

IDRC in Vietnam

IDRC began supporting research in Vietnam in the early 1990s, shortly after the country began its transition to a market economy. The impetus for change provided the Centre the opportunity to help build national capacity for economic research and policy-making and for community-based coastal and uplands resource management.

When a generation of Vietnamese economists found that its skills were ill-suited for the new market system, the Centre was the first donor to respond with training in non-Marxist economic research. IDRC's years of support to economic research centres laid the foundation for the Vietnam Economic Research Network, which is nurturing economists' capacity to produce high-quality, policy-relevant research. The Centre for Analysis and Forecasting coordinates the Network-supported research, which is now regularly featured in national and international reports and requested by senior Vietnamese trade negotiators. A second phase of IDRC support aims to extend the Network's reach and increase the influence of its research on policy issues and is focusing on the reforms still needed for the country to reach middle-income status by 2010.

IDRC support has strengthened the ability of Vietnamese researchers working in natural resources to embed preservation and manage-

ment efforts in communities. For example, Vietnam's Institute of Anthropology is collaborating with the Department of Anthropology of Canada's Université Laval to incorporate the participation of women into research on natural resource management.

Another IDRC partner in Vietnam, the Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry, is collaborating with farmers, fishers, and local authorities to develop models of community coastal resource management that improve people's lives. Hue University is also using an IDRC grant to develop a platform for web-based learning and knowledge sharing among researchers and policy-makers tackling development challenges in the uplands, the poorest regions of the country.

These activities are the result of more than a decade of support to develop an autonomous research and policy capacity in the country. It began with the Vietnam Institutional Strengthening and Economic Development program, jointly funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and IDRC from 1993 to 1997. Through this program, the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment coordinated 50 small-scale research investigations carried out by 25 institutions. This first phase helped assess the Vietnamese institutions, explore a range of policy areas, and train the first group of researchers.

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In a second phase of CIDA and IDRC support from 1997 to 2002, the Vietnam Economic and Environmental Management (VEEM) program focused on trade liberalization, competitiveness, and natural resource management. Mentored by senior academic advisors from other countries, researchers at the Institute of Economics provided evidence for policy reforms that could have helped Vietnam weather the Asian economic crisis of 1996-97. The research showed, for example, that the country's export-oriented policy fell far short of intended goals and that government measures to expand cotton cultivation to increase garment and textile exports were misguided.

The VEEM program also introduced participatory development concepts, training, and practices to key Vietnamese fisheries, universities, and ocean and coastal science research institutions. Community-led research trials are showing how to implement national legislation on fisheries co-management through local user groups. In the Tam Giang lagoon, for instance, a research team led by Hue University helped a user group better allocate space in the lagoon. These solutions resolved an escalating dispute between those who fish by boat and those who capture fish in net enclosures and practice aquaculture.

Parallel support enabled two Vietnamese partners to conduct research on the micro impacts of macroeconomic adjustment policies. The Socio-Economic Development Centre has been collaborating with the National Program for Hunger Eradication, Poverty Reduction and Job Creation to provide data on households and communities. Communities collected the data and became involved in poverty reduction efforts as a result of this monitoring. At the same time, the Centre for System and Management Research worked with the Ministry of Finance to apply economic models that estimate how policy proposals, such as a change in taxes or tariffs, affect the economy.

The Centre has also enabled the Vietnamese research community to access the Internet.

In 1994, IDRC was a key partner in establishing the first Internet provider in the country, Netnam. Fisheries College No 4 is now delivering training, using CD-ROMs and the Internet, to distant fishery technicians who cannot travel to Hanoi for instruction. The College of the North Atlantic in Newfoundland, Canada, collaborated to develop the materials and adapt open-source software.

Through its Ministry of Science and Technology, Vietnam is participating in the IDRC-supported Asian Partnership for Avian Influenza Research (APAIR). Government ministries, agencies, and granting councils from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Thailand, and Canada are also participating in this partnership, which is looking at policies and the capacity to control the spread of avian influenza and other emerging infectious diseases.

Since 1991, IDRC has supported 97 projects in Vietnam, for a total allocation of close to CA\$23.6 million. The 10 projects now active represent grants of CA\$3.6 million.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Vietnam Economic Research Network

Economic research that can inform policy is crucial in a country trying to rapidly graduate from its low-income status, eliminate poverty and inequality, promote a market-based economy, and pursue global and regional economic integration.

The Vietnam Economic Research Network (VERN) builds on the earlier Vietnam Economic and Environmental Management program. Through support for applied research and on-the-job training, it is improving the capacity of researchers to carry out policy-relevant research. IDRC's first phase of support to the Network generated research with a strong empirical focus. VERN's analysis of the effects of trade liberalization on non-farm household enterprises and on the competitiveness of Vietnam's textile and garment sector, for example, has been published internationally. Reports from the World Bank

and the country's Human Development Reports cite VERN research.

This second phase of IDRC support is enabling the Network to expand its reach to research centres outside Hanoi. It is supporting research on such themes as the privatization of state-owned enterprises, the economic and social impacts of accession to the World Trade Organization, and social protection. It is also coordinating training programs that make use of national and regional expertise and help researchers translate technical information into workshop presentations and policy briefs for government, business, and civil society.

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Building Capacity for Social and Gender Analysis

Efforts to involve local communities in biodiversity conservation and natural resource management are multiplying in Asia. But their proponents have come to realize that the most disadvantaged groups — the very poor, minority ethnic groups, and women — often remain on the margins, limiting the reach of policies and projects. Most see the need to address social and gender inequity, but don't understand how to do so. Indeed, those who work in agriculture and fisheries were trained exclusively in natural sciences.

Through this project, researchers in nine Asian countries as well as at Université Laval and the University of British Columbia, in Canada, are working to strengthen the capacity in Asia to undertake social and gender analysis related to natural resource management. In earlier Vietnamese projects, a team of national experts and advisors from Université Laval trained 16 researchers in gender analysis, mentoring them as they undertook small research projects.

Topics ranged from the life and situation of single women to the effects that diminishing agricultural land is having on gender roles in an upland community. Participating researchers in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Hue reported that they have improved their methodology, analytical skills, and ability to work in multidisciplinary and multi-institutional teams.

The third phase of research in Vietnam is now part of an umbrella program, which includes components in China, Southeast Asia, and the Eastern Himalayas. Capacity building in gender and social analysis, through training, mentoring, and applied research, continues.

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Community-based Coastal Management in Vietnam

A boom in aquaculture has brought rapid changes to resource use in the coastal waters of Vietnam. One impact has been the displacement of small-scale, poorer farmers and fishers and their reduced access to resources. Local and national government managers and planners need to study the impacts of aquaculture to see the whole picture of coastal resource management. But they have little experience with community involvement in resource management, especially when many communities and types of stakeholders are involved.

The previous IDRC-supported Vietnam Economic and Environmental Management program led to initial successes in resolving passage problems and opening up transport and boat travel lanes on the Tam Giang lagoon. This grant enables the Hue University of Agriculture and

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Forestry to continue its participatory mapping work and community planning in six communes. Its efforts to foster organizational change to deal with the increasing pressure on coastal resources have already borne fruit: new fishing unions are emerging, which should play an important role in fishery management.

This project is helping the Hue team to gain more experience in this type of research and to transfer its knowledge to other coastal practitioners in Vietnam. It is doing so in collaboration with the IDRC-supported Community-based Coastal Resource Management Learning and Research Network and researchers at Dalhousie University in Canada. The Hue team is also forming a national network to continue collaborating in this area of research.

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Electronic Networking for Development in Vietnam's Uplands

Three-quarters of Vietnam's land area are uplands, areas of low agricultural productivity where a diversity of marginalized ethnic minorities live in poverty. National universities have begun to tackle the development challenges in

these areas but have found it difficult to exchange information on results. To solve this problem, five national universities and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development formed the Vietnam Upland Forum to pool their information and undertake joint training activities and pilot studies.

This project is enabling the Centre for Agricultural Forestry Research and Development at Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry to link the 132 network members electronically. Researchers at Hue University are also developing a Vietnamese version of Isang Bagsak — a web-based learning and networking program that IDRC created with several partners to improve communication between researchers and the communities in which they work. The Forum's website is now online and web and Isang Bagsak training for members is well underway.

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