

# IDRC in Tunisia

**M**uch of IDRC's three decades of support to researchers in Tunisia has been focused on agriculture, trade and economic policy development, water management, and local development. Newer areas of research funded by the Centre include globalization, urban agriculture, and information and communication technologies.

IDRC is currently supporting the collaboration of the Groupe d'études et de recherches interdisciplinaires sur la Méditerranée (interdisciplinary research group on the Mediterranean), at the Université de Tunis, with the Globalization and Autonomy project, led by Professor William Coleman of Canada's McMaster University. This major international study is based on the premise that in the present phase of globalization, autonomy for individuals and communities is one of the world's most crucial issues. The long-term objective of this initiative, involving more than 60 researchers, is to create a virtual international centre that will lead research on globalization issues.

As well, a team of researchers and city advisors from Tunis participated in a course on urban agriculture given by the American University of Beirut. Other teams came from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, West Bank and Gaza, Algeria, and Yemen.

Tunisian researchers and policymakers will also benefit from the results of an IDRC-supported effort piloted by two nongovernmental organizations to promote the availability, in

Arabic and African languages, of computer and Internet software and content. Another group of IDRC partners is aiming to bridge the African continent's "digital divide." Researchers will provide information and training to African decision-makers, to help them make appropriate technology choices for wireless networks, as a low-cost and dynamic complement to wired infrastructure.

Tunisia is also a member of an extensive regional initiative related to water demand management (WDM) that focuses on making better use of existing water resources. Over the past decade, IDRC, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development have supported numerous research projects and a network of researchers on WDM in the Middle East. In 2004, these donor agencies set up WaDImena, a five-year program coordinated by IDRC, as a new source of funding for Middle Eastern and North African researchers. The program will help the policy and research communities and civil society develop policies and practical solutions for more efficient, equitable, and sustainable use of existing water resources.

Past IDRC-supported research has contributed to the knowledge and capacity of Tunisian researchers and policymakers in several fields. In one initiative, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas found better designs for windbreaks, which are trees planted to protect crops from strong sea breezes. Several regional workshops, including one in Tunisia, have helped researchers identify

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knowledge gaps and compile gender-related data in key areas such as housing, health, and employment. IDRC and other international donors supported the workshops, organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and Tunisia's Center of Arab Women for Training and Research.

Since 1975, IDRC has contributed almost CA\$7 million to 44 research activities in Tunisia.

### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

#### Globalization and Autonomy

A research team from the Université de Tunis is involved in a major international research project on globalization and autonomy, comprising more than 60 academic contributors. Professor William Coleman of McMaster University, who holds the Canada Research Chair in Global Governance and Public Policy, is leading the project, which is funded by Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The overall objective is to investigate the relationship between globalization and the processes of securing and building autonomy. The researchers believe that the relationships between globalization and autonomy are often at the root of many of the difficult debates and conflicts about social and economic well-being in the lives of people across the globe.

IDRC support is helping Professor Yassine Essid, of the Groupe d'études et de recherches interdisciplinaires sur la Méditerranée (interdisciplinary research group on the Mediterranean), at the Université de Tunis, participate in the project. An affiliated interdisciplinary research team of 16 scholars is based in Tunisia; it also includes members from Jordan, Lebanon, Spain, and France. Research results appear on the Globalization and Autonomy Online Compendium and in the Globalization and Autonomy Series published by the University of British Columbia Press. As well, individual team members contribute to

their usual disciplinary journals and books. One of the project's long-term objectives is to create a virtual research centre on globalization and autonomy issues to which all team members will belong and which will become a leading research centre on globalization issues.

(Project # 101955, Globalization and Autonomy; Duration: 2003–2006; IDRC allocation: CA\$64 000; IDRC contact: Tim Dottridge; Research partner: William Coleman, Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition, 1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8S 4M4 Website: <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~global/ga/globalizationautonomy.htm>; Local partner: Yassine Essid, Université de Tunis, Faculté des sciences humaines et sociales, GERIM, 94 avenue 9 Avril 1938 - 1007 Tunis. Tel.: 216-71-720-530; Cell: 98 412 409; Email: [Yassine.Essid@flshs.mu.tn](mailto:Yassine.Essid@flshs.mu.tn) or [my\\_essid@yahoo.fr](mailto:my_essid@yahoo.fr))

#### 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 Lebanon's 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 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 Tunis.

The teams are now developing pilot projects that reflect lessons learned during the course. The Tunis team will implement a project to collect, stock and reuse rainwater for urban agriculture through rooftop water systems. The team aims to generate more public awareness about urban

agriculture and, to do so, it is engaging students in schools.

(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

It 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 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 more accessible and relevant to multilingual North African users 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 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-Zaim; 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; Web site: www.kabissa.org)

### Bridging the “Digital Divide” with Wireless Technology

The 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 Wi-Max, 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 fulfil the promise of “bridging the digital divide” will require an appropriate integration of investment in both wired and wireless infrastructures, and a joint effort by governmental, profit, and nonprofit 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, among other components.

(Project # 102693, Capacity Building for Community Wireless Connectivity in Africa; Duration: 2004–2006; IDRC allocation: CA\$319 870; IDRC contact: Adel El-Zaim; 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)

### Putting Gender Equity into Practice

In principle, empowering women is increasingly recognized as a key to development. In practice, however, lack of current data prevents many countries in the South from addressing gender inequity. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and Tunisia’s Center of Arab Women for Training and Research brought both producers and users of statistics together in regional workshops

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in Egypt, Jordan, West Bank and Gaza, and Tunisia. The workshops helped participants identify knowledge gaps and compile gender-related data in key areas such as housing, health, and employment. Ultimately, this knowledge will help planners, trainers, officers of national women's organizations, researchers, and gender experts promote gender equality, equity, and women's empowerment more effectively.

(Project # 002803, Development of Gender Statistics Programs in Arab Countries; Duration: 1997–2001; IDRC allocation: CA\$150 000; IDRC contact: Eglal Rached; Research partner: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, PO Box 927115, Amman, Jordan)

### Helping the Maghreb Compete Globally

In 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. The CNCE has set up lines of communication between universities and professional groups that it will continue to rely on for follow-up work 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 Joeekes; Local partner: Mohammed Benayad, Secretary-General, Conseil national du commerce extérieur (CNCE), 63, Boulevard My Youssef Rabat, Rabat, Morocco. Email: Mohamed@mcnet.gov.ma)

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