

# IDRC in Algeria

**I**DRC began to support research in Algeria in 1974. The Centre was forced to interrupt its programming in the mid-1990s, however, because of the prolonged civil conflict that followed the rise and suppression of an Islamic political force.

In 2002, a visit by three of IDRC's senior officials, in collaboration with the Canadian Embassy, assessed potential research areas with a view to resuming direct support of Algerian researchers. In the area of environment and natural resource management (ENRM), it was evident that tackling the water issue and the impact of environmental factors on human health were priorities. IDRC resumed or established relationships with a number of important research institutions, as well as with the ministries of Water Resources, and of Agriculture and Rural Development.

A workshop in Tipaza, in March 2005, marked the beginning of IDRC's renewed support in Algeria. The workshop, conducted with the collaboration of the Algiers-based Institut national de recherche agronomique d'Algérie (national agronomic research institute of Algeria), aimed to increase the capacity of selected ENRM researchers to conduct research using interdisciplinary approaches, participatory methods, and social and gender analysis. As a follow-up, IDRC is providing small research grants during 2005–2006 to the eight teams that attended the

workshop. Following this, IDRC will establish a competitive grants program and will select several project proposals for full-fledged support in the 2006–2007 fiscal year.

Some of the country's researchers, policymakers, business people, and civil society organizations are already involved in IDRC-supported research that is regional in scope. For example, Algeria is involved in an extensive regional initiative related to water demand management (WDM) that focuses on making better use of existing water resources. IDRC has supported numerous research projects and a network of researchers on WDM in the Middle East and North Africa. In 2004, IDRC, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development set up *WaDimena*, a five-year program coordinated by IDRC to support collaboration among Middle Eastern and North African researchers. The program will bolster efforts that seek more efficient, equitable, and sustainable use of existing water resources through research, policy change, and the adoption of new practices.

Algerian universities are also part of a new network of experts on open source software (OSS) in North Africa. Their representatives will participate in workshops in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Canada, and Senegal to develop OSS for universities' e-learning, grid computing, records management, access, databases, and library man-

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agement systems. Participants will subsequently develop project proposals, which can be submitted to IDRC or other donors for support.

Regional research supported by IDRC on information and communication technologies also includes making computer software and Internet content available in Arabic and African languages and developing recommendations on how to make appropriate wireless technology choices and establish community wireless networks.

Morocco's Conseil national du commerce extérieur (national external trade council) explored competition and competition policy issues in four Maghreb countries, including Algeria. The Moroccan council has set up communication links between universities and professional groups to follow up on the research stage.

Since the 1970s, IDRC has allocated close to CA\$2.8 million to 19 research activities in Algeria, some of which were regional in scope. Examples of research prior to the mid-1990s include the production of higher-yielding legume varieties, improving the conditions of the farming and herding populations on the Maghreb steppe, the promotion of tree-growing in the mountain zones, and recommendations to improve the performance of the education system and the efficiency of basic schooling.

### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

#### A Course on Urban Agriculture

Interest in urban agriculture as a development tool has grown rapidly since the mid-1990s. If promoted with sound policies and practices, farming in the city can reduce poverty, improve nutrition, ease the demand for waste disposal (through composting), and beautify the urban environment. IDRC's partners in the Middle East and North Africa had asked for training on the subject, particularly on how to translate research into action.

IDRC support enabled the American University of Beirut to design, deliver, and evaluate a three-week training course on urban agriculture for teams of researchers and city advisors, which was held in September 2005. The University developed Arabic language materials for use during the workshop and as resources for the future. Multidisciplinary city teams from the region, with experience in urban agriculture, attended the course; one team was from Setif, Algeria.

As an extension of the training, the teams are developing pilot projects that reflect lessons learned during the course. The Setif team is carrying out a pilot project to introduce urban agriculture as a way of creating jobs, while ensuring proper planning and zoning for this activity.

(Project # 102696, MENA Regional Short Course on Urban Agriculture; Duration: 2005–2007; IDRC allocation: CA\$490 980; IDRC contact: Mark Redwood; Research partner: Rami Zurayk, Project Manager, Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, Environment and Sustainable Development Unit, American University of Beirut, PO Box 11-0236/(Department), Riad El-Solh, Beirut 1107 2020, Lebanon; Tel.: 961-1-343002; Fax: 961-1-744460; Email: rzurayk@aub.edu.lb)

## Software and Web Content in Local Languages and Cultures

**I**t is generally agreed that for users to adopt and make optimal use of computers and the Internet, software and content need to be available in a familiar language. Yet almost all software and Internet content are developed in English and a few other Western languages. This project, led by the US-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) Kabissa, aims to make information and communication technologies (ICTs) more accessible and relevant to multilingual users in North Africa by speeding up the localization — the adaptation to local languages, cultures, and preferences — of computer software and Web content. This will in turn make technology a much more powerful tool for social and economic development in rural areas.

In this three-year project, Kabissa is partnering with several US and local NGOs, associations, and institutes. The project involves an initial survey of the current state of localization in Africa; a workshop in which African and other experts will exchange information and identify areas for collaboration; and a Web-based database of localization resources for software developers and content authors.

(Project # 102933, PAN Africa Localization: Enhancing Capacities for Localization of Arabic and African Languages; Duration: 2005–2008; IDRC allocation: CA\$312 100; IDRC contact: Adel El-Zaïm; Lead research partner: Kim Lowry, Kabissa Inc., 1519 Connecticut Avenue, Suite 200, Washington DC 20036, USA. Tel.: 20-2-265-6116; Fax: 70-2-441-8964; Email: info@kabissa.org; Website: www.kabissa.org)

## Bridging the “Digital Divide” with Wireless Technology

**T**he high cost of conventional “wired” infrastructure is a barrier to ICT access and social change in developing countries. By contrast, less cumbersome wireless technologies, such as WiFi and WiMax, can deliver tested low-cost telecommunications to complement conventional networks. They are also particularly effective in places where no infrastructure exists, helping communities to “leapfrog” generations of existing technology. To make “bridging the digital divide” a reality will require an appropriate integration of investment in both wired and wireless infrastructures, and a joint effort by governmental, profit, and non-profit sectors.

A group of African partners is conducting workshops; providing face-to-face training in how to set up community wireless networks; and creating classroom curriculums in English, French, and Arabic for an online repository of information on wireless technologies, along with other components.

(Project # 102693, Capacity Building for Community Wireless Connectivity in Africa; Duration: 2004–2006; IDRC allocation: CA\$319 870; IDRC contact: Adel El-Zaïm; Research partner: Ann Tothill, Association for Progressive Communications, APC Secretariat, Presidio Building 1012, Torney Avenue, PO Box 29904, San Francisco, CA 94129 USA. Executive Director’s Office, PO Box 29755, Melville 2109, South Africa. Tel.: 27-11-726-1692; Fax: 27-11-726-1692; Email: webeditor@apc.org)

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### Helping the Maghreb Compete Globally

**I**n the context of major changes in the international trade environment, it is important that countries understand their competitive advantages and adapt their trade policy accordingly. North Africa's Maghreb region, a crossroad between the Mediterranean and the Sahara, Africa and Europe, and East and West, is no exception. Morocco's Conseil national du commerce extérieur (CNCE — national foreign trade council) has identified competitive advantages among industrial sectors in its own country, as well as in Algeria, Tunisia, and Mauritania. The CNCE developed indicators that combine up-to-date quantitative benchmarks from international authorities with a qualitative analysis of internal and external factors of competitiveness. Industry representatives, researchers, and policymakers in the Maghreb can use these indicators to compare industrial performances and, based on the findings, recommend policies to promote exports. The study of

sample enterprises led to explanations of why some industries succeed while others do not. Through this project, the CNCE has set up lines of communication between universities and professional groups that continue to help industries better position themselves in international markets.

(Project # 101115, The Competitiveness of Maghreb Enterprises: Analysis and Monitoring; Duration: 2001–2004; IDRC allocation: CA\$499 200; IDRC contact: Susan Joekes; Local partner: Mohammed Benayad, Secretary-General, Conseil national du commerce extérieur (CNCE), 63, Boulevard My Youssef Rabat, Rabat, Morocco. Email: Mohamed@mcnet.gov.ma)

#### **For more information, please contact IDRC's Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa:**

Postal address: PO Box 14 Orman, Giza, Dokki, Cairo, Egypt  
Street address: 8 Ahmed Niseem Street, 8th Floor Giza, Cairo, Egypt  
Tel.: 20-2-336-7051/52/53/54/57  
Fax: 20-2-336-7056  
Email: skamel@idrc.org.eg

September 2006

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#### **International Development Research Centre**

PO Box 8500, Ottawa, ON, Canada K1G 3H9

**Street address:** 250 Albert Street, Ottawa, ON, Canada K1P 6M1

Tel.: 613-236-6163

Fax: 613-238-7230

Email: info@idrc.ca