

# IDRC in Guatemala

**I**DRC has supported research in Guatemala since 1980. Early work focused on improving farming systems, health care, and access to water and sanitation. When the 36-year civil war ended in 1996, IDRC-supported initiatives addressed issues related to the peace accord and the legacy of war, including widespread poverty, inequality, and the demand for justice.

Current research is helping the Guatemalan government ensure equitable access to natural resources, health care, and education. IDRC partners in Guatemala are also testing new community-based approaches to fight Chagas disease and analyzing conditions to improve the use of information and communication technologies among small and medium-sized enterprises.

IDRC supports a regional effort to facilitate the implementation of peace agreements. The Toronto-based International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives and the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales branch in El Salvador are studying how some local authorities, including the Guatemala City government, can successfully reduce conflict, insecurity, and violence.

Peacebuilding in the region was also the focus of a call for research proposals on Gender Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies, directed at

Colombian and Guatemalan researchers. A proposal by the Guatemalan Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial (ECAP) was selected, along with a Colombian organization, from among 30 respondents. With a consortium of organizations, ECAP is exploring how to improve redress for sexual violence against women.

Small economies can be even more vulnerable than large ones to the damage done by monopoly abuses and need policies that encourage competition if they are to achieve their development potential. IDRC has supported research coordinated by the United Nations' Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean that is boosting the capacity of countries in the region to promote competition within their borders. The research initiative, focusing on Guatemala and five other countries, has created some of the conditions for a regional competition agreement. Results have included country studies on competition policy that have been extremely timely given the scarcity of such material in the region.

Since one of the root causes of the armed conflict in Guatemala was the unequal distribution of productive land, dispossession of Indigenous lands, and unclear ownership of land, the 1996 peace accords provided a political framework for addressing land tenure problems. IDRC supported the efforts of government and non-

## IDRC in Guatemala

government groups during the 1990s to review the types of land-related conflicts prevalent in the country and draft legislation to resolve them by regularizing land tenure and use of natural resources.

Educational reform became another important post-conflict issue in the late 1990s. Indigenous communities have been traditionally under-represented in education spending and have the highest illiteracy and school drop-out rates in the country. Four years of IDRC support enabled the Coordinación de Organizaciones del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala to build its research and policy advisory capacity in order to recommend changes to the education budget.

Through the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas, IDRC, the Canadian International Development Agency, and other donors supported a computer and Internet training model aimed at including Indigenous peoples in the “information society.” Asociación Ajb’atz’ Enlace Quiché created a 571-term ICT vocabulary in the k’iche’ language. During the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society held in Tunis in 2005, Ajb’atz’ Enlace Quiché won the prestigious World Summit Award in the e-inclusion category. Enlace Quiché’s training centres have also designed six computer courses. One of these courses, for small businesses, has been incorporated into Lanz@, an IDRC-supported regional initiative fostering entrepreneurial skills through the use of digital technologies.

IDRC has also supported regional initiatives that have strengthened the capacity of municipal governments in Guatemala to mitigate natural and other disasters. With additional support from the Inter-American Development Bank and the Federation of Municipalities of the Central American Isthmus, the Centre funded the development of the Integrated Environmental Management System, known by its Spanish acronym SIGA. This tool uses input from local communities, along with geographic information system software, to generate maps showing areas

of environmental risk. It has allowed municipal authorities to make disaster prevention and preparedness plans that have wide community support.

Since 1980, IDRC has funded 79 research activities in Guatemala. These projects, some of which involved several countries, represent an allocation of CA\$15.3 million. Eight projects, worth CA\$3.6 million, are active.

### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

#### **Bridging Differences: Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution**

Many communities around the world struggle with violence, insecurity, and conflict, which are barriers to sustainable development. Now in its second phase, the Local Agenda 21 for Peace and Security project grew out of Local Agenda 21, a campaign endorsed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to identify local sustainability priorities and support good governance.

Local governments can address conflict in their communities through meaningful public participation and consultation. With IDRC support, researchers from the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives in Toronto and the El Salvador branch of the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales are analyzing good practices in Guatemala City; Lago Agrio and Tulcan in Ecuador; and Soyapango in El Salvador. The researchers are developing a framework of local policies on peaceful coexistence, which takes into consideration the concerns of disadvantaged groups. They will disseminate the resulting guidelines and tools for sustainable peacebuilding activities.

(Project # 103791; Local Agenda 21 for Peace and Security – Phase II; Duration: 2006–2008; IDRC allocation: CA\$395 097; IDRC contact: Gerd Schönwälder; Research partner: Konrad Otto-Zimmermann, International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, City Hall, West Tower, 16th Floor, 100 Queen St. West, Toronto, Canada M5H 2N2; Tel.: 416-392-1462; Fax: 416-392-1478; Email: konrad.ottozimmermann@iclei.org)

## Gender, Conflict, and Peacebuilding

Women, particularly the very poor and marginalized, suffered various forms of gender-based violence during the 36 years of armed conflict in Guatemala. As in other post-conflict societies, public policies designed to redress the consequences of violence are largely gender-blind, and perpetrators of gender-based violence have not been brought to justice.

In a 2004–2005 research competition, Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial (ECAP) received a grant to examine the challenges of redressing sexual violence against women and the prospects for reparation. ECAP is collaborating with a consortium of Guatemalan women's groups and rights activists. The research aims to improve women's access to mechanisms for justice, and to influence reparation plans with respect to sexual violence in the context of armed conflict. ECAP will produce a book documenting the experiences of the consortium and give public presentations in Guatemala and internationally.

(Project # 102657; Gender Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies: Call for Proposals (Colombia and Guatemala); Duration: 2004–2008; IDRC allocation: CA\$459 500; IDRC contact: Colleen Duggan; Research partner: Amandine Fulchiron, Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial, 2da Avenida 01-11, Zona 3, Colonia Bran, Guatemala, 01003, Guatemala; Tel.: 502-2-253-6071; Email: amandineolymp@intelnett.com)

## A New Approach to Chagas Disease

Chagas disease, carried by an insect, affects 16 to 18 million people in Latin America, most of them poor. In Guatemala, an estimated 730 000 people suffer from Chagas, and 30 000 new cases occur annually. The disease, which is sometimes fatal, can cause cardiac, gastrointestinal, or neurological damage. The traditional control strategy in Central America, based exclusively on insecticide spraying without the participation of the affected community, has had limited results.

The Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala and the National Vector Control Program are

coordinating research in villages to compare an ecosystem approach with the traditional spraying strategy. The ecohealth approach involves the community in promoting improved household and environmental management techniques and a community-based surveillance system. Since people's homes are the battlegrounds against Chagas, community involvement in efforts to fight the disease is essential. As the infected insects hide in the crevices of floors and walls, upgrading housing materials — from straw and adobe to cement, for example — greatly reduces transmission.

As this project nears completion, researchers are concluding that the level of re-infestation is lower in the two communities implementing an ecohealth approach than in villages where intervention has been limited to spraying. Three regional workshops have brought together researchers, civil society groups, policymakers, and other stakeholders to discuss the findings.

(Project # 101812; Ecosystem Approach to Chagas Disease Control in Guatemala; Duration: 2004–2007; IDRC allocation: CA\$454 300; IDRC contact: Roberto Bazzani; Research partner: Carlota Monroy, Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Ciudadela Universitaria, Zona 12, 01012, Guatemala; Tel.: 502-443-9672; Fax: 502-476-7221; Email: carlotamonroy@yahoo.com)

## A Vision for Health Care

Guatemala faces complex public health challenges. With only 2 percent of gross domestic product spent on public health, the country's health system is underfunded. More than 20 percent of the population, mostly in poor rural areas, has no access to any health service.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) commissioned a scoping study in 2002 that highlighted the lack of a national policy on health and social security as a key human development issue. UNDP also detected strong interest among health policy analysts, government officials, and civil society members in reaching a consensus on health sector reforms.

## IDRC in Guatemala

Along with the UNDP, IDRC is funding studies by local health specialists analyzing Guatemala's past and present health and social security system, as well as proposed policies and strategies. Using these studies as key inputs, UNDP is collaborating with the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance, and the Pan American Health Organization to convene a series of meetings to arrive at a consensus on the future of Guatemala's health system.

(Project # 102229, Building the Future for Better Health in Guatemala; Duration: 2005–2007; IDRC allocation: CA\$404 810; IDRC contact: Roberto Bazzani; Research partners: Karin Slowing, UNDP Guatemala, Apartado Postal 23A, Guatemala, 01014, Guatemala; Tel: 502-2-384-3165; E-mail: karin.slowing@undp.org)

### Improved Entrepreneurship through Digital Technologies

Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Central America are mostly family owned and managed. They operate in local markets, often with small profit margins, and offer low-quality jobs. Access to digital technologies and the Internet are usually restricted to larger, more profitable enterprises. A new research initiative, called Lanz@, aims to reverse this trend and foster entrepreneurial skills, business productivity, and citizen participation among MSMEs.

IDRC and other donors are supporting Fundación Omar Dengo's efforts to develop new, locally adapted training tools in demonstration projects in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The training equips youth, entrepreneurs, and other citizens with the skills to improve the production processes and administration of their MSMEs through digital technologies. Lanz@ also strengthens the capacity of its institutional partner in each country — Enlace Quiché in the case of Guatemala — to develop strategies based on technology use to increase employment and productivity, and ultimately to reduce poverty.

(Project #103590, Lanz@: Information Technology for Entrepreneurship, Citizen Participation and Productivity (Central America); Duration: 2005–2008; IDRC allocation: CA\$1 078 200; IDRC contact: Ben Petrazzini; Research partner: Elena Carreras, Fundación Omar Dengo, Apartado Postal 1032-2050, San José, Costa Rica; Tel.: 506-257-6654; Fax: 506-233-1549; Email: Elena.Carreras@fod.ac.cr)

### For more information, please contact IDRC's Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean:

Address: Avenida Brasil 2655, 11300 Montevideo, Uruguay  
Phone: 598-2-709-0042  
Fax: 598-2-708-6776  
Email: lacroinf@idrc.org.uy  
Website: www.idrc.ca/lacro

July 2007

WWW.IDRC.CA

Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is one of the world's leading institutions in the generation and application of new knowledge to meet the challenges of international development. For more than 35 years, IDRC has worked in close collaboration with researchers from the developing world in their search for the means to build healthier, more equitable, and more prosperous societies.

### International Development Research Centre

PO Box 8500, Ottawa, ON, Canada K1G 3H9  
Tel.: 613-236-6163  
Fax: 613-238-7230  
Email: info@idrc.ca