

IDRC's Current Program Initiatives

The Acacia Initiative: Communities and the Information Society in Africa

The Acacia initiative is an international effort to empower **sub-Saharan African** communities with the ability to apply information and communication technologies (ICTs) to their own social and economic development. Left unchecked, the "globalization of information" would widen the information gap between developed and developing countries, further distance elites from the general population, and limit traditional social and economic development efforts. African communities can use ICTs to counter this trend and to take advantage of new forms of social organization and economic activity that result from the transformation to an information society.

Alternatives to Poverty and Resource Degradation

The grinding cycle of poverty and the degradation of natural resources is widespread in every developing country in the world. This cycle is particularly evident on the hillsides, highlands, and forest margins of Central and South America, where large and increasing numbers of people depend upon a declining natural resource base. Diverse and conflicting interests often lie at the root of environmental problems in these areas. To address the issues surrounding poverty and resource degradation in **Latin America and the Caribbean**, IDRC supports approaches that involve diverse stakeholders in analyzing and managing natural resources. The Alternatives to Poverty and Resource Degradation initiative aims to enable Latin American governments and civil societies to better address sustainable development through the design and implementation of policies and technologies that break the cycle of impoverishment that leads to the depletion of natural resources.



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Assessment of Social Policy Reform

The Assessment of Social Policy Reform initiative supports research that will provide policymakers with the knowledge and tools necessary to make informed changes to their country's social security systems. The initiative will assess various approaches to social policy reform (such as decentralization, privatization, targeting, and fees for services) and identify best practices and lessons learned. The initiative will also develop and test low-cost methods, instruments, and indicators for assessing the impact of social reforms, with an emphasis on the impact of reforms on vulnerable groups. Databases and information resources for use by national and local governments in promoting integrated reforms across social sectors will be developed by fostering Canadian and developing-country collaboration.

Cities Feeding People

Millions of people in the cities of the South have become farmers in recent decades, growing vegetables, raising livestock, and practicing many other types of agriculture in urban areas. Urban agriculture can provide farmers with better diets and higher incomes, improve local food supplies, put marginal lands to use, and absorb wastes. To improve the well-being and health of urban dwellers who are low-income food producers and consumers and to make ecosystems sustainable, the Cities Feeding People initiative supports both technical and political solutions.

Community-Based Natural Resource Management

Despite rapid industrialization, many **South and Southeast Asians** remain dependent on a productive natural resource base for a living. The long-term health of the natural environment is

threatened, however, by increasing exploitation of land, forest, and water resources and by a growing population. As the ability of ecosystems to recover diminishes, so do the employment and lifestyle options open to local people. Millions of livelihoods and irreplaceable storehouses of biodiversity may be lost forever. To halt the erosion of their local resource base, the men, women, and children living in affected communities often must overcome physical and social barriers. The Community-Based Natural Resource Management initiative will assist women and men living in systems that face increasing resource exploitation to manage and use their natural resources sustainably.

Ecosystem Health

Sustainable and equitable development requires that the well-being of both the people and the ecosystems of which they are an integral part are maintained or improved. Ecosystem health is, therefore, a concept that encompasses the complex interplay among the environment and the socioeconomic, cultural, and political conditions of any group of people. In particular, it focuses on how these relationships influence human health and well-being. The initiative will support research to develop and evaluate new approaches for health impact assessment in environmental assessments and field test proposed sets of indicators for ecosystem health. Interdisciplinary expertise and new research strategies and proposals that address and test the full ecosystem health approach will also be promoted. Through these interventions, the initiative will forward the agenda of ecosystem health both in the developing world and in Canada.

FoodLinks

FoodLinks is a market-oriented initiative that links Canadian private enterprises to producer groups in developing countries in research and business partnerships. Addressing key issues that constrain small producers and processors in developing countries from more profitable, value-added activities, FoodLinks aims to minimize the considerable waste of agricultural production experienced in the South and to maximize returns to the community.

Learning for Change — Africa

The Learning for Change initiative aims to foster lifelong learning opportunities to enable individuals to better manage change and overcome marginalization. It will support research to identify and develop appropriate means and capacities for the acquisition and transmission of knowledge. The initiative will examine the factors influencing the content, relevance, access, and quality of learning, and will promote access to learning, especially for women and other marginalized groups. Information and communication technologies that facilitate lifelong learning and that meet community needs will also be identified and developed.

Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic and Adjustment Policies

The Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic and Adjustment Policies (MIMAP) initiative supports the efforts of developing countries to analyse, identify, and develop economic policies, that meet the objectives of stabilization and structural adjustment, but whose negative impacts on the most vulnerable groups in society are limited. It supports economic modeling studies, the development and implementation of systems for monitoring poverty at the community level, and research that provides a better understanding of some of the factors contributing to poverty. MIMAP requires the active participation of all

stakeholders, including researchers, government decision-makers, and representatives of non-governmental organizations or other national organizations..

PAN Global Networking

The PAN initiative aims to promote speedy and more efficient access by researchers to the vast textual and multimedia information resources available on the Internet. Special attention is given to research and development communities in poorer countries and remote areas. The initiative also aims to develop the capacity in the South for using the Internet.

Peacebuilding and Reconstruction

Postconflict reconstruction is a fragile phase in the development of societies. Each country emerging from conflict faces a set of threats and challenges that are unique to its socioeconomic, security, cultural, and political context. A gap must be bridged between the short-term imperatives for international humanitarian assistance and conflict management and the long-term need for sustainable development and security. Reconstruction, therefore, requires a special set of analytical tools and appropriate policies to respond to a country's specific situation. Applied research plays a critical role in developing these tools and in guiding policy and action.

People, Land, and Water

The goal of the People, Land, and Water initiative is to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of communities in **Africa and the Middle East** through more equitable, sustainable, and productive use of land and water resources. The geographical focus is on two regions where the problems are particularly severe: the arid and

semi-arid regions and the highland ecosystem of sub-Saharan Africa. The initiative aims to achieve its goals by supporting research and enhancing communications among governments, communities, and local institutions.

Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises Innovation and Technology

The Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises Innovation and Technology initiative is based on a conviction that innovation and access to technology are key factors in enabling small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) to generate employment, remain competitive, and improve their environmental performance. It supports a combination of research, pilot projects, and networking. Typically, projects will improve the delivery of support services for SMMEs and strengthen the policy and regulatory environment for SMME development. The initiative will also support the identification, adaptation, and transfer of cleaner technologies and production methods for use by SMMEs and assist in the commercialization by SMMEs of IDRC-funded products and technologies.

Sustainable Use of Biodiversity

The goal of the Sustainable Use of Biodiversity initiative is to enhance the capacity of local and indigenous peoples to protect, access, and sustainably use biodiversity and to enhance their knowledge of biodiversity. It places particular emphasis on the gender aspects of conservation and sustainable use. To reach this goal, the initiative will support multidisciplinary research that focuses on enhancing the sustainable use of biodiversity by local communities.

Trade, Employment, and Competitiveness

While international economic relations are changing at an accelerating pace, most developing countries are ill equipped to deal with emerging issues, either independently through the adaptation of national policy or as part of regional and multilateral negotiations. The goal of the Trade, Employment, and Competitiveness initiative is to support developing countries in their efforts to participate more effectively in the global economy. Research will contribute to development in three ways, through improved negotiation and bargaining skills in international fora, the enhancement of the role of trade by improving policy and streamlining institutional mechanisms, and consistent and coherent policies in dealing with fast-changing developments at home and abroad. The initiative is global in nature and global in reach, although individual research projects may be country or region specific.

For further information

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