacity building.

Both the interviews and the background studies indicate that IDRC staff and managers use a wide array of activities to build research and research related capacities. By approach to capacity building we meant the way in which they do their work—the process, tools and ideas they bring with them in terms of how to do capacity building. Consistent with what we found in the literature, however, few people talked about a process (diagnosis-prescription-reflection), or how they mixed and matched activities into a specific approach to capacity building. What is also interesting is that while we found several process approaches (change management processes) we did not find anything in the literature that looks at research investments and the mix of capacity building strategies or approaches. There is a lot of literature on capacity building activities but very little information on how to create an activity mix that supports capacity building approaches.

Not stating their approach does not mean that there isn't one. When discussing the approaches they use, Centre staff and managers frequently talk about using a "mixed bag" of activities, often a combination of training coupled with "hands on experience". They see their interventions as opportunistic about how they approach capacity building. Respondents frequently talked about looking at the level of existing capacities and the availability of resources and using this information to try and fill in wholes and create more capacity.

> **Box2: Activities Used by Centre Staff/Managers to Build Capacity**
>
> Small grants funding
>
> Training courses (research and evaluation methodologies and approaches)
>
> One-on-one exchanges
>
> Study exchanges, visits
>
> Conferences, workshops and other professional public venues or forums
>
> Networks and networking
>
> Award programs (Agropolis, EcoHealth Award)
>
> Learning by doing
>
> Linking senior researchers with junior researchers
>
> Having recipients work with experts
>
> Writing experiences (manuscripts, theses, articles for peer-reviewed journals)
>
> Sustained mentoring
>
> Centres of Excellence

Nearly all of the interviewees identified short courses, often delivered through workshops and training sessions as an effective, but not sufficient approach to building research and research related capacities. When talking about such training sessions, these respondents almost always added the caveat: "training by itself is not enough to build capacity". Respondents emphasized the importance of all training (formal, informal, non-formal) to be connected to a research project, since this is the best way for researchers to use the knowledge and experience gained

through the training in a real life context. Invariably, these training sessions were substantive in nature, and focused on training in specific methodological approaches to research and evaluation (e.g., participatory research, gender analysis, Outcome Mapping).

Moreover, many respondents, both in our interviews as well as those conducted by Gillespie, recognize that "one-off training sessions" were insufficient for on-going learning and changes in capacity.

Several respondents also talked about using local consultants and experts to deliver the training. One respondent noted, "*IDRC's strength is to help design the training, but not deliver the training*". Another remarked "*using local or regional experts helped to feed into the process since they could add their own local knowledge and experiences*".

The term most often used by interviewees that comes close to an approach is the idea of people-centered approaches to capacity building including mentoring and coaching via phone calls, e-mail, monitoring/site visits and other forms of face-to-face interactions. As one respondent remarked "*face-to-face meetings cannot be underestimated. Visits once a year is not enough. You need to continually ask questions to get a more robust or profound analysis*". This labour-intensive, hands-on approach has historically been one of IDRC's strengths in the capacity building business, and is still seen by most as one of the Centre's most powerful and significant "comparative advantages".

> "*The key is project monitoring, talking to the people implementing the project. Partners want to know you're committed*".
>
> "*POs give lots of time to interact with researchers. This is very positive and I think it makes the difference between good research and bad research. It also provides opportunities to form links between researchers, both South-South links, as well as North-South links*".
>
> *Networks. We have large networks for researchers to tap into, and we have a history with that, lots of experiences*".

Many staff and managers identified networks and networking as an effective way to build capacity, both South-South networks/networking as well as North-South networks/networking. They view this as one of the most vibrant and dynamic means for researchers to share and exchange information, as well as an important means for them to build confidence in themselves and increase their awareness that "*they're not the only ones struggling with these ideas*".

Many of the ENRM interviewees identified small grants mechanisms and Centres of Excellence as activities used towards institutional capacity building. In this context, small grants programs were implemented as a means to build their partners' capacities to manage research projects. This includes managing the call for proposals, selecting projects for funding, and administering, managing and monitoring the projects. But small grants programs are also used as a means for providing young or inexperienced researchers with an opportunity to do fieldwork, especially when it is combined with training in particular approaches to research or research methodologies (e.g., community-based natural resource management combined with gender, ecosystems approach to health research). The ENRM program area in particular is also experimenting with developing "Centres of Excellence" which could act as a hub for capacity building in the region.

Finding 11: While building human resource capacity through training and scholarships remains a central component to capacity building at IDRC, funding cuts forced the Centre to abandon its foundational support to Masters and PhD degrees. Some think that IDRC needs to re-establish this key tool in capacity building.

During the past three decades, IDRC's support to training and awards has endured several structural and programming changes, which culminated with the dismantling of its Fellowship and Awards Division. In its early years (1970s), 10% of the Centre's program appropriation was spent on training, and up to one third of projects had training components built into project activities (Bowry, 2004, p.2). By the end of the 80s, the Centre was investing 13% of its program funding towards training. But the

> 1970s = 10% of program appropriations
>
> 1980s = 13% of total program funding
>
> 2000 – 2004 = 5% of total program funding

severe cutbacks to development funding during the 1990s meant that grave choices had to be made, and the once foundational support to individuals towards formal degree (Masters, PhD) level training was abandoned when the Fellowship and Awards division was dismantled. Data obtained from EPIK for this study suggests that during this last CSPF period (2000-2004), the Centre's investments towards training and awards stood at approximately 5% of total program funding, less than half of what it was during the 1980s.

In our interviews, a number of the interviewees from the ENRM program area mentioned the need to re-establish a formal training program at IDRC. Many of these interviewees told us that one of the key bottlenecks in their programming was the lack of researchers with Masters/PhD level training in multi-disciplinary subject areas (social science areas), such as NRM and gender. Minga, in particular, has recently started to provide funding towards Masters theses for researchers to conduct gender/NRM research because "*this was picked up as a key bottleneck in the LAC region*". Another respondent explained that it was "*hard for people to take on leadership roles at their institutions if they don't have degrees*".

Most of these respondents emphasized that a key component of this formal training is that it should be linked directly to the program initiatives and their projects not only to provide an opportunity for the recipient to carry out related field work, but also "*to ensure opportunities for work in the field later on*".

> "*When I first started here…there was lots of money – money for training and many projects had awards or training components. When we changed to the PI system, less money; less staff; less money to do more; training, especially PhDs, no longer done. For the past few years, now we see researchers need training (Masters/PhDs) – social/gender analysis, participatory research, multi-stakeholder analysis; Awards Division dismantled – then each PI/program to fund training awards and there is a need/demand for that*".

Moreover, many program staff/managers are receiving requests to include formal training at the Masters/PhD levels. But they recognize some of the challenges associated with this type of training, including cost and the recognition that advanced education is a long-term form of capacity building with a long-term pay-off. On the other hand, informal or non-formal training is not necessarily more cost-effective. CFP's experience with training in UA is a case in point: $400K for each regional training session plus there is the need to find good facilitators/moderators from the regions.

The challenge for IDRC is not to prejudge tools or activities that are part of the capacity building arsenal of staff. Rather, it is to help create a better understanding of how to use the various tools

in creating approaches to capacity building that are robust and sustainable for the context within which they are operating.

4.4 Factors that Contribute to or Inhibit Changes in Capacity

Finding 12: IDRC staff and managers indicate a number of important factors that either contribute to or inhibit capacity building objectives. Many of the success factors are also identified as being IDRC's comparative advantage when it comes to building research capacities in the South.

The following examines those factors identified as either contributing to, or inhibiting, capacity building objectives and initiatives.

4.4.2 Contributing Factors

Interviewees identified **eight (8) factors** that **contribute** to the Centre's capacity building objectives. The majority of respondents in our interviews suggest that IDRC's long-term approach to capacity building, coupled with the Centre's flexibility, both in terms of funding arrangements as well as programming design, are two of the most important factors that contribute to their program's or project's capacity building objectives.

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CAPACITY BUILDING	FACTORS THAT INHIBIT CAPACITY BUILDING
Persistence, long-term commitment	Staff turnover at partner institutions
Flexibility	Personalities within partner organizations
Face-to-face interactions	Structures (rules/regulations) within institutions/organizations
IDRC's history & experience with networks	No effective strategy to include all parts of the Centre
Range of expertise	Conflicting mandates
Mutual learning	"Complete capacity" – what does this mean?
Agility	
Provision of support beyond "one-off training" sessions	
Location in government system	

Most respondents recognized that "*capacity building does not happen overnight*". It is a long-term process that requires **persistence** and a commitment to resources. Many also noted persistence as one of IDRC's comparative advantages, since they see long-term commitment to projects and recipients as something that other donors pay lip service to but don't necessarily follow through on.

Flexibility was also frequently mentioned, both as a success factor and as one of the Centre's comparative advantages. Interviewees talked about flexibility in terms of funding arrangements for projects and the ability of program staff/managers to shift funds in budgets in order to be more responsive to their partners' needs. They felt that as a relatively small organization within the donor field, this programming and budgetary flexibility gave them opportunities to respond quickly to new ideas on the ground.

A number of interviewees reported **face-to-face interactions** with their partners as a key factor of success towards capacity building. Even with the advent of electronic communications such as the use of electronic conferences and electronic discussions, staff/managers told us "*it's talking to the people implementing the project face-to-face that really makes a difference. It's*

about building the personal relationships." Electronic communication can help as a bridging mechanism, but staff/managers feel that regular face-to-face contact is essential for building capacity.

Although no one we interviewed saw themselves as "experts in capacity building", Centre staff and managers see themselves contributing through the **range of expertise** that they themselves provide their partners. Each of the program initiatives is structured to incorporate different sets of expertise. For example, one ENRM team could conceivably consist of a biologist, a sociologist, a gender specialist and a political scientist and brings to the table a variety of specializations and experiences. In addition to this, the Centre itself brings a range of expertise to each program or project including the research area, communications, partnership and evaluation. Many of the respondents also suggested that some of their expertise they now bring to the table comes from the **mutual learning** that they have shared with their partners over the years.

There is a strong recognition within the Centre that one of the key success factors towards capacity building is providing support beyond "**one-off training sessions**". As with several of the other contributing factors, this was also seen as one of IDRC's comparative advantages. The respondents who talked directly to this factor characterized capacity

> "*One of the things we have learned is we tended to think that one-off training or workshops, or one-off events help, or would do the trick. I think now we know that a series of iterative training events or courses, including both theoretical and practical over a longer period of time…*"
>
> "*Capacity building is not a 'one-off effort'. It's on-going: the planning leading up to the capacity building activity, the activity itself, follow-up, the seed funding to do a project based on what they learned. IDRC is good at **not** doing one-off training*".

building as an on-going learning process that takes time, money and effort. One respondent emphasized, however, that IDRC is more effective at helping partners design the training than actually delivering the training, since there are organizations (e.g., NGOs) that specialize in this area and that the Centre would be more effective using these expert organizations as a resource rather than having Centre staff deliver training sessions.

Finally, at least one interviewee we spoke to mentioned **IDRC's location within the government system** as a key factor in its success towards capacity building. This respondent noted "*as a Crown Corporation, the Centre is not under the same financial administration Act that drives other government departments to do RMAF and RBM frameworks and systems*", thus allowing the Centre to direct its own course in relation to its operating style and strategies. This echoes Whyte's comment regarding "degrees of freedom" as being one of the key the differences in approaches to capacity building between many of the US Foundations and the multi-lateral and bilateral agencies she reviewed in her landscape analysis (2005, p.i).

4.4.3 Inhibiting Factors

These success factors, however, must be seen in parallel with those factors described as inhibiting capacity building objectives. Staff and mangers interviewed identified **six (6) factors that inhibit capacity building** initiatives in the South.

Interviewees reported **staff turnover** at partner organizations/institutions as a continual challenge, especially when dealing with organizational/institutional capacity building objectives. When confronted with issues of institutionalization and continuity within organizations, staff turnover was seen as a considerable obstacle. This was perhaps most acutely felt with organizations the Centre has been supporting for many years.

Closely related to the issue of staff turnover, **personalities within organizations/institutions** were also noted as sometimes being an inhibiting factor. Difficult personalities can sometimes prevent not just the implementation of capacity building objectives, but also how those objectives are to be implemented (i.e., participatory, partnership approaches).

Other institutional or organizational challenges to capacity building initiatives include the actual **structures (rules, regulations)** existing within the institution/organization. Structural obstacles such as these were frequently mentioned in association with government ministries or departments. In these situations, many respondents felt that important elements to capacity building such as "changes in attitudes, behaviours and values" towards using participatory approaches to research is much more difficult in environments that prefer to use more traditional approaches to conducting research. Most of these respondents felt that changes in capacity in these kinds of environments are much slower to occur, and often require more of the Centre's resources (time, money).

A number of people we spoke to felt that the **Centre does not provide adequate support, particularly from the non-programming areas,** to program staff to meet some of the capacity building objectives. For example, some of the interviewees noted that although support from the library and research information management team has improved recently, they felt that the services provided could be more effective, particularly if staff from this team could travel to the regions more often to meet with researchers. Another respondent also noted that the Centre could provide more support to construct libraries, or maintain existing libraries for researchers to access information. The views expressed by the library staff we interviewed also talked about the need to "integrate with programs branch more" in order to provide more effective services to the researchers including accessing electronic resources and assisting with literature searches.

Respondents also reported that the some of the non-programming units and divisions have mandates that conflict with those of the program initiatives. For example, the Communications Division has the mandate to communicate what IDRC is and what IDRC does to a Canadian audience, but does not provide communications experts in the regions. On the other hand, program staff and managers have the mandate to support researchers and build their capacity to do policy relevant research. These respondents felt strongly that to effectively support Southern researchers to influence policy they should have better support from, or more access to communications experts in the regions.

Finding 13: Flexibility and persistence were mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews as the two most compelling factors associated with IDRC's comparative advantage. It is not only that the Centre supports *research* in the South, but also *how* that research support is delivered that IDRC staff and managers see as the Centre's niche.

Central to IDRC's position in the development field is that IDRC funds *research* in the South, rather than development projects and this was seen by most, if not all interviewees as a fundamental comparative advantage. Beyond that, however, they also repeatedly mentioned **flexibility** and **persistence** as two important characteristics of IDRC that sets it apart from other funding organizations. For Centre staff and managers, capacity building is recognized as a long-term process and this vision or approach is reinforced by their ability to fund projects for relatively long periods of time (e.g., 10 years), and program officers have the flexibility to manage them as they see fit, based on their expertise as well as their experience with the project.

This long-term mentality is coupled with another advantageous characteristic: the **intense involvement** of program officers with their partners. As one respondent claimed, "*our intense involvement is what makes us **real** partners, not just funders*". Echoing this sentiment, another interviewee explains this involvement in detail: "*at IDRC, usually program officers are really hands-on with the project. We monitor projects, we go the field, we talk with the stakeholders, and we facilitate meetings with the communities. So we work in a very engaged way – very hands on with partners – differently than many other donors*". Although a few of the interviewees noted the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation as having similar approaches, none felt that either organization had the same long-term, hands-on approach that IDRC takes, or had the flexibility needed to be responsive to partners' needs.

> "*AERC is a testament to the long term capacity vision. AERC has had nearly 20 years of uninterrupted support. The initial researchers supported by IDRC are now mentoring young researchers, they now head-up AERC, they can hold their own in debates – even in Washington!*"
>
> "*My impression is that, for example the World Bank, training is very traditional. IDRC is very responsive, flexible to meet the needs of our partners. Flexible funding arrangements helps with responsive programming needs*".
>
> "*Not many organizations supporting research, therefore IDRC is a relatively unique organization, and most organizations don't have a long term approach. IDRC gives the whole package – the training, the delivery of services, equipment – as part of the research project*".
>
> "*IDRC is extraordinarily flexible!*"
>
> "*IDRC funds research for a longer period of time than most other donors. Other donors will fund research institutes, but there's a particular deadline, and once the deadline comes, the money ends and the researchers don't know if the funding will be renewed or not. IDRC will fund a project for two or three phases. It's in it for the long haul*".
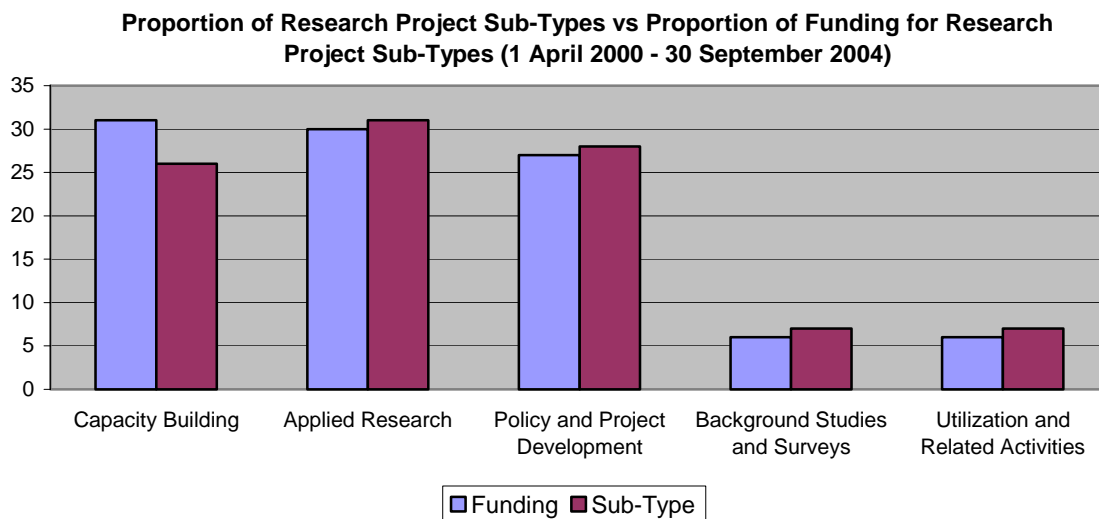
Moreover, many felt that IDRC's responsiveness is a direct result of the Centre's willingness to take risks. As one respondent commented, the Centre is like a "venture capitalist" and is willing to take risks to support individuals and institutions to build capacities.

5. What IDRC is actively funding[6]

5.1 Intended Project Contributions to Capacity building

Finding 14: Research Projects classified as "capacity" represent 26% of the total number of projects approved (n=146) and 31% of total funding.

Given the challenges associated with how a project is classified as a "capacity building" project, this finding must be taken with caution. What the data do tell us is that about 26% of the projects are primarily capacity building projects. This is not to say that the others do not involve capacity building activities, but rather that POs feel that capacity building is not the major aspect of the project. Furthermore, the data shows that the 26% of the projects represent 31% of the total expenditures of these projects. Within this data set the projects range in size from $63,000 to $1.6 million.

Proportion of Research Project Sub-Types vs Proportion of Funding for Research Project Sub-Types (1 April 2000 - 30 September 2004)

Finding 15: While more of the capacity building projects categorized by EPIK (n=146) are funded through the ENRM program area (36%), both SEP (27%) and ICT4D (26%) have similar project patterns.

Using Maessen's data we explored the distribution of capacity building projects across IDRC. Basically we were interested in whether or not one or more of the three program areas engaged in capacity building more frequently than another. In general, the data indicates a reasonably consistent pattern across Program Areas.

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[6] It is important to note that this data comes from self-reported project information database completed by IDRC staff. We have been told by staff to be careful using the data because it is not carefully developed nor screened. It is presented here as a way to discus both the work of IDRC and as well the importance of this tool for future work. This said, read the tables and charts with caution.
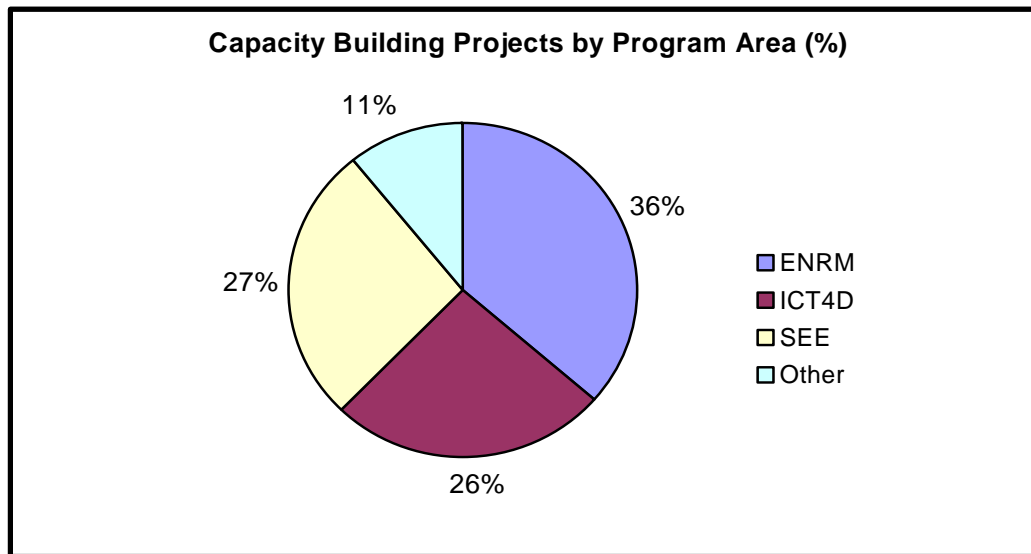
Capacity Building Projects by Program Area (%)

Finding 16: Over half of the capacity building projects are funded through the ENRM program area.

In Finding 14 we indicated that there were relatively similar patters in codifying projects, this is a bit less true in the projects being funded. Our analysis of the data indicates the proportion of total funding to these projects is not. Differences in funding may be function of the number of PIs in each program area, with ENRM having six (6) program initiatives, SEP with four (4) and ICT4D with two (2). Without inferring too much let us just say from the targeted projects labelled capacity building, ENRM invests more of it's funding into capacity building projects.

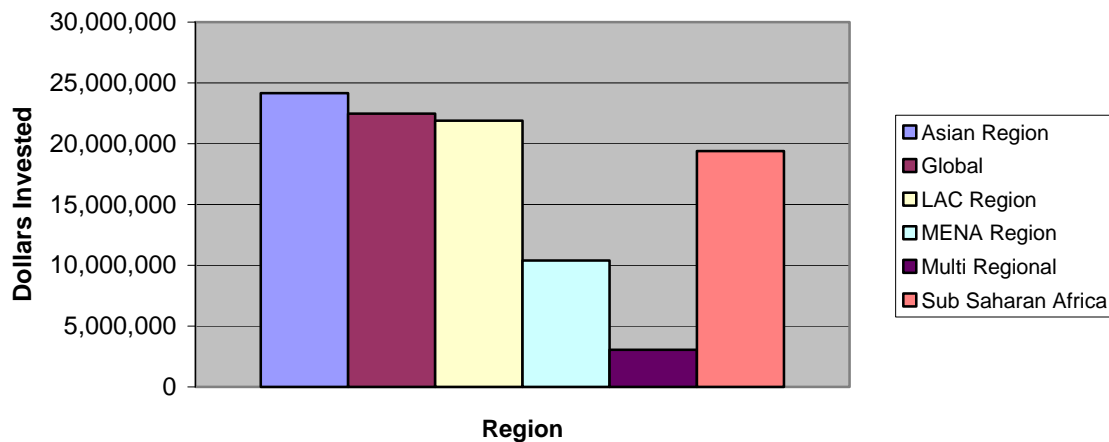**Capacity Building Research Projects by Program Area**
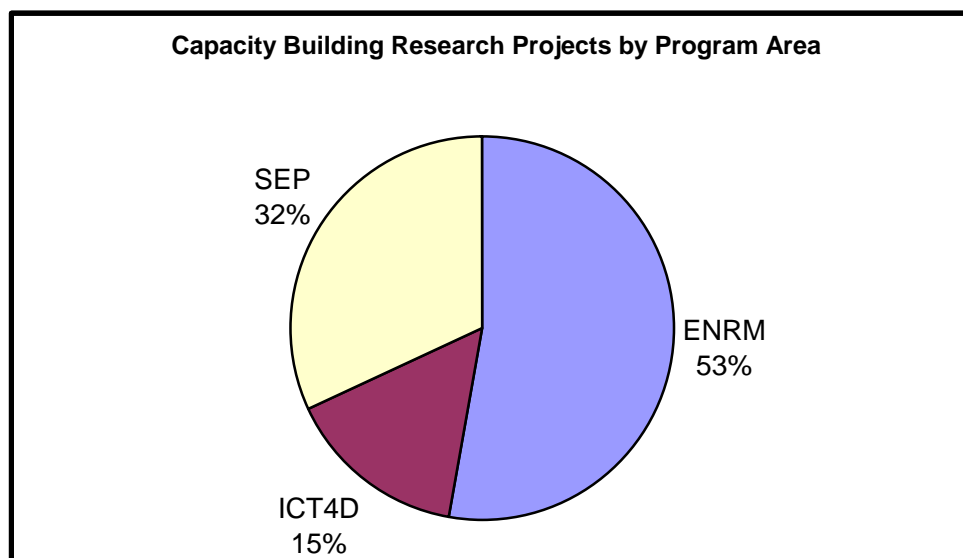
Finding 17: Although there is little difference among the regions with respect to patterns of funding capacity building projects, Research Projects classified as "capacity building" located in the Asian Region receive the most funding.

Little differences exist among the regions with respect to the patterns of capacity building. The Asian region invested nearly $25 million in capacity building projects during 2000-2004. Projects classified as LAC and Global also had investments over $20 million. Projects located in the sub-Saharan Africa region received just under $20 million, while projects located in the MENA region received only half that amount with $10 million. Interestingly, our interviews with staff/managers located in the two sub-Saharan African regional offices (WARO, ESARO) suggested that research capacity levels were substantially more limited in these regions, suggesting that there is a significant need for capacity building work. While the data is not definitive in this regard, it does show that the sub-Saharan region ranks fourth (4th) in terms of the funding it received during the 2000-2004 period.
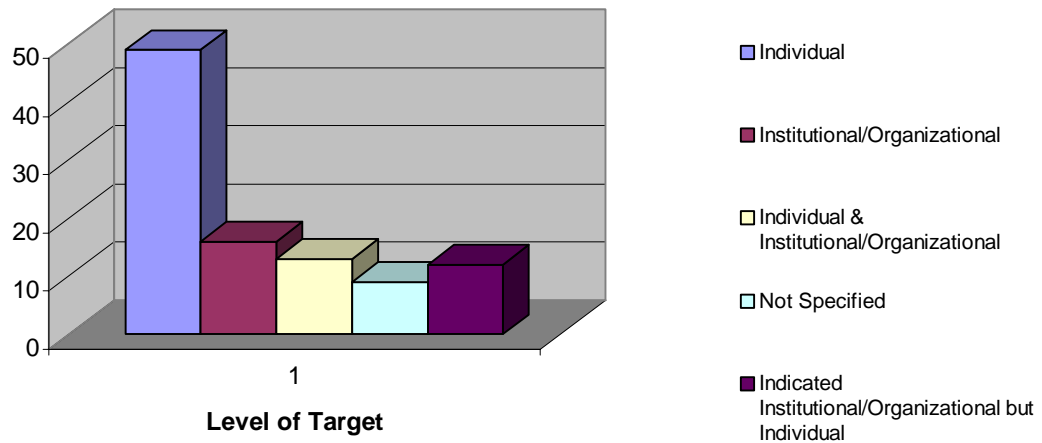
Finding 18:

Funding to Capacity Sub-Type Research Projects by Region

Finding 18: IDRC approved Research Projects target funding more at the individual level than at the institutional level. This is consistent with the espoused ideas expressed in our interviews.

Target of Capacity Building in Capacity Sub-Type Projects (%)

Data from Maessen's report indicates that nearly half of the capacity building projects funded by IDRC target individuals. This finding is consistent with the data from our interviews which also suggest IDRC targets capacity building activities at the individual level more often than at the institutional/organizational level. This data also suggests that less than 20% of capacity building projects target institutions or organizations.

As part of this analysis we did a secondary analysis looking at those projects identifying institutional/organizational targets. Civil society organizations, NGOs, women's organizations are also indicated as the targets in these project documents. Nearly 12% of projects indicate they target the institutional/organizational level. However, a secondary analysis that more explicitly looks at what is being funded, indicates that much of the activities seem to be targeted to individual skills or competencies. Are they organizational or individual? In other words, even when the code is institutional, the activities are often targeted to individuals.

Finding 19: Researchers and policy/decision makers are most often identified as the target to IDRC capacity building activities.

An in-depth examination of data from Massen's report indicates that nearly half (46%) of the capacity building projects that received funding during 2000-2004 clearly targeted "researchers" (including researchers, research teams, multidisciplinary teams, scientists).

The data also suggests that nearly one quarter (22%) clearly target "policy/decision makers" (including local/national government, policy makers, decision makers, Ministry people/Governors, local authority/village leaders). This is consistent with the review of program level documents (PI prospectuses), which suggests that, in terms of whose capacities, 67% of PIs target "policy/decision makers".

Ten percent (10%) of the projects do not specify the target, but only indicate "individuals" so it is unclear whether or not these individuals are researchers, policy/decision makers, or other actors or stakeholders (e.g., community members, civil society actors etc.).

Box3: Example of Unspecified Target in a Capacity building Project

"Internet service providers (ISPs) in African countries are engaged in the process of establishing Internet exchange points (IXPs) to improve the quality of service locally and reduce the enormous costs associated with traffic exchange via upstream carriers. It is expected that between 20 and 30 IXPs will be established over the next 36 months. Various reports have contended that 30-40% of all Internet traffic is local, but these reports are as yet unsubstantiated. Given that the IXPs will act as a natural point of aggregation for local and regional traffic, this project will install data collection nodes at five IXPs and transmit the data to a central archive. The goal is to assess the impact of IXPs on national, regional and continental traffic flows and the African Internet economy as a whole". (Abstract from IDRIS, project #101617).

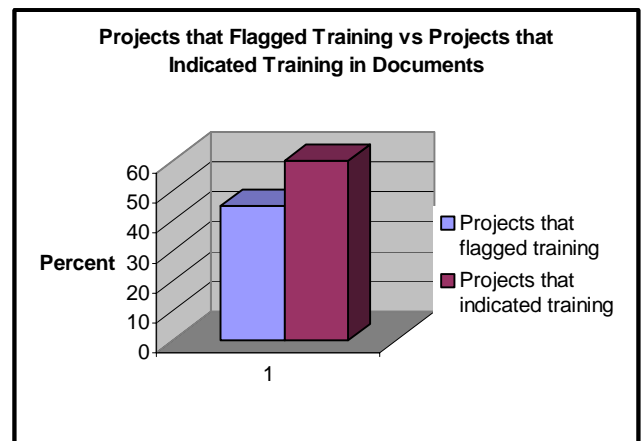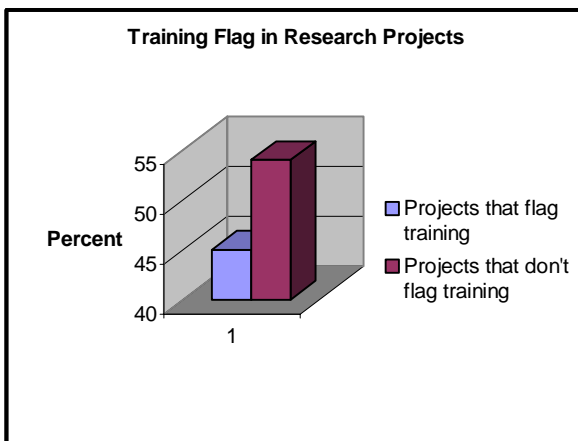
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5.2   Approaches Used in IDRC Projects

Finding 20: Approaches used in projects are similar to those that were espoused during the interviews.

Project documents reviewed for this study reveal that many of the approaches used for capacity building activities and initiatives are similar to those that were espoused during our interviews with staff/managers. Training, either face-to-face, distance education or a combination of the two, coupled with practical experience through "learning by doing" was mentioned repeatedly.

Project documents also reveal that although training is mentioned regularly as an approach to capacity building, only 45% of approved research projects "flag" training in the project documents. Under further examination, these documents also reveal that although only 45% "flag" training, a full 60% indicate planned training or training activities within the documents. This discrepancy may indicate that, like the term "capacity building" itself, there is no coherent corporate approach as to when a research project should "flag" training in the database. In terms of reporting on capacity building then, this lack of precision will make monitoring and tracking training as an element of capacity building difficult.

Box4: Approaches Used in IDRC Projects

Training (face-to-face, distance ed.)

Workshops/seminars

Learning by doing

Networks and networking

Small grants

Use of external experts/consultants

Southern institutions act as hub/resource

Mentoring/coaching

Study tour & field visits

Linking more experienced researchers with less experienced researchers

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Training Flag in Research Projects

Percent

- Projects that flag training
- Projects that don't flag training

Projects that Flagged Training vs Projects that Indicated Training in Documents

Percent

- Projects that flagged training
- Projects that indicated training

Another key tool for capacity building mentioned frequently was the use of networks and networking to link researchers and institutions to share and exchange knowledge, lessons from the research carried out, and to link less experienced or junior researchers with more experienced, senior researchers.

The project documents also reveal the regular use of international or expatriate experts or consultants as mentors, coaches and/or resource persons within the projects. When we reviewed our interview notes, it struck us that no one mentioned the use of outside experts as a regular approach to build the capacity of researchers in the South. Another approach not frequently mentioned in the interviews was the use of Southern institutions to act as a hub or resource centre and provide training, resources including library and other infrastructure resources, and technical support to the researchers. At least one of the interviewees, however, did talk about working with a Southern institution in this way as an approach to building institutional capacity.

6. Conclusion and Future Directions

Interviewees generally felt that their work was inextricably linked with the values, ideas and tools of capacity building. For the most part, what interviewed staff espoused to support in terms of its capacity building work, seems to be, what they actually fund in projects. Capacity building is important to IDRC and staff operate in this fashion. Having said this, there is another darker side to our interviews. Many staff do seem insecure about their work in this area. They try to increase their security by engaging in the technical areas of work that they know. While this adds to their sense of security, it narrows the scope of IDRC's capacity work. Below are a few tentative conclusions and possible directions for a continuing discourse about capacity building as this study moves into the second part of its work—exploring the results of capacity building.

1) IDRC generally operates within a very narrow range of the types of capacities needed to build research capacity at a global, national or institutional level. Most staff engage in capacity as an individual phenomena. While this gives the impression of internal coherence, our interviews suggest a great deal of uncertainty in the organization about capacity building and what it is. While many interviewees felt comfortable with their experience with capacity building, we did not find anyone within the organization who felt that their social science expertise rested in the field of capacity building.

2) This lack of social science expertise coupled with lack of in-depth discourse on capacity building is noteworthy considering that many feel that capacity building is the Centre's "***raison d'être***". Linked to this is the issue of how IDRC and its partners **learn** about capacity building. Capacity building is an interdisciplinary construct with many component parts to it. Given the importance IDRC places on capacity building a learning agenda seems in order—but it is not present.

3) Linked to #1 is the difficulty uncovered in the study with respect to categorizing capacity building projects. In the absence of a better system of identifying and categorizing capacity building, the databases will be useless for those interested at looking at capacity building from an IDRC perspective.

4) Core values of IDRC-local ownership, flexibility, and respect for diversity are all important ingredients of capacity building.

5) Of importance at the at the corporate level, is that the Centre's corporate level documentation often purports to support institutional capacities, but the staff and managers focus and feel most comfortable at the individual level. While capacity building at the society and institutional levels are not simply a financial issue, it should

be noted that engaging in societal and institutional change often involve significant financial commitments. IDRC needs to think carefully about its target group, its approach and the availability of resources.

6) The recent development of IDRC's Corporate Assessment Framework (CAF) is a corporate level document that was developed by the Centre's Senior Management Committee (SMC) that provides some degree of guidance towards a corporate level understanding and approach to capacity building. Yet, the people we spoke with were either unaware of the "building indigenous capacity" definition and performance characteristics, or did not feel that it was adequate. At the very least, no one we spoke to mentioned it. Moreover, the CAF appears to focus more on changes at the organizational/institutional level than at the individual level. Finally, the CAF demands attention to tracking and monitoring "building indigenous capacity" as a result area for senior management to monitor and report on. The difficulties we came across in terms of being able to use reliable data that tracks and monitors capacity building will pose major challenges for people to report on in a valid and reliable way.

7) IDRC focuses on the technical capacities at the individual level to change "parts" to the system. According to some, this approach no longer commands credibility anymore. However, because IDRC is a relatively small organization (within the donor field) with a (relatively) small budget, this approach is probably the leading option. However, others have offered interesting ideas in terms of how to move issues forward. In his report to the Rockefeller Foundation, Winton Pitcoff (2005) writes:

> *Individual skill building is of limited value if the organization they work in isn't functioning well, and the theory that simply building human capacity will improve organizations hasn't proven true. Human capacity building efforts must be done in parallel with organizational capacity building efforts* (Pitcoff, 2005, p.14).

8) Additionally, Pitcoff also suggests that donors think about providing support to "indirect" capacity building activities. Here he suggests:

> *As much as training, coaching, networking and other capacity building tools are needed, practitioners also need time to reflect, manage, lead, think and even simply rest in order to remain effective. Without additional staffing resources, sabbatical programs or simply ample general operating funds, few leaders get such opportunities. Some funders have taken this to heart, and call their general support funding a form of capacity building* (Pitcoff, 2005, 14).

9) As mentioned in the report there are a much wider range of tools and as well a need to better understand the mix of tools needed for specific interventions. Technical tools formally identified are quite limiting.

The question facing IDRC is: how do they want to move these issues forward? And if they choose to move towards organizational capacity, what will their approach be? Some suggestions are:

- Do nothing new. While staff would prefer to be more comfortable with capacity building, our review indicates that capacity building work is still operating as an "art form" and that the science of capacity building is still at an early stage. IDRC might wait until capacity building is more developed as an interdisciplinary field.

- IDRC may choose to work more closely with others within the donor community (e.g., Rockefeller Foundation, Carnegie, Ford Foundation) in order to help the Centre better understand the state of the art/and science in capacity building.

- IDRC may choose to build internal capacity by either hiring or developing a cadre of experts, who reflect, study and support the organization's capacity building ambitions.

- IDRC may choose to create an internal group to provide more guidance on an agency-wide approach to capacity building.

6.1   Preliminary Thoughts on a Framework

Definitions for the following framework:

$\Rightarrow$ The **systems (or institutional) level**, e.g., the regulatory framework, policies and conditions that support or hamper the achievement of certain policy objectives;

$\Rightarrow$ The **organizational (or entity) level**, i.e., the structure of organizations, the decision-making processes within organizations, procedures and working mechanisms, management, instruments, the relationships and networks between organizations;

$\Rightarrow$ The **individual level**, i.e., individual skills and qualifications, knowledge, attitudes, work ethics and motivations of the people working in organizations.

(Guidelines on Capacity building in the Regions: Module A: The Capacity building Cycle, GTZ, 2005).

	Education &Training	Mentoring/Coaching	Networks/Networking	Face-to-Face Interactions
Individual • Skills • Competencies • Attitudes/Values • Personal and professional networking	• Research & Evaluation methodologies • Approaches to research (gender, participatory) • Scholarships	• Build trust & relationships • Provide recognition • Build confidence • Think outside the box	• Linking with other researchers (same field, different context)	• Monitoring visits/site visits • Workshops, conferences, forums • Probing questions
Organizational • Leadership • Strategy • Organizational functions and systems • Relationships/Link ages between organizations	• Financial –HR management • Communications • SWOT sessions • OM	• Organizational learning/reflection • Strategic mentoring	• Linking like-minded organizations	• IDRC-Inst relations • Invitations to events
Systems (Institutional) • Regulatory Frameworks • Policies • Conditions (context) • Research ethos-receptiveness	• Policy seminars • Conferences • Dev Ed	• Strategic mentoring	• Working with policymakers & decision makers	• Working with policymakers & decision makers

Capacity building Funding (left vertical label)

Own solutions to development problems (right vertical label)

Appendix I Capacity building: The concept, discourse and what is being done

The purpose of this section is to provide a context for understanding capacity building/capacity development, including a review of other development agencies and their work in this area. Some of the issues under consideration include:

How does the capacity building/capacity building literature talk about capacity building/capacity development—how is it dealt with within those funding research institutions in the developed world? Who is the target? What approaches are used? How do they describe results?

How do other institutions funding capacity building for research institutions organize their work with respect to capacity building/capacity development (e.g., is it seen as a strategic objective, is it defined and programmed, are there separate capacity building units staffed by "capacity building experts", or is everyone expected to carry out capacity building activities? Does this organization target individuals, or organizations/institutions?)?

Introduction

Capacity building is creating change that ultimately solves important development problems. Capacity building involves changing individuals, organizations, networks of people and organizations, societies etc. It is a term that includes both the creation of new organizations as well as the improvement or development of existing organizations. It is inclusive of government agencies, civil society groups, the private sector, communities, municipalities etc. It covers a wide range of human activity aimed at creating ways to improve peoples' quality of life.

Our experience indicates that a great deal of disconnect surrounds the idea and practice of capacity building. For example, we have an "espoused" way of talking about capacity building that differs from how we act. We engage in relatively simple capacity building events, such as a training activity, and expect or at least articulate that these simple events will lead to significant results. In the development field the outward attention paid to capacity issues is pervasive; activities that are associated with capacity building show up in most development interventions. For example CIDA claims that almost 74% of its activities relate to capacity building and development. Yet despite the pervasiveness of the idea, there is still doubt regarding our ability to understand and operationalize the idea. Some people perceive capacity building to be an umbrella idea that is used in faddish ways. They see it as a banner or a slogan for a class of activities.   Others see it as an emerging field of inquiry that requires more rigor in its use and application.

Capacity building has neither accepted definitions nor any concrete boundaries and anybody involved in development work can claim some title to or some level of expertise. It is not based on any particular academic discipline – it is clearly of a multidisciplinary nature and there is neither professional degree nor certification with respect to it. In some arenas it includes everything from a single workshop to the creation of a judicial system. Only recently, in the last few years have we seen it being taught and researched as a specific area of interest. The field is at its naissance stage of evolution. To better understand the field the next section provides a review of the evolution of the term and the discourse surrounding capacity building.

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The Capacity building discourse

In the field of development the term *capacity building* is relatively new, having emerged in the 1980s. Despite its recent emergence, capacity building has become the central purpose of technical co-operation in the 1990's (UNDP 1996). It is seen as complementary to other ideas that dominated development thinking (and still play an important role) over the past four decades. These concepts include *institution building, institutional development, human resource development, development management/administration* and *institutional strengthening.*

The following table summarizes the broad evolution of capacity building approaches and associated development ideas from the 1960s to the present (adapted from Lusthaus et. al. 1999 and Whyte 2004):

DECADE	TERMINOLOGY	APPROACHES
1960s	Institution building	Create public sector institutions Models transplanted from developed countries Training in Northern universities North tells South what needs doing
1960s – 1970s	Institutional strengthening/development	Shift to strengthening rather than establishing Continued focus on manpower TA to put in place various organizational functions
1970s	Development management/administration	Public sector management training Reach neglected target groups Improve delivery systems & public programs to reach target groups Create public sector management institutes
1970s – 1980s	Human Resource Development	Formal, non-formal and informal training Development is about people Education, health, population key sectors to target and their organizations and institutions Indigenization of institutions People centered development emerges as a concept Participatory practices

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1980s – 1990s	New Institutionalism	Macro economics key to development
		Structural adjustment, policy reform, governance paradigm
		Capacity building broadened to sector level (government, private, NGOs)
		More attention to external environment and national economic behaviour
		Shift from project to program focus
		Concern with sustainability
		Capacity building and sustainability linked
1990s	Capacity building, development & enhancement	New focus on networks
		Reassessment of technical cooperation
		Learning and knowledge based organizations linked to capacity
		Donor policies and approach toward capacity building
		Wide assortment of ideas around capacity building
		Emergence of importance of local ownership
		UN system adopts "Capacity building" (UNDP champions)
		ICT revolution
2000s	Capacity building/knowledge networks	Millennium Development Goals become development driver
		Increased participation in capacity building
		Spread of ICT-based knowledge networks
		Emphasis on ongoing learning and adaptation
		Systems approaches and emerging talks of complex systems
		Balancing results-based management and long-term sustainability
		More emphasis on needs assessment/analysis
		Increased donor coordination
		Concern with how to secure long-term donor investments

The definitional issue

Today capacity building, like institutional strengthening and development, is a term that is widely used in development discourse. Unfortunately, the debate over the meaning of the term still exists.

In the social sciences it is not unusual to have on going debates over both the conceptual and operational definitions of words. In our work in capacity building, the confusion is extended to

include the ideas of capacity development (CD) and capacity enhancement (CE). Are they synonyms? Do the words or the ideas behind the words carry cultural or philosophical biases?

At one level it matters little what term we use. But the discourse about the concept underscores a number of important characteristics of the term. The following chart provides a quick review of some of the definitions:

1."Capacity building is the ability of individuals, groups, institutions and organisations to identify and solve development problems over time."(Peter Morgan, 1996)
2. Capacity building is a concept which is broader than organisational development since it includes an emphasis on the overall system, environment or context within which individuals, organisations and societies operate and interact (and not simply a single organisation). (UNDP, 1998)
3. Capacity building is "… any system, effort or process… which includes among its major objectives strengthening the capability of elected chief executive officers, chief administrative officers, department and agency heads and programme managers in general purpose government to plan, implement, manage or evaluate policies, strategies or programs designed to impact on social conditions in the community." (Cohen, 1993)
4. "...capacity is the combination of people, institutions and practices that permits countries to reach their development goals … Capacity building is... investment in human capital, institutions and practices." (World Bank, 1998)
5. Capacity building is any support that strengthens an institution's ability to effectively and efficiently design, implement and evaluate development activities according to its mission (UNICEF, 1996).
6. "Capacity building is a process by which individuals, groups, institutions, organisations and societies enhance their abilities to identify and meet development challenges in a sustainable manner, (CIDA, 1996)
7. Capacity building: "The process by which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and societies increase their abilities to perform functions solve problems and achieve objectives; to understand and deal with their development need in a broader context and in a sustainable manner." (UNDP, 1997)
8. "Capacity strengthening is an ongoing process by which people and systems, operating within dynamic contexts, enhance their abilities to develop and implement strategies in pursuit of their objectives for increased performance in a sustainable way" (Lusthaus et al. for IDRC, 1995).

As is illustrated by the variety in definitions, there are many conceptual approaches to capacity building. Yet as Morgan (2005) states:

> "What's unique about this idea of capacity...What's inside this idea…What does it give us that other ways of supporting development activities do not...Simply put, what's the value added?"

Basically, Morgan argues that capacity building is about "the ability to do something" that was missing before; in this context capacity is improving the potential to act in context. Thus this ability is "both a means and an end." Furthermore Morgan argues that the concept is embedded in systems, " *In systems terms, capacity is an emergent property that comes from the interaction and interconnection of a wide range of factors.*" In other words, capacity is embedded in context, which itself is in a continuous state of flux as demands and pressures ebb and flow since organizational systems are in a constant state of evolution and self-creation. The inherent capacity present in all systems is either emerging or declining in response to complexity, change and uncertainty. Some approaches to capacity building seem unduly technocratic and apolitical, assuming that the various actors are 'willing but unable' to do certain things. In this situation, training and learning improvements can be critical, but capacity building also involves trust, care, attention, hope, motivation; many things that are intangible.

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To understand capacity building is to understand it in context. Furthermore, the object of capacity building must always be involved in it—either as partner or as a doer (as in self development). Donors cannot build the capacity of others in the absence of an agreement of the object of capacity building. When donors engage in capacity building it is best done as a partnership, this leads to the philosophical aspect of the concept. This is because is very difficult to build the capacity of someone, who does not want their capacity built.

The philosophical approach

As discussed above capacity building, like capacity development and capacity enhancement is used to convey the improvements of capabilities to solve development problems. For others, the discussion on *capacity building* is an umbrella idea for their philosophical approach to development assistance and how they perceive global issues. For these development theorists, the definition of capacity building includes ideas such as ownership, participation, system perspective and so forth. In this context they see capacity building as a term, which incorporates the philosophical ideas. You work with or partner with those with whom you are working on capacity building. Capacity building in this philosophical discourse is about partnership. You cannot build the capacity of others—they need to be partners of and in the process. What matters in this dialogue on capacity building is the "process"—how it is done. CIDA in its stock taking exercise provides us with an example of such an approach.

> **Features of Model CD projects**
> ✓ An explicit, comprehensive, strategic approach to CD
> ✓ Continuity – learning from past experience
> ✓ Part of a larger program led by the host-country partner
> ✓ Usually includes a strong component of organizational development
> ✓ Considerable room for learning by doing
> ✓ Ongoing dialogue with people closest to the beneficiaries
> ✓ An iterative, flexible, long-term approach
> ✓ Creativity and innovation in adapting to local contexts and problems.

Embedded in the above approaches are particular ideologies about the process of development. Within the capacity building theme, an ideology is emerging which identifies how capacity building occurs. Those who view development as people-centred and non-hierarchical believe that unless capacity building is a participatory, empowering partnership for which those involved feel a high degree of ownership, intended results cannot be achieved (Fowler, 1997). The goal to develop an institution should not result in the imposition of a foreign model but instead attempts should be made to identify and use local expertise, and develop a grassroots, domestic model (Upoff, 1986).

Capacity building is consistently linked to empowerment in much NGO literature, with some objectives incorporated from other approaches. However, linkages between capacity building, empowerment and participation are not clear. Although definitions vary, a few key considerations emerge. The notion of empowerment implies a particular vision of development. Wallerstein refers to "*a social process that promotes participation of people, organisations and communities towards the goals of increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life and social justice*" (Wallerstein, 1992:198).

Fundamentally this is a process approach embracing change and learning as core values. In this context, what makes capacity building different from other process approaches, i.e., people-

centered development? The advantage to a normative approach is that it has a narrowly defined scope, which clarifies what is included and excluded i.e., development activity should be participatory. This is congruent with general concepts of development because it shares some of the same basic assumptions, emphasizing participation, ownership, power sharing. However, little consideration is given to the stages of development people go through as they learn how to be more participatory or empowered. Furthermore, because of the importance people play in this approach, the focus of change is often individual. We do not argue that individual change is unimportant yet we do need to better understand when the qualitative and quantitative changes to individuals can be attributed to capacity building intervention.

Targeting Capacity building: Whose capacity?

Whose capacity needs to be built? As mentioned earlier, building capacity is about learning, change and building capabilities among other things. It is about building, human, social and institutional capital. It engages individuals, organizations, networks and communities among others and involves all sectors and tends to deal with important priority themes within the development arena. It is important to remember that development interventions aspire to foster change.

In terms of capacity building ventures, the objective is to improve the current abilities of a target or targets, which could be a person, community or network. By definition, organizational and/or institutional approaches target institutions or organizations. In a systems approach, the target is less clear unless we identify the system we want to change. In the normative approach, the change process itself is the target of change.

However, in each of these situations it is unclear what it is that makes the change event capacity building. Is any attempt at change a capacity activity? The discourse in the capacity literature is unclear on this point. Dia (1996) suggests that a "litmus test" is an emphasis on the building of indigenous organizations and institutions. Many development writers confine themselves to individual and organizational change as the central targets of their capacity building interventions. But is this enough? In looking at the literature, perhaps the distinguishing factor is the exploration of the various levels involved in capacity building. Though interventions and targets may be limited, the contextualizing of the interventions and the targets might provide the flavour that sets capacity building apart from other interventions.

In general, there does not seem to be guidance with respect to what are the acceptable targets of capacity building. Are all interventions that change individuals, organizations or institutions capacity building? In the absence of this clarity it seems we are encouraging people to use the term as a slogan rather than as a meaningful concept, which helps us better, understand the process.

Systems and capacity building

One of the more interesting issues associated with capacity building is the idea that capacity building is a systems intervention. By this it is meant that in the development sphere, one trivializes development when one deconstructs it. Today, much of the support given to systems thinking emerges from the rejection of linear reductionism approaches to development. In a systems perspective while ideas such as institutions, results based management, capacity building all matter; each requires a framework of understanding that embeds these ideas into larger contexts of understanding. None are a solution unto themselves. In the systems perspective on capacity building, individuals operate within organizations, and individual organizations perform within wider systems e.g. the health system, the educational system. In turn, these systems are

nested within other systems. To intervene in one part of a system, suggests a change in one or more systems. At best one must be cognizant of the interaction that goes on when one attempts to build capacity.

Morgan sees it this way,

> It is a way of thinking that looks at the 'whole' first with its fit and relationship to its environment as a primary concern. Attention to the constituent elements or parts of the system is secondary. Systems thinking are more an orientation or a perspective than it is a formula or prescription. It can be used to help people understand how systems work and how people can deal with them more effectively. It is a way of exploring real life rather than representing it. It is a technique to figure out what's going on. It encourages people to look for patterns of interaction and underlying structures that shape the emergent patterns of system behaviour. A corollary to this approach is the idea that structures matter much more than individual events in terms of determining outcomes (Morgan, xxxx).

Systems are dynamic; their existence rests on their ability to import energy or resources from their surrounding environment. Individuals and organizations constantly get cues from their environment with respect to their functioning. When the environment is supportive, systems survive. When environments are hostile, systems decline. Capacity building is therefore a cue from the external environment. As Morgan puts it:

> Systems are seen as having a dynamic of their own. It recognizes the power of the environment to act randomly, thus not under the control of management or managers. Systems evolve, discover, emerge, and die because of their ability to adapt to their environments. In this context Capacity building might not be about building capabilities but rather on building, identities, relationships, power and luck (Morgan, XXXX).

How individuals, organizations, communities, networks etc. use their capacity building both affects the target of capacity building but also the environment itself. In this way systems create two-way information flows that create meaning. Most of the systems we deal with - whether individual or organizational, are complex. Dealing with and attempting to work with complexity is inherent in systems. System thinkers embrace complexity.

Capacity building in a systems perspective is seen as a dynamic process whereby intricate networks of actors (individuals, communities/groups and organizations) seek to enhance their abilities to perform what they do, both by their own initiatives and through the support of outsiders.

Where we are today

There is now a general consensus that it is no longer sensible or productive to engage in finding the definitive definition for capacity building/capacity development. The consensus is that we have and are exploring the idea and those using it should build on the various traditions emerging and explain the tradition they are using. While no one wants or believes a prescription is in order at this point, there is an emerging dialogue between those that perceive capacity building as an identifiable set of functional skills that can be identified and learned -and those that see it as a more complex idea, which not only covers the functional skills and capabilities but a set of capabilities that are embedded in contexts, identity, relationships, power and so forth. For some capacity building is seen as a technical concern requiring a technical solution. In this approach to capacity building, various learning approaches, formal, non-formal and informal are seen as a central means for building capacity. For others still, while learning is a necessary part of capacity

building, one must contextualize capacity building in relationship to the environment within which one is operating.

Approaches

Most donors have a wide assortment of modalities they use to engage in capacity building related to research. The type of approach used seems to be determined by the set of circumstances linked to the setting, needs, donor, project designers and prevailing ideology. Some donors focus on themes and thus utilize approaches that can provide resources linked to helping individuals, agencies, networks improve the capabilities of those working on the theme. Others focus on organizations or institutions and thus their major approaches are related to organizational and institutional development. Approaches come in and out of favour as well. For example, a number of years back some donors stopped funding scholarships to their country because they felt it contributed to the so-called "brain drain." Also a few years ago, donors preferred twinning arrangements between and among research centres as a mode to build capacity. While funders might have investment patterns, we have not located any evidence, which provides insight on what types of approaches work in what types of settings. The lessons learned we found tended to be quite situational. The following table presents a list of approaches used for capacity building activities we found in the literature.

Approaches Used for Capacity building Activities

APPROACH	COMMENT
Technical Assistance	This is the most common and involves long and short-term experts imparting knowledge and skills on site through consulting, coaching and training activities.
Mentoring and "apprenticeship"	These are capacity building approaches where senior staff members take on junior staff to improve their capabilities and/or counsel them in their careers.
Training programs	The concept of a training program is used for both long and short term learning activities. It includes everything from a workshop to a degree program. With respect to skill or capabilities it involves subject and management competencies. Training can be classroom-based, field based, laboratory-based etc. It covers a wide spectrum of activities.
Workshops	Workshops are a special type of training that is usually short-term (under six months).
Conferences	Conferences and meetings are gatherings for people to discuss issues, research findings and personally network. These are normally topic driven.
Study Tours	These are one of many experiential learning activities being used today. In study tours, participants are able to see in action the things they want to implement in their own setting.
Institutional linkages, partnerships and/or twinning arrangements	These are normally organizational relationships aimed at improving the capabilities of the institution. They normally involve a wide variety of exchanges, learning activities, training events and so forth. Mutual benefit is usually a key component of such arrangements.
E-courses and programs	This is a recent attempt to utilize technology to improve processes of capacity building.
Networks	Recently, donors have been supporting groups of individuals and organizations to engage in capability development. This involves new forms of relationships and interactions and usually involves e-technology as well as face-to-face meetings.

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APPROACH	COMMENT
Infrastructure support	This is capital infrastructure needed in any research endeavour. Normally, infrastructure support requires the organization to have some sort of maintenance budget or system. If not, it will not last. Infrastructure support could include buildings, libraries, utilities and the internet.
Base budget support	Unlike infrastructure, base budget support is a capacity intervention aimed at sustaining the on-going recurrent costs of an organization.
Awards, scholarships, fellowships, internships	A wide assortment of incentives used to encourage individuals to engage in capacity building. These awards can be given for local or international activities. They can be given to those who have done exceptional work or who have the potential to do exceptional work.
Publications and publication resource support	This too is a wide array of capacity building tools that help disseminate research work.

The Results Conundrum

As with many soft concepts (e.g. empowerment) an important aspect in defining capacity building is to determine whether it is perceived as process and/or outcome and what the outcome, objective or goal is considered to be. In the UN literature, which is more political than analytical, capacity building has been changed from strategy, a means of achieving something, to **outcome or objective**. From 1996, the UN General Assembly Resolution refers to the "objective of capacity-building" as "an essential part of the operational activities of the UN" (UN, A/RES/50/120: para. 22). These references to capacity building as the goal itself, however, provide little guidance on operational considerations with respect to "results." Nor has this shift affected those involved in the results based management movement who want to see the link between capacities and development results.

Whether capacities or development is the outcome, most literature either alludes to or directly refers to the **process nature of capacity building**. These processes are often referred to in the work on organizational and systems capacity building. There, the processes for supporting change are critical to the change itself. Where capacity building/capacity development is defined as involving systems analysis, it becomes a much longer term endeavour, a more searching process and thus less linear and defined in sequence.

> Institutional and organizational capacity building is a messy intractable process of human behaviour, frequently under conditions of adversity, which does not lend itself to confident prediction of tight cause and effect analysis and quantifiable results (Morgan and Qualman: 1996, p.18).

To some the complexity of this perspective on capacity building/capacity development process can be overwhelming. The complexity and the length of the process of capacity building can also introduce "goal displacement." In capacity building the focus often shifts from pre-planned measurable outcomes to new vistas of change. The expectations of funders need to be able to shift with the contextual changes that are going on; a difficult thing to do. What are the results that can be expected in capacity building work? In dynamic systems, while capacities might be built, the contexts within which they are being built are often changing, as are the changes that are being predicted. It is for this reason that many capacity building projects today have monitoring processes built in to both track changes and learning as one goes along.

Appendix II   List of People Interviewed

Person	Position	Program	Location
Pam Scholey	Team Leader	PBR	Ottawa
Fred Carden	Director, EU	Evaluation	Ottawa
Linda Waverley	Exec Director	RITC	Vancouver
Simon Carter	Team Leader	RPE	Ottawa
Frank Tulus (Telephone)	Officer	ICT4D	Delhi
Terry Smutylo	Former Director EU	Evaluation	Ottawa
Lisa Burley	Officer	PPB	Ottawa
Rita Bowry	Officer	PPB	Ottawa
Barbara Porrett	Professional Support	RB	Ottawa
Maria Ng (telephone)	Officer	ICT4D	Singapore
Helen Raij (telephone)	Officer	ENRM	Montevideo
Alioune Camara (telephone)	Officer	ICT4D	Dakar
Mark Redwood	Officer	PPB	Ottawa
Wardie Leppan	Team Leader	ENRM	Ottawa
Nancy Smyth	Senior Manager	President's Office	Ottawa
Merle Faminow (telephone)	Team Leader	ENRM	Montevideo
Brian Davy	Officer	ENRM	Ottawa
Lamia El-Fattal (telephone)	Officer	ENRM	Cairo
Sylvain Dufour	Senior Manager	RB	Ottawa
Gisèle Morin-Labatut	Officer	PPB	Ottawa
Sharmila Mhatre	Officer	SEP	Ottawa
Luis Navarro (telephone)	Team Leader	ENRM	Nairobi
Martha Melesse	Officer	SEP	Ottawa

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Chantal Schryer	Senior manager	President's Office	Ottawa
Renald Lafond	Team Leader	ICT4D	Ottawa
Basil Jones (telephone)	Officer	SEP	Nairobi
Tim Dottridge	Director	SID	Ottawa

Appendix III List of Organizations

African Capacity Building Foundation	ACBF
African Economic Research Consortium	AERC
Association of Development Research and Training Institutes of Asia and the Pacific	ADIPA
Canadian International Development Agency	CIDA
Capacity.org	
Carnegie Corporation	CC
Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research	CGIAR
Council for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa	CODESRIA
European Centre for Development Policy Management	ECDPM
Food and Agriculture Organization	FAO
Ford Foundation	FF
Global Development Network	GDN
InterAcademy Council	
International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications	INASP
The Netherlands Development Assistance Research	RAWOO
North South Institute	NSI
The Norwegian Council for Higher Education's Program for Development Research and Education	NUFU
Overseas Development Institute	ODI
Resources for Environmental Activists	
Rockefeller Foundation	RF
Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa	SISERA
Swedish International Cooperation Agency	Sida/SAREC
Swiss Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries	KFPE
United Nations Development Program	UNDP
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	UNESCO
United Nations Children Fund	UNICEF
United Nations Research Institute for Social Development	UNRISD
United Nations University	UNU
World Bank	WB

Appendix IV   Profile of Consultants

Charles Lusthaus is a founding partner of Universalia Management Group and is an Associate Professor with the Faculty of Education, Department of Administration and Policy Studies, McGill University. Dr Lusthaus' expertise lies in the areas of organizational change, performance management and evaluation. He has extensive experience in organizational development and capacity assessment. As well, he has over 25 years of experience in diagnosing and evaluating projects, programs and organizations. He is co-author of the book *"Enhancing Organizational Performance"* that provides a framework for strengthening organizational capacity. Dr. Lusthaus has published more than 30 articles on topics related to evaluation methodologies, educational management and policy development. He has also made over 50 presentations at conferences and workshops.

Stephanie Neilson has been an intermediate consultant with Universalia Management Group since January 2005. Ms Neilson is a highly motivated individual with extensive experience in planning, monitoring, evaluation, performance management and organizational development. She has participated in the planning, design and implementation of several monitoring and evaluation initiatives as part of organizational programming and projects. She has extensive experience working with donor agencies on such issues as organizational systems, partnership, capacity building and policy (both organizational and public policy). Ms Neilson has significant sector experience in gender, health (including reproductive and sexual health, HIV/AIDS), agriculture and participatory development. She has extensive experience building the capacities of donor project/program officers and their partners to plan, monitor and report for results on international development projects and programs. Prior to joining Universalia, Ms Neilson was the Evaluation Officer with IDRC's Evaluation Unit.

Appendix V   List of Findings

Finding 1:   While some IDRC staff and managers prefer the term capacity development to capacity building, most see the concept as a broad umbrella housing many of their activities and do not want a semantic debate.

Finding 2:   There is no commonly understood definition within IDRC to help guide staff in carrying out their work.

Finding 3:   The CAF offers an operational definition of capacity building that could provide guidance towards a corporate understanding of and approach to capacity building. But few of the people we talked to mentioned the CAF as a possible source of guidance towards a corporate approach. In fact, several interviewees lamented that there is no coherent institutional approach to capacity building at IDRC and wished there was one.

Finding 4:   There is an inconsistent approach to categorizing capacity building work in IDRC. This makes file reviews, analysis and learning difficult.

Finding 5:   For IDRC staff, capacity building is a key variable in their approach to development and relationships are key to capacity building.

Finding 6:   IDRC talks about change occurring from capacity building from the point of the problematique and the research area, rather than changes at the institutional or systems level.

Finding 7:   For most IDRC staff the entry point for change is at the individual level, however, despite the individual to individual bias a significant number of those interviewed wanted to focus at institutional and organizational level.

Finding 8:   IDRC's approach to capacity building is normally instrumental or functional in nature and focuses on professional competencies, capabilities and the tools needed to conduct research.

Finding 9:   Most interviewees do not feel confident in IDRC's ability to affect change at the institution or organizational level.

Finding 10: Although staff and managers identify a wide array of activities they use to build capacity, no process, or "activity mix" or set of mixes are identified that would indicate an approach to capacity building.

Finding 11: While building human resource capacity through training and scholarships remains a central component to capacity building at IDRC, funding cuts forced the Centre to abandon its foundational support to Masters and PhD degrees. Some think that IDRC needs to re-establish this key tool in capacity building.

Finding 12: IDRC staff and managers indicate a number of important factors that either contribute to or inhibit capacity building objectives. Many of the success factors are also identified as being IDRC's comparative advantage when it comes to building research capacities in the South.

Finding 13: Flexibility and persistence were mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews as the two most compelling factors associated with IDRC's comparative advantage. It is not only that the Centre supports *research* in the South, but also *how* that research support is delivered that IDRC staff and managers see as the Centre's niche.

Finding 14: Research Projects classified as "capacity" represent 26% of the total number of projects approved and 31% of total funding.

Finding 15: While the majority of capacity building projects (36%) are funded through the ENRM program area, both SEP (27%) and ICT4D (26%) have similar project patterns.

Finding 16: Over half of the capacity building projects are funded through the ENRM program area.

Finding 17: Research projects classified as "capacity" located in the Asian Region receive the most funding.

Finding 18: IDRC approved Research Projects target funding more at the individual level than at the institutional level. This is consistent with the espoused ideas expressed in our interviews.

Finding 19: Researchers and policy/decision makers are most often identified as the target to IDRC capacity building activities.

Finding 20: Approaches used in projects are similar to those that were espoused during the interviews.

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Appendix VII Terms of Reference[7]

Introduction

The Centre's Evaluation Unit is conducting a strategic evaluation to investigate the Centre's contribution to the development of capacities of its southern partners. This strategic evaluation focuses on the processes and results of Centre support for capacity development – whose capacities and what capacities have been enhanced, through what approaches, and how effectively?

The activity described in this contract forms part of the strategic evaluation's analysis of the experiences and results of selected projects and partners. The activity will derive from, and be consistent with, the larger set of activities described in Annex B (attached).

Objectives

The objectives of the activity described in this contract are as follows:

- Create a data set consisting of file reviews and interviews with IDRC staff and partners, for a sample of Centre-supported projects, and "mini"-case studies of selected Centre-supported projects. The consultant will also review selected Centre documents on capacity building (in particular, background reports for the strategic evaluation), as a means of contextualizing the data.   The data will focus primarily on the Centre's work in the Corporate Strategy and Program Framework (CSPF) 2000-05 period.

- Through an analysis of the data obtained the consultant will identify approaches, factors influencing outcomes, and results in terms of building capacities, in activities supported by the Centre.

- The consultant will examine the extent to which, how and in what contexts IDRC support has facilitated capacity development.

- Develop a paper that will describe the data set, identify capacity results, and describe the factors associated along with IDRC's role in supporting results. The paper should be written for the Evaluation Unit, Policy and Planning Group and Senior Management Committee in order that they can have a more comprehensive data set and use the information to verify corporate knowledge and raise issues for Corporate Assessment Framework (CAF) reporting by the Centre's Senior Management Committee (SMC) and its Board of Governors on indigenous capacity building. This is scheduled for May/June 2005 (see Annex C for information on the CAF performance area). Also, the data and its analysis should assist Centre managers and staff, in monitoring, supporting and evaluating capacity development.

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[7] The actual Terms of Reference used for this phase of the study were quite different from those presented here. The TORs presented here represent much of the work to be undertaken during the next phase. There was a verbal agreement between the two officers from the Evaluation Unit and the two consultants concerning the changes, which were then documented in the Final Workplan prepared by Universalia for the Evaluation Unit.

- Raise issues that the Centre might consider investigating, monitoring and/or evaluating further in order to improve the design, implementation and evaluation of projects and activities intended to develop capacities.

Questions to guide the analysis

10) What **results** (outputs, outcomes) of capacity building can be identified in selected examples of IDRC-supported work, and what contributed to these results? How are these results manifested? The consultant should pay particular attention to, but not be limited to, capacities that are relevant to IDRC's work in these cases (see CAF on capacity-building, and background information on capacity-building in IDRC's work [or, the Annex B will have more by way of categories for this and the sub-questions below]).

   a. **Whose capacities** and **what capacities** have IDRC and its partners **sought** to enhance? Identify capacities, which **have been enhanced**, and describe the level(s).

   b. What **approaches** (time, resources, strategies, modalities, mechanisms, etc.) have been used? How **relevant, appropriate and effective** have these been? (or, what have been the results of these?)

   c. What **other factors** affected results? Types of other factors can include, but are not limited to: internal context of IDRC; IDRC program objectives; other initiatives in place, including those of the organization and other donors; other factors or incentives within or affecting the recipient organization and the project leader and research team; the external context within which capacities are being built.

Design of the activity

Components of the conceptual framework

The activity will focus on the collection of data from a sample of Centre-supported projects, across the Centre's program and non-program areas and geographic regions. The sample will consist of 3-5% of the overall population of projects (1683 projects of all types approved between April 1 2000 and September 30 2004), or n=50-85. The activity will have three parts:

1) **File review** –an extensive review of IDRC's documentation to obtain an overview of perspectives and experiences. This review may also assist the consultant to identify cases for more in-depth analysis.

2) **Interviews** with / questionnaires to   IDRC staff and partners (project leaders, research team members etc.) This activity will provide a rich source of in-depth information regarding perspectives and experiences on capacity building in the sample of projects

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3) **"Mini" case studies**[8] – a small number of projects and partners to investigate more specific issues in greater depth. The methodology (whether a field trip is required) will be decided by agreement of the consultant and IDRC at a later date.

The developing fields of systems approaches to evaluation and evaluation in complexity will inform the analysis. It will also draw on the concept of "theories of change" found in the evaluation literature. "Theories of change" are articulations of the underlying assumptions about a program's "logic" – why it has selected the particular activities and approaches it has, and what processes of change are believed required to reach the desired ends. While the strategic evaluation will not attempt to assess the theories of change that are uncovered, an exploration of these can help shed light on why the Centre uses these approaches to capacity building that it does, and how these compare to others' theories; and help the Centre's role in overall capacity development.

Sampling

Project Population and sample

The sampling frame will initially be projects of all types approved since April 1, 2000 to date, and all organizations supported by IDRC (this could be extended to previous periods, including the 1996-2000 period, and prior, depending on the specific issues and criteria for sample selection). Note: The population of projects approved as of September 30, 2004 is 1683 (= 562 Research Projects + 1083 Research Support Projects + 37 Awards projects + 1 Secretariat). This includes 860 completed projects (= 119 Research Projects, 736 Research Support Projects, 5 Awards Projects). A longer time period would expand the number of projects in the population accordingly. The total number of Research Projects supported by IDRC since 1970 is approximately 7000, with support provided by these to approximately 3000 different institutions.

For this study the sample will be approximately 3-5% (i.e., 50-85 projects).

Interviews: The review will undertake interviews with IDRC staff/managers and projects staff for each of the projects examined.

Case Studies (See footnote 1. Budget does not include field visits at this time).

The sample size and approach will depend on time and financial resources and on methodological considerations. These suggest a selection of approximately 6-10 projects and partners. Purposeful sampling will be used to allow for cases to be selected that will generate insights into selected issues and that enhance the Centre's understanding of capacity development. Purposeful sampling will involve talking to Centre staff and the Evaluation Unit, and examining the Centre's portfolio of activities to determine which projects to investigate.

Possible criteria for selection of the sample, arising from discussions with IDRC managers and staff include:

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[8] Discussions with various people (including IDRC staff) indicate that full case studies will cost approximately $20,000-$30,000 per case. This activity does not have the necessary financial resources required for this kind of inquiry; as such, mini case studies will be conducted through interviews with IDRC managers & staff, and project staff.

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- Cases that offer insights into particular issues/areas of interest – e.g., the role and effects of IDRC support within the broader system(s); in particular the **relationship between individual and organizational support and capacity**;

- Cases that offer insights into types of approaches (training, mentoring by IDRC staff and/or advisors,) and how these contribute to building capacities;

- Cases that are identified by IDRC staff/managers as being "unsuccessful" examples of capacity development as well as those identified as being "successful" examples (looking at these over time and in context).

Data Sources

File review – PAD including the appraisal, reports, correspondence, evaluations, PCRs, program prospectus

Interviews – IDRC responsible program officers and staff (face-to-face or telephone)

Interviews - Project leaders, project staff (face-to-face or telephone)

Deliverables

Pursuant to this contract the consultant will:

1) Submit a workplan based on the above outline of work 10 days after the signing of the contract.

2) Undertake the work set out above and as agreed to in the workplan;

3) Engage with Centre staff and partners (and the Evaluation Unit as necessary) to conduct the work and disseminate the findings;

4) Submit a draft, preliminary report covering the first stages of the work, and proposing an approach for the "mini"-case studies by March 15?

5) Submit a draft report by April 15,2005

6) Submit a final report by April 29, 2005. This report will detail the methodology, work accomplished, findings and issues arising. It will adhere to the guidelines for evaluation reporting and for quality found on the Evaluation Unit's website at: www.idrc.ca/evaluation. The report will be written for the Evaluation Unit and focus on 1) the results found with respect to IDRC's capacity building work 2) factors that support or inhibit the results found, and the effectiveness of approaches used, 3) issues identified and suggestions for the future.

7) Provide a session or workshop to Centre Staff on the data set, key findings and issues arising.

Personnel

It is understood that the work to be done under contract with Universalia Management Group will be led by Dr. Charles Lusthaus, and complemented by a Universalia consultancy team agreed to by IDRC. It is further agreed that the Dr. Lusthaus will coordinate this work with the on-going reports presently being prepared. Finally, Dr. Lusthaus will coordinate his efforts with Mr. Peter Morgan, who is being contracted separately under a personal service contract in order to link this work with the lessons and the results of a global review of Capacity building presently being conducted by ECDPM.