IDRC’s Cooperative Programs Unit takes a new tack

FORGING RESEARCH LINKS

IDRC’s Cooperative Programs Unit was set up early in 1981 to administer joint Canada-developing-country research projects (see Reports 10(1), April 1981). Jim Mullin, formerly with Canada’s Ministry of State for Science and Technology, took over as Director of the Unit in August 1981. He replaced Ernest Corea, the Cooperative Programs’ first Director, who was appointed Sri Lankan Ambassador to the U.S.A. and Mexico.

In its first full year of operations, the Unit had a budget of Can$1 million and 10 projects have been supported to date. The budget for the 1982/83 fiscal year is Can$2.5 million.

In the following interview, Mr Mullin outlines the thrust of the program.

**Reports:** Could you briefly outline the objectives of IDRC’s Cooperative Programs Unit?

**Mullin:** The program aims to promote collaboration between research groups in Canada and in the developing world in the execution of projects that will address problems of Third World development. In addition, the program has three other important objectives. First is the development of the scientific and technological research capacity of participating Third World institutions by way of improving their opportunities for collaboration with the Canadian scientific community. The second is to create channels of communication among scientists through which the results of successful research in Canada can be transferred to researchers in developing countries. Last is the use of collaboration as a means of influencing Canadian research groups to direct them towards a greater number and variety of Third World concerns.

**Reports:** Promoting collaboration between research groups in Canada and developing countries is a broad enterprise. Can you define the scope or boundaries of the program more specifically?

**Mullin:** The program is designed to foster collaboration between groups rather than individuals. It is open to all sectors — university, government, and the private sector — and to those disciplines that can be shown to contribute to the economic or social development of less industrialized nations.

Basically, it is designed to promote access by developing countries to research strengths that exist in Canada, not to establish new research capacity in Canada itself. The aim is to support research collaboration, not technical assistance projects; to support research projects of up to three years duration, not broad, unfocused programs. We see it including support for training developing-country nationals within the context of approved research projects, but stopping short of financing training that is divorced from a specific research activity.

**Reports:** Within those boundaries, what items can be funded?

**Mullin:** Funds can be appropriated for direct research costs within the developing country involved and in Canada, for the cost of exchanging staff between participating groups, and as well, for training related to the projects being financed. Materials are also covered. This means minor laboratory equipment, not basic infrastructure.

In addition, and given an interesting preliminary proposal, pre-project financing can be made available to ensure that the developing-country partner has a full opportunity to participate in project proposal planning.

**Reports:** How will project proposals be evaluated?

**Mullin:** Proposals will be evaluated against a number of criteria dealing with the developing country’s interest and commitment, the scientific merit of the proposal, the arrangements proposed to ensure collaboration, and the potential for application of the results.

In particular, the following criteria will be important:

- **Developing-country interest:** Is the proposed project clearly designed to strengthen the research capacity of the institutions or groups involved? Have they been given a significant role in the planning and execution of the project? Does the project have the support of all the institutions involved and what support are they willing to offer — funds, staff time, facilities, etc.? The institutional support on the developing-country side will be taken by IDRC as one indicator that the proposed research activity addresses a meaningful development problem.
- **Scientific merit:** Is the project scientifically sound? Is the proposed methodology adequately described, and is it appropriate to the problems being addressed? Is the timetable realistic? The scientific merit of proposals will be subject to peer review.
- **Institutional considerations:** Does the Canadian participant have the scientific capacity required to undertake or play a significant role in the project? Will the project be conducted in a manner that ensures Canadian-developing-country partnership? Is it capable of leading to a long-term relationship between the institutions involved?
- **Potential for application:** Does the developing-country institution involved, or a related institution, have the authority, finances, and so forth to implement the results of the proposed research? Is the project country-specific or would its results be applicable to other developing countries?

I must also point out that proposals falling within the area of competence of IDRC’s main program divisions — Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Sciences; Health Sciences; Information Sciences; and Social Sciences — will be administered by those Divisions. Proposals in other areas will be administered by the Cooperative Programs Unit.

For more information, contact the Cooperative Programs Unit, IDRC, P.O. Box 8500, Ottawa, Canada K1G 3H9.

THE FIRST STEP

Proposals submitted either by developing-country or Canadian groups should contain the following information:

- **Background:** the problem the project addresses and how it relates to the development priorities of the country concerned.

- **Objectives:** the scientific objectives to be pursued in the joint research activity.

- **Methodology:** the research strategy and tentative timetable as well as an explanation of how cooperative elements will be organized.

- **Utilization of results:** who will use the results and how.

- **Budget:** costs in Canada and developing country as well as costs for personnel exchange. All other resource contributions, should be outlined, particularly those provided by the developing country and Canadian institutions involved.