

Speaking Notes
for
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Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a pleasure and a privilege to meet with you today to talk about IDRC's work in East Africa. Before I begin, I would like to thank the Ambassador of Ethiopia for graciously hosting this meeting. Allow me to offer my congratulations to you for the recent peace agreement with Eritrea. Let us hope that it ushers in a new era of regional cooperation in the Horn of Africa.

I would also like to introduce Dr. Eva Rathgeber, IDRC's Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa. She normally works out of Nairobi but, as luck would have it, she is in Ottawa this week. After my presentation, we will both be pleased to answer any of your questions.

IDRC is a public corporation created by the Parliament of Canada. We report to Parliament through the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and IDRC is funded through an annual Parliamentary grant. For the fiscal year 2000-2001, IDRC received a grant of \$86.7 M. The Centre is special among Canadian public corporations because of the international composition of its 21-member Board of Governors. The IDRC Act requires that only the Board's Chairman, Vice-Chairman and nine other members be Canadians. The international complement of the current Board is made up of eight governors from developing countries and one from the United States. The leadership and perspective provided by governors from outside Canada help to keep the Centre's programs relevant to the developing world while setting them within a broader international context. Our Board is a direct reflection of IDRC's philosophy which is to convene people from different backgrounds and different nationalities to work together and benefit from each other's experiences.

IDRC was created under the basic premise that a country can develop only when its citizens have acquired the capacity to address their own development problems. We help communities in the developing world find practical solutions to important development challenges. In doing so, we support the work of Southern researchers and scientists.

IDRC has been supporting research in developing countries for thirty years now. This assistance has had multiple repercussions and considerable significance. The training provided to thousands of researchers in the South has helped create a pool of specialists who seek solutions to the problems of development at the local, national, regional, and global levels.

IDRC has also been an innovator in the way research is carried out in the developing world. The Centre sets a premium on a participatory and multi-disciplinary approach which takes into account inequalities between men and women. Now, more than ever, we look for opportunities to support researchers working on issues where there is high public interest and, ideally, an openness in governments at least debate the policy changes which emerge.

In East Africa, as elsewhere, our program focusses on three broad program areas: social and economic equity; environment and natural resource management; and information and

communication technologies (ICTs) for development. Over the years, IDRC has supported hundreds of programs in East Africa. Let me tell you about some of them, as they relate to the three program areas.

Social and Economic Equity

It is no secret that the gap between rich and poor is growing around the world. In sub-Saharan Africa, many countries are still grappling with the fallout from structural adjustment programs. Decision-makers in Africa are developing policies to reduce poverty, but they often need support to put these policies into action.

IDRC has recently identified four areas of research to help developing countries strengthen their institutions and reduce economic vulnerability. In sub-Saharan Africa, IDRC's social and economic equity research will focus on governance, public services, globalization, and secure jobs.

Governance

Before IDRC can concretize a program on Governance, we need to understand how research can contribute to governance and, at the same time, how research organizations can assist in advancing the process of governance. I would welcome your views on these two questions.

Health Services

As an example, let me describe the Tanzania Essential Health Intervention Program, or TEHIP, which is currently one of IDRC's largest programs.

Through an approach known as "evidence-based planning," the TEHIP team, made up of Tanzanian researchers and health ministry officials and Canadian specialists, provides local districts with tools to analyze their health spending. Using these tools, they can identify the major health problems in their district and, if necessary, redirect funds from the health budget to address these particular priorities. This provides necessary data to the local officials to make sensible choices, in and of itself strengthening Tanzania's goals to decentralize public decision-making and provision of services. New approaches to local financing of health services are also being explored.

In Morogoro, for example, health officials discovered that malaria accounts for 30 percent of the years of life lost due to death and illnesses. As a result, the district health team is now putting more emphasis on malaria. Between 1996 and 1998, the budget for malaria prevention and treatment jumped from 5 percent to 25 percent of total health spending in that district.

Last November, I visited several projects that are part of this program.

[President offers a few personal thoughts from her experience visiting the project.]

TEHIP is ground-breaking work, and not just for Tanzania's health system. We have the potential to transfer the frameworks, tools and methodologies developed through TEHIP to many other sectors and countries. I think that, because of globalization, sharing knowledge and best practices is becoming more important than ever.

Globalization

Globalization is rapidly creating winners and losers. The successful completion of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations led to a new global trading system, and the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to manage it. The implementation of that Round of negotiations along with subsequent developments, including the events in Seattle last November, are playing a critical role in Africa's future as it begins closer integration into the world economy. Although the purpose of the WTO system is to create a level playing field, many developing countries don't have the capacity to negotiate proposals for fair trade rules. If Africa is to benefit from closer ties to the world economy, strong negotiating skills in international trade issues are crucial. Through key interventions, IDRC is attempting to fill this knowledge gap.

An IDRC-supported project, Africa and the World Trading System, assesses the potential gains and obligations of the commitment that African countries make in the WTO process, resulting in a series of seminars and books that provide African policymakers with a better informed basis for decision-making. These books will be published by the end of this year.

Secure jobs

The last component of our focus on social and economic equity relates to livelihoods. IDRC-funded research looks at ways to strengthen the competitiveness of small enterprise. We pay particular attention to women and youth in the informal economy.

Street vending, for example, provides employment and income to vast numbers of urban poor, especially women. Unfortunately, their success makes them a visible target for police and municipal harassment. In one of our projects, we documented policies related to women street vendors in Kenya. This included assessing the capacity of street vendors to advocate on their own behalf, as well as ways to promote dialogue between women street vendors' groups and organizations, NGOs and relevant policymakers.

Environment and Natural Resource Management

Let me leave social and economic equity now and turn to IDRC's second major program area: environment and natural resource management.

More than 800 million people do not get enough food, and this number will only get higher in the next 50 years. This puts enormous pressure on natural resources to meet both local and international demands. Inevitably, the environment suffers: forests are cleared, water is diverted

and rare plants are over-harvested.

IDRC supports a variety of research to address the complexities of environment and natural resource management in sub-Saharan Africa. I'll mention one comprehensive program known as "People, Land and Water (PlaW)." This program currently supports 10 projects in East Africa that conduct research at both the grassroots and policy levels.

One of these research projects examined a community water harvesting initiative. Ultimately, the study helped women in the Kitui District in Kenya to build a sub-surface water dam. They were then able to organize themselves and the community to use their improved water supply more effectively.

Information and Communication Technologies

The third and final program area of our new five-year strategy is Information and Communication Technologies, or ICTs, for Development.

Ambassador Fecadu Gadamu (*Ethiopia*), I'm sure that you can confirm that a personal computer in Ethiopia costs 15 times the average annual income. Somehow, we need to bridge the divide between the information rich and the information poor.

IDRC's contribution to this issue is an integrated program of research, development and demonstration projects that addresses issues of ICT applications, technology and infrastructure, as well as policy and governance. We call it Acacia. In East Africa, Acacia's work is focussed in Uganda, and applied research is under way in: agriculture, education, health, governance, trade, commerce and environment.

Some of this access to ICTs comes through community telecentres. Community telecentres are local focus points that offer a range of information and telecommunications services, such as telephone, fax, e-mail and internet, to every member of the community. And the most improbable things can happen. The owner of a small scale metalworking enterprise went to the Nabweru Telecentre to surf the Internet. He wanted to find out what people in other countries were doing in metalworking. In this way, he made contact with a counterpart in South Korea and they started to communicate. A couple of months ago, the South Korean met with the Ugandan in Kampala, and they are now planning to start a small joint venture.

It's a small example, but it illustrates the power of telecommunications to reshape the economic landscape of Africa.

Before I finish, I would like to say a few words about IDRC's approach to gender. In my presentation, I've highlighted a few projects that deal specifically with the concerns of women. I want to emphasize that IDRC tries to consider gender in all the research projects it supports — whether it's to do with social and economic equity, environment and natural resource

management, or ICTs.

We've learned that it's not enough to introduce information and communications technology into a community. It's not enough to set up an infrastructure to provide information. We have to look at how the technology and the information it conveys will be used, by both men and women.

Let me illustrate what I mean.

IDRC has a project in Nairobi with the International Centre for Agroforestry Research. Through this project, information on soil conservation and good farming practices is e-mailed to women at a community centre in Kabale, Uganda.

However, the information is too technical and scientific to be of much use. So, local women's groups have started to humanize the information by creating stories and performing dramas to convey the knowledge. This is perhaps yet another example of how Africans are the best judge of what they need and how they need to use it.

Your Excellencies, I've sketched out the three program areas of IDRC's new five-year program: social and economic equity, environment and natural resource management, and information and communication technologies for development. Within this framework, IDRC supports a broad range of projects and programs.

Thank you again for this invitation to speak with you. Both Dr. Eva Rathgeber and I would now be pleased to answer any questions.