

IDRC in Singapore

IDRC no longer supports research projects in Singapore, though the country remains a hub of activity for the Centre as the home of its regional office for Southeast and East Asia.

Most of IDRC's support for research in Singapore took place during the 1970s and 1980s as the country pushed for social and economic development. By 1989, the progress made toward this goal led IDRC to wind down support for research projects that focused on Singapore, which was by then a highly industrialized economy with a well-developed system of social welfare, health, and education, and the highest per capita income in Southeast Asia.

IDRC opened a regional office in Singapore in 1971. It is one of the Centre's six regional offices around the world and it guides programming for the region. Since 1993, it is also home to the Economy and Environment Program for Southeast Asia (EEPSEA), which the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Swedish International Development Agency, and IDRC support. EEPSEA, now part of IDRC's new Environmental Economics program, offers training and promotes the economic analysis of environmental problems in 10 Asian countries. Its successful approach of building a cadre of researchers able to provide sound advice to Southeast Asian policymakers is now being replicated in other regions with support from IDRC and other donors.

In 1994, as the Internet was introduced to Asia, IDRC established another in-house project at the Singapore office: the PAN Internet Collaboratory for Research, Experimentation, and Training. This initiative supported IDRC's Asian partners — non-profit organizations and research institutions — in experimenting with Internet-based technologies, such as web conferencing, e-learning and e-commerce, to further their development work and research. The Singapore government began to promote content-based applications in the late 1990s and the PAN Collaboratory multimedia website, hailed as a key pioneering effort, attracted close to CA\$330 000 of funding from the Singapore Infocommunications Development Authority. In 2003, IDRC devolved the Collaboratory project to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations based in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Though Singapore is not the focus of IDRC-supported research, the Centre periodically supports Singaporean research partners who are examining issues relevant to developing countries in Asia. For example, through the Singapore-based Centre for Environment, Gender and Development, IDRC supported a set of linked research studies on women's livelihoods, which was undertaken by local teams in countries throughout the region. The Centre also provided seed money to help establish a branch of the United Nations Development Fund for Women in Singapore. IDRC was also behind the

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participation of researchers, including one from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, in a 2005 regional conference held in Indonesia on how research by Asian public policy schools can contribute to policy-making.

IDRC's links with Singaporean researchers include support for them to host regional seminars. The regional office is currently working with the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore to co-host a regional consultation on gender and migration. In 2005, the same institute held a workshop on micro-finance in Southeast Asia, and a small grant from IDRC covered the travel expenses of some of the participants.

During the 1980s, IDRC-supported researchers from the National University of Singapore developed a computer-based system for controlling and monitoring agricultural and industrial processes. In Sri Lanka, the system was used to make tea-drying more energy efficient, thereby decreasing the use of fuelwood and electricity. A corporate entity called Eutech Cybernetics was formed as a result of the project in order to commercialize aspects of the technology. In 1996, Canada's Minister of International Trade presented a certificate of recognition to the project's lead researcher, Dr Hari Gunasingham, for his contribution to the advancement of science, business, and sustainable development.

Research on wastewater supported during the 1970s is also still proving relevant today. IDRC-supported researchers developed a waste treatment process involving a high-rate algae pond system. At the time, untreated wastewater from pig farms was contaminating Singapore's limited water supply and threatening public health. Research showed algae ponds were an energy efficient approach to large-scale sewage treatment and that they were affordable to construct, operate, and maintain. Research results from this pioneering project continue to generate interest worldwide among researchers and organizations focused on alternative waste disposal methods. One of the key researchers then, Dr Lee Boon Yan, who was with the Primary Production Department, is now the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts.

Since 1975, IDRC has supported 25 projects in Singapore, some regional in scope, worth CA\$3.3 million.

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