

Opening Remarks at the

“Strengthening Climate Change Adaptation Research: Mobilizing and Enabling International Research Partnerships” forum

Board Room, IDRC
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Good morning, everyone, and welcome to IDRC for this workshop on mobilizing and enabling international alliances for climate change and adaptation research. Je suis très heureuse de vous accueillir à ce colloque portant sur un sujet d’une actualité brûlante.

More and more, the corporate sector, the public, and governments are keen to understand better what climate change entails for us.

In Canada, much of the current political debate centres on how to avert the threats or to capitalize on the opportunities created by climate change. We have seen the launch and restructuring of a number of domestic programs for action and research.

Internationally, you will be aware of the debate triggered by the Stern Report, which was released by the UK government in October, and the recent outcome of the November Nairobi Climate Change Conference. The Stern Report calls for public and private action on a number of fronts. On the importance of adaptation measures, it recognizes that “it is no longer possible to prevent the climate change that will take place over the next two or three decades, but it is still possible to protect our societies and economies from its impacts to some extent through effective adaptation measures”.

La Conférence sur les changements climatiques tenue à Nairobi s’est achevée sur le dépôt, par l’Organe subsidiaire chargé de fournir des avis scientifiques, techniques et technologiques, d’un programme de travail pour la recherche ayant pour but de faire progresser la compréhension et l’évaluation des impacts des changements climatiques, et de nous permettre de mieux cerner notre vulnérabilité à ces changements et de préparer des stratégies d’adaptation.

We are reminded by Sir Nicolas Stern and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the need to situate national research efforts in an international setting. We have a global challenge before us demanding scientific collaboration and collective political action. Whether you view Canadian participation in climate change research as science for humanity or in the national self-interest, Canadian science has much to contribute to, and to be enriched by, international collaboration.

Comme la plupart d'entre vous le savent, le CRDI est une société d'État qui a été créée en mil neuf cent soixante-dix par le gouvernement fédéral. Il est dirigé par un conseil indépendant dont la majorité des vingt et un membres sont des citoyens canadiens; les dix autres gouverneurs viennent d'autres pays.

The IDRC Act mandates us to work in partnership with other Canadian institutions to mobilize research capacity that is responsive to the challenges faced by developing countries.

Le Centre s'inquiète de plus en plus des effets qu'auront les changements climatiques sur les pays en développement, et il se demande ce qu'il peut être fait pour aider les collectivités les plus vulnérables à s'adapter aux répercussions prévues.

IDRC has supported research to buffer the effects of climate variability for many years. Through our Environment and Natural Resource Management program area, we have supported research in agricultural and forestry practices, watershed management, land and water conservation, measures to combat desertification, and protection of biodiversity. These efforts take on new relevance in light of climate change.

Most recently, IDRC is managing the Climate Change Adaptation in Africa research and capacity development program, which is jointly funded by IDRC and the UK Department for International Development. Africa is especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change because of widespread poverty and weak infrastructure, and because agriculture is the life support system for so many households in Africa.

Over the past number of years, it has been increasingly clear to us that a broader cross-section of the Canadian research community has begun to turn its attention towards international challenges.

Le Centre a en effet constaté une évolution des plus heureuses, à savoir l'internationalisation croissante de la recherche canadienne, et il est très heureux d'appuyer les efforts en ce sens.

In recognition of these trends, IDRC has made internal changes with the encouragement of our Board of Governors. These were outlined in 2005 in our five-year Corporate Strategy and Program Framework.

La Stratégie générale invite le CRDI à accentuer sa collaboration avec les chercheurs et les organismes de recherche du Canada.

The goal is to assist with the creation of knowledge and practice that respond to the realization that Canada's own security and prosperity, in a just and peaceful world, are linked to ideas, knowledge, and innovation, which are increasingly generated around the world, including and especially in developing countries.

To support partnership renewal, we established the Research Partnerships Challenge Fund to facilitate the development of larger-scale research programs. This Fund, for example, has enabled us to develop Canada-South research alliances in collaboration with the Canadian

Institutes of Health Research, the Networks of Centres of Excellence Program, CIDA, and Health Canada. We intend to use the Challenge Fund as a means for developing theme-based research programs supported in conjunction with other Canadian research funding partners and possibly even other international funding partners.

I would like to conclude my remarks with a couple of points.

First, we think that there is a strong rationale for collaborative and comparative research on climate change and adaptation.

Second, we think that Canadian researchers have limited opportunities to organize international research alliances on issues of mutual interest. This is one reason why IDRC has established the Challenge Fund mechanism.

As the research funders present with us realize, we have mandates to follow, and finite resources require us to make choices. IDRC has a primary mandate to support research in the South whereas Canadian government departments and research funding councils have a mandate to build Canadian expertise.

But we also have the choice to do things collaboratively. Over the next two days, I hope that we will be able collectively to identify priorities and think through appropriate mechanisms to facilitate comparative and collaborative research on adaptation to climate change. We have an opportunity to advance science and public action on one of the most important questions of our time.

Thank you. I wish you great success in your deliberations. Je vous remercie de votre attention et vous souhaite des délibérations fructueuses. Let us now move to introductions. I would like to invite everyone to introduce themselves. (ROUNDTABLE INTRODUCTIONS)