

# IDRC in Chile

**I**DRC has collaborated with the research community in Chile for more than 30 years. The Centre has supported applied research in areas relevant to economic growth, such as trade policy, mining, and the promotion of technology and innovation.

IDRC has worked with Chilean partners on initiatives to improve social equity, including the development of new governance and education strategies, and the decentralization of environmental and natural resource management programs.

The Centre's support has evolved in response to the changing needs and capacity of Chilean researchers. During the 1970s and 1980s, IDRC's continued support helped many researchers remain and work in the country despite the dictatorship's suppression of social science research. Driven out of universities and other publicly funded institutions, these researchers created private research entities, which IDRC grants helped to maintain. Later, they were able to contribute to the re-establishment of democratic institutions.

Recent support has fostered Chilean researchers' growing participation in transnational research networks. Several IDRC-supported initiatives make use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to foster development. For example, the Centre has supported the develop-

ment of two Latin American networks in which Chile plays an important role: one promoting and analyzing the exchange of educational materials, the other studying the use of ICTs in schools. IDRC is currently enabling the two networks to consolidate and further promote the integration of ICTs in education.

Related IDRC-supported activities include a Chilean non-governmental organization's (NGO) effort to set up procedures and standards to manage computer recycling programs in Latin America based on the Canadian Computers for Schools model. SUR Corporación de Estudios Sociales y Educación is analyzing the social, economic, and environmental aspects that need to be monitored as it implements recycling programs in several countries in Latin America.

In 2003, the Centre, through the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas and the Santiago-based United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, established the Observatory for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (OSILAC). The observatory supports national administrations' efforts to increase the quantity and quality of official statistics related to the information society and economy. OSILAC is also looking at how governments incorporate ICT data in their planning and decision-making processes.

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ICTs can also help to strengthen democracy. IDRC support is enabling a municipality in the greater Santiago area, together with the Universidad de Adolfo Ibañez, to design and test applications that increase transparency and promote citizens' participation in government decision-making.

To promote trade and economic growth, IDRC supported the creation of the Latin American Trade Network (LATN) in the late 1990s. LATN members analyze national and international trade policy issues such as trade negotiations, labour standards, and agriculture. The Centre continues to support the network, which counts Chilean economic researchers and practitioners among its members. Research reports produced by LATN analysts are now being used by such international organizations as the World Bank and Andean Community, as well as by government and private officials. LATN's success has led to the establishment of similar networks in South Asia and Southern Africa.

The Latin American Center for Rural Development (Rimisp), in Santiago, has been an IDRC partner since its establishment in 1986. In 1997, IDRC supported Rimisp's Fondo Mink'a de Chorlavi, a competitive small grants program for research on poverty and natural resource degradation. An IDRC grant also enabled Rimisp to organize a consultation in January 2007 in Toronto, to solicit the views of civil society leaders on topics to be covered in the World Bank's *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture in Development*.

IDRC has also supported several research activities on the impact of mining. For example, the Chilean NGO, Centro de Investigación y Planificación del Medio Ambiente, assessed the impacts of large mines on small communities in several countries in the late 1990s. The research, which looked at whether benefits outweigh the potential social, cultural, and environmental costs, resulted in the development of a conceptual framework for legislation to regulate the closing

of mines. Many mining companies involved in medium and large mining projects voluntarily adopted the framework.

IDRC's support for research in Chile has also enabled the Universidad Católica de Temuco and Mapuche communities in Chile's south to jointly develop an approach that gives the Mapuche a voice in municipal, state, and federal planning for community development, health services delivery, and natural resource management. As a result, the Mapuche Indigenous Association has become more representative of all Mapuche groups in Rupukura's Chol Chol Valley. Progress has been made in the establishment of irrigation works, soil conservation, and the production of indigenous crops, among others. Women's groups have been established to promote health and agriculture. This project's innovative "inter-cultural" approach to community development, built on equity and respect for the social and cultural demands of local Indigenous populations, has led to greater investment in the Rupukura sector.

IDRC has supported 237 projects in Chile since 1973 for a total investment of almost CA\$42 million. There are currently eight active projects in Chile, some regional in scope, worth CA\$3.2 million.

### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

#### Better schooling online

There is a strong belief in Latin America that a complete overhaul of the education system is needed to raise the quality of education and improve access by and retention of underprivileged children and youth. Many are also convinced that integrating information and communication technologies in learning processes could play a major part in the renewal.

IDRC has supported two distinct efforts to promote ICTs in education. In 2004, the Latin American Educational Portals Network (RELPE), was established in Santiago by Fundación Chile,

and the Ministries of Education of 16 countries to share educational materials, thus reducing the cost and the time needed to develop Spanish-language content. The other research activity — Redes Escolares de América Latina (REDAL) coordinated by Fundación Evolución, in Buenos Aires — identified the factors contributing to the success of six national schoolnets. Among the factors cited were a concern for ensuring that participants appropriated ICTs and an emphasis on professional development of teachers in the use of the technologies in education. More technical considerations, such as the ICTs themselves, the quality of connection, and maintenance also contributed to success. One of the sites studied was Chile's Enlaces.

IDRC is now supporting research to build on the work carried out by these two networks. They are joining together to consolidate the information exchange system and to reinforce political commitment to using ICTs in education. Coordinated by the Chilean-based Corporación de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo, the project's participants are also describing and classifying the thematic content of educational materials on the portals, surveying users, and adding to the material by adapting and translating digital content from outside the region. The partners are also developing, testing and evaluating an off-line software to make teaching aids and materials available to schools that do not have Internet access.

(Project # 103811; Strategies to Consolidate and Integrate the RELPE and REDAL Networks; Duration: 2006–2009; IDRC allocation: CA\$856 900; IDRC contact: Alicia Richero; Research partner: Marcela Gajardo, Corporación de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo, Santa Magdalena 75, oficina 1002, Providencia, Santiago, Chile; Tel.: 56-2-334-4302; Email: mgajardo@preal.org).

### Strengthening Democracy through ICTs

Latin American governments are using information and communication technologies to modernize and improve delivery of their services. For example, they are adopting online platforms for

taxation and public procurement. ICTs can also give the public access to a wider range of information and open new spaces for citizens to have a say in government matters.

The municipality of Peñalolén, in the metropolitan Santiago region, is collaborating with the Universidad Adolfo Ibañez to design and analyze applications that could increase transparency. The research team is assessing current levels of technology use and citizen participation and is designing applications for the public to interact with government officials. Only 10% of Peñalolén homes have access to the Internet, but 10 telecentres, donated by Hewlett Packard, provide additional access and a focus point for the research. Researchers are also evaluating the use of the applications and will disseminate their findings through a policy document and a tool kit.

(Project #103709; Impact of ICTs on Local Democracy: Transparency and Citizen Participation in the Municipality of Peñalolén; Duration: 2006–2008; IDRC allocation: CA\$493 400; IDRC contact: Angelica Ospina; Research partner: Samuel Varas, Universidad Adolfo Ibañez, Av. Diagonal Las Torres 2640, Peñalolén, Santiago, Chile; Tel.: 56-2-675-4620; Email: samuel.varas@uai.cl)

### Building Knowledge of the World Trading Systems

The Latin American Trade Network (LATN) is a regionally recognized interdisciplinary network of practitioners and scholars, established in 1998 with IDRC support. Working in nine countries, the network aims to enhance experts' and trade negotiators' understanding of the implications of multilateral and hemispheric trade agendas and how they can lead to widespread economic benefits. The Argentinian branch of the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) coordinates the network. Researchers at the Universidad de Chile are LATN members.

The current research phase aims to make negotiation strategies and proposals better reflect broad-based national and regional priorities.

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FLACSO is also working to decentralize LATN's organizational structure and increase NGO and civil society involvement in its decision-making. It is expected that this process will enhance the network's profile as a regional mechanism to generate policy-relevant knowledge and provide a foundation for sustainable growth.

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### Creative Thinking about Rural Development

The Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural (the Latin American Center for Rural Development, or Rimisp), which began in 1986 as a network of IDRC-supported farming systems projects, became an independent organization in the mid-1990s. Its focus is on promoting learning and innovation that leads to greater equity, inclusion, well-being, and democracy in rural societies. The Fondo Mink'a de Chorlavi is one of the means by which it carries out its mandate.

Supported by IDRC and ICCO (the Netherlands-based Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation), the Mink'a de Chorlavi competitive small grants program supports applied research on participatory management of natural resources and rural development.

The 2006 competition for example, focusing on migration, supported 13 research projects in eight countries documenting such issues as community use of remittances for rural development and adaptation to community members' long-term absences.

The goal is to stimulate learning in organizations to help them improve living conditions and democratic processes in rural areas. The fund is building on the research findings by improving disseminating and sharing of results and by promoting the use of experience-based learning among change agents and others involved in sustainable rural development efforts.

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