

IDRC in India

In the last five years, India's fast-growing economy has attracted the attention of governments and businesses the world over. The push to compete in a global market has contributed to India's economic spurt, but its impact on poverty, inequality, and employment is controversial. A widening gap exists between those benefiting from economic development and the 300 million Indians still living in poverty — a gap that contributes to rising discontent. Indian decision-makers need research-based evidence to design and implement policies that promote inclusive growth and social equity.

India's rapid development is creating infrastructural and environmental strains that limit potential. Degradation in urban environments restricts livelihoods and affects health. Water problems are a central feature of efforts to address poverty, productivity, and employment in many regions.

IDRC supports research on rights and citizenship, the dynamics of growth and inequality, social protection, telecommunications policy, and conflict in India's troubled Northeast. All these themes address growing inequalities in power, wealth, and development. Support to research on disaster management, sustainable development options, and climate change focuses on the need to develop policies that can

manage growing environmental stress. In several areas, IDRC is fostering comparative research with Chinese and Indian scholars. For example, research on information and communication technologies, innovation systems, son preference, rural health care systems, labour markets, and food supply chains is generating evidence for public policy debates in both countries.

India's importance to IDRC is reflected in the many active projects it supports in the country. There are 65 research activities, worth CA\$19 million, currently underway, some of which are regional in scope. Since 1974, IDRC has funded 424 research activities involving India, a total allocation of more than CA\$87 million. This year IDRC's regional office for South Asia and China in New Delhi is celebrating 25 years of operation. Several distinguished individuals from India have been members of IDRC's Board of Governors, including organic chemist Yelavarthy Nayudamma, physicist M.G.K. Menon, medical scientist Vulimiri Ramalingaswami, and current Governor Pratap Mehta, President of the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi.

India is a leader in the use of telecentres — community centres offering access to computers, the Internet, and other digital technologies. To address stagnant rural productivity and entrenched poverty, IDRC supported one of India's first rural telecentre pilots in 1997 at the

IDRC in India

M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation. Widely considered as an early proof of concept underlying India's mass rollout of telecentres, the pilot identified how villagers could use information to improve health, gain access to fish and agricultural markets, contribute to local understanding of climate change and adaptation, and use computers as learning tools. The Foundation's chair, Prof. M.S. Swaminathan, who is the father of India's green revolution, has spearheaded the technology rollout. IDRC contributes to its success through several activities such as a training academy for telecentre managers, a fund for low-cost application development, and research on business models to help the knowledge centres earn revenue. IDRC support also links India's knowledge-centre leaders with the organizations responsible for spreading community-based telecentres in other developing countries.

In the wake of economic reforms that have cut back public services, social protection is also among IDRC's priorities in India. IDRC supports research on health systems in particular. For example, the Anusandhan Trust is documenting the inequitable access to health care in the state of Maharashtra and developing standards of care for private practitioners.

The gap between women's rights and their ability to exercise them is another area of inequity that requires research, discussion, and advocacy for change. Several IDRC-supported activities aim to shed light on the state of women's legal, social, and economic rights. For example, the Centre's partners are analyzing women's economic rights after separation and divorce, gender biases in taxation, and women's experience of the growing reproductive technologies industry.

Research partner, ActionAid India, has been researching the reasons for sex-selective abortion, infanticide, and the neglect of girls. It has concluded that policymakers must confront the aversion to daughters through measures that increase the economic worth of women, such as improved employment opportunities.

The capacity of rural communities to adapt to climate variability and other types of change is the focus of IDRC-supported research carried out by Canada's International Institute for Sustainable Development and The Energy and Resources Institute in New Delhi. They are exploring how policies can be more flexible to respond to uncertainty and changes and help Canadian and Indian agricultural communities to adapt.

IDRC also supports research on the relationship between people's health and the sustainability of their ecosystem, including research on the occupational health hazards of the growing urban stone-quarrying and pottery industries, the focus of two separate projects by the Society for Development Alternatives and Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action.

The Indian government's G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development participated in 10 years of IDRC-supported research in the world's highest mountain system, the Hindu Kush Himalayas. Participatory research on rehabilitating common land and sustainable crops — such as off-season vegetables, cardamom, and ginger — raised farmers' incomes.

IDRC's support between 1993 and 2004 to the Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies continues to generate significant results. More than 10 000 local innovations identified by the Society, such as herbal pesticides and human and veterinary medicine, are now registered with the National Innovation Foundation, created for this purpose by the Department of Science and Technology in 2000. In 2006, the Indian Council of Medical Research began testing some of the registered plants with a view to developing drugs.

The work of IDRC partners in India and other countries on trade policy, global economic governance, and intellectual property rights is also relevant to Indian policy issues.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

The Role of Innovation in Development

Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa — known as the BRICS — stand out among developing countries for their large populations and strong economic growth. Their development could make a significant dent in world poverty as the number of poor within their borders runs into hundreds of millions. Since many BRICS governments now recognize innovation as a key source of sustainable economic success, the Global Research Network for Learning, Innovation and Competence Building Systems (Globelics) is studying the innovation systems of these countries.

India's Department of Economic Affairs is overseeing research that analyzes how knowledge is created and disseminated in India. Researchers are examining how various players interact in India's national innovation systems and how innovation affects the country's socio-economic development. Researchers in India are interacting with government policymakers and plan to hold a national workshop to report their findings and those of the research teams in other countries. It is expected that lessons learned about innovation in the BRICS will help policymakers in other developing countries make informed decisions that encourage the widespread emergence of innovation.

(Project # 104227; National Innovation Systems of BRICS Countries; Duration: 2007–2009; IDRC allocation: CA\$470 000; IDRC Contact: Gustavo Crespi; Research Partner: Jose Eduardo Cassiolato, Fundação Universitária José Bonifácio, Avenida Pasteur, 280 – Urca, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 22290-240; Tel: 55-21-3873-5279; Email: cassio@ie.ufrj.br)

Women's Rights and Reproductive Technologies

Fertility is an important value in Indian society and women often feel pressured to conceive. As a result, women increasingly turn to the assisted reproductive technologies (ART) provided by private industry. These unregulated procedures could have harmful impacts on women's health and pose pressing ethical questions, such as the selling of human eggs for profit. However, little information exists on the subject.

With IDRC support, researchers at SAMA–Resource Group for Women and Health are examining how culture shapes the way people deal with infertility, and why women decide to use ART. They will document the experiences of women undergoing these procedures, study their medical, ethical, and social implications, and examine the growth of India's ART industry as a whole.

SAMA aims to initiate an informed public debate on ART within both the women's and health movements in India and make policy recommendations for the industry's regulation.

(Project # 104780; Assisted Reproductive Technologies: Implications for Women's Reproductive Rights and Social Citizenship; Duration: 2007–2010; IDRC allocation: CA\$203 500; IDRC Contact: Navsharan Singh; Research Partner: N.B. Sarojini, SAMA, B-45, 2nd Floor, Main Road Shivalik, Malkviya Nagar, New Delhi, India, 110 017; Tel: 91-11-6563-7632 and 91-11-2669-2730; Email: sama.womenshealth@gmail.com)

Training Telecentre Leaders

By 2010, India plans to establish over 100 000 telecentres as part of its national e-governance strategy. To ensure that these knowledge centres empower all segments of the communities they serve, telecentre managers need appropriate support systems and training. The M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) is therefore establishing an Indian Telecentre Academy that

IDRC in India

will train managers to run telecentres in a socially, commercially, and environmentally sustainable way, while serving the poor.

The Academy is one of several ways in which IDRC is supporting India's knowledge-centre rollout. With support from the Indira Gandhi National Open University, MSSRF will design a locally accepted curriculum to train telecentre managers. It will begin by training 350 master trainers, who will then go on to train the 100 000 managers needed by 2010. The project will also develop a multimedia toolkit and curriculum that will instruct people on how to establish, maintain, and manage a community-based telecentre. MSSRF is also establishing a peer-to-peer help desk to provide ongoing support to telecentre managers and operators.

(Project # 105199; Indian Telecentre Academy; Duration 2008–2010; IDRC allocation: CA\$178 900; IDRC contact: Basheerhamad Shadrach; Research Partner: S Senthilkumaran, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Taramani Institutional Area, Third Cross Street, CPT Campus, Chennai, Madras, India, 600 113; Tel: 91-44-2254-2791; Email: senthil@mssrf.res.in)

Resilience to Change

Climate change is forcing communities the world over to adapt their agricultural practices and use of water resources. In India, for example, IDRC-supported research noted large swings in levels of precipitation, stream flows, and groundwater. In addition to changes in climate, rapid shifts in patterns of trade, investment, and competitiveness, and in environmental degradation and resource use are also common.

When communities face uncertainty and change, conventional planning scenarios are no longer useful. Researchers from the International Institute for Sustainable Development in Winnipeg, Canada and The Energy and Resources Institute in New Delhi are identifying farmers' adaptive practices in two Canadian provinces, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and in six Maharashtra-state villages in India. Some adaptive practices are crop insurance, land drainage, temporary migration for employment, and taking children out of school to work as farmhands. The researchers aim to help policy-makers understand how this community-scale adaptation links to policy and how policy can adapt to unexpected circumstances.

(Project # 102963; Adaptive Policy-Making for Agriculture and Water Resources; Duration: 2005–2009; IDRC allocation: CA\$1 000 000; IDRC contact: Marco Rondon; Research partner: Stephan Barg, International Institute for Sustainable Development, 161 Portage Avenue East, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3B 0Y4; Tel.: 204-958-7703; Email: sbarg@iisd.ca; Research partner in India: Preety Bhandari, The Energy and Resources Institute, Darbari Seth Block, IHC Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi, 110003, India; Tel. 91-11-2468-2100; Email: preety@teri.res.in)

For more information, please contact IDRC's Regional Office for South Asia and China:

Address: 208 Jor Bagh, New Delhi, 110 003, India
Tel.: 91-11-2461-9411/12/13
Fax: 91-11-2462-2707
Email: saro@idrc.org.in
Website: www.idrc.ca/saro

August 2008

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 nearly 40 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