

Final Case Study Report

Capacity Development for Research: Strategic Evaluation

A Partnership of Peers:

*Organizational Case Study of the
International Centre for Agricultural Research
in Dry Areas (ICARDA)*

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Executive Summary

This document reports on an evaluation study of the capacity development activities undertaken by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in its programming with the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA). This study is one of six organizational case studies undertaken as Phase 4 of a strategic evaluation of capacity development led by the IDRC Evaluation Unit. The case studies will be used by IDRC staff to improve the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of capacity development projects and activities as part of the Centre's programming. The case studies will also be used by IDRC senior management to better understand IDRC's approach to capacity development as a corporate result area.

Research for Development Context

The International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA) was established in 1977 and is one of the 15 international agricultural research centres supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). ICARDA's mission is to reduce poverty through research and training focusing on sustainable agricultural development in risk-prone and highly variable arid and semi-arid sub-tropical environments in the developing world.

ICARDA's core budget has fluctuated at just under \$US 30 million over the past several years. Research priorities include: (1) technologies that simultaneously improve productivity and sustain natural resources using low levels of external inputs; (2) resource management and productivity practices that conserve soil, water, and vegetation; (3) more diversified farming systems that reduce economic risk, improve resource use efficiency, and provide higher returns; and (4) enhanced quality and added value of farm products, post harvest processing and storage, and employment generation.

ICARDA undertakes most of its research in collaboration with other research partners. While it maintains formal collaboration with dozens of international universities, Advanced Research Institutes, and international agencies, ICARDA also collaborates directly with NARS partners in the countries in which it works and in regional networks. In addition to collaborative research, ICARDA runs large scale training programs with the objective of improving the skills and capabilities of agricultural research scientists.

ICARDA already sees itself as serving an important regional capacity development (CD) role with respect to NARS in the research domains on which it is focused. It has credibility with regional research organizations, and a strong network of regional scientific and policy contacts.

Expectations and capacity development strategies

IDRC was a key player in the founding of ICARDA, and has been engaged with the organization ever since. Over the years, the research programs of each organization have shifted, driven by their different mandates and governing structures, but they have consistently found areas of common interest to justify continued collaboration.

There is a high degree of mutual respect in the relationship between IDRC and ICARDA. Senior staff from both organizations reported in interviews that despite its relatively small financial scale, the relationship is a strategic one that is valued by each organization. From its standpoint, IDRC values the regional networks, scientific and administrative expertise of ICARDA. IDRC sees ICARDA as a reliable partner that can deliver quality research results even under difficult conditions. For its part, ICARDA values the active engagement of IDRC professional staff in shaping projects, because of their research expertise and regional knowledge. ICARDA also appreciates the strong sense of partnership and flexibility demonstrated by IDRC through project support.

ICARDA can justifiably point to its accomplishments and regional leadership in all five of Bernard's (2005) categories of capacity: conducting research; managing research activities and organizations; conceiving, generating and sustaining research in a particular theme or region; using / applying research outcomes in policy and/or practice; and mobilizing research-related policy and programs "systems" thinking. Indeed, *IDRC sees ICARDA as an important strategic partner in the Middle East and North Africa region precisely **because** of ICARDA's relatively high organizational capacity to manage and deliver complex and rigorous research.*

Because of this relatively strong capacity, IDRC does not emphasize basic organizational capacity development in its relationship with ICARDA, unlike some other of its research partners. The focus of most IDRC projects with ICARDA is on high quality research and regional networking. Capacity development plays a role in IDRC projects with ICARDA in two related ways, but this role is relatively minor compared to the focus on research:

1. IDRC takes advantage of ICARDA's strengths to help deliver research projects that involve weak partners in the region. Part of IDRC's intention in structuring projects this way is to reduce risk and improve the quality of research outcomes, but part of the intent is also to build the capacity of the weaker NARS partners through their engagement with ICARDA in the research work.¹
2. IDRC supports research and networking projects with ICARDA to help strengthen ICARDA's regional role in areas that are of mutual interest to the two

¹ The fact that IDRC capacity development efforts are targeted not at their grant recipients, but at the recipients' partners, is apparently common (Universalia 2007).

organizations, but where ICARDA experience may be limited (e.g. interdisciplinary research, social and gender analysis, participatory research). This is not merely a question of supporting “good research”, but of deliberate strategic intervention by IDRC to extend the experience of ICARDA scientists so that they are better able to lead research projects in IDRC priority thematic areas. Part of the intent in supporting these challenging research themes is often to connect ICARDA expertise to other regional partners. This approach therefore links to, and reinforces, the one identified above. In some cases, both approaches were used in the same project.

Major Findings

The main type of CD intervention in these projects was training, typically conducted through specialized workshops. In most cases, this training was specifically tied to the research activities that were the primary focus of the project. The target groups supported for capacity development were mainly NARS partners, and planning and delivery of the CD was generally left to the research project leaders (ICARDA) to organize. The linkages between the training and research, and the engagement of the less experienced NARS in different aspects of the research activities, from planning through implementation and reporting, constituted an important element of the CD exercise. Engagement in innovative and novel research was also an important way for ICARDA staff to build their own capacities for research in thematic areas that were of strategic value to IDRC. While the main entry point for CD was through research organizations, the main targets were individual researchers who could develop their skills and conceptual understanding through both training and engagement in new kinds of research activities. IDRC appears to have had very limited (if any) influence over the selection of the individuals who were ultimately offered CD support through projects it funded, nor were there any formal obligations on the part of ICARDA to consult IDRC in this matter.

Relationships between IDRC and ICARDA have built on peer-to-peer communications to achieve strategic objectives relevant to both organizations. IDRC support has led to greater expertise (particularly in integrated NRM, participatory research, and SAGA), regional exposure, NARS capacity development and influence for the Centre’s development-oriented research priorities; while ICARDA has been able to broaden its multidisciplinary research programs and regional networks, and strengthen analysis or implementation of the development linkages related to its work. These outcomes have been achieved largely as the result of persistence and continuity in IDRC program officers’ feedback and suggestions to ICARDA over the course of the project cycle; and as the result of ICARDA’s professional delivery of the resulting research, networking and NARS capacity development.

There were four main *processes* through which the Centre influenced the delivery of CD:

- peer-to-peer learning: communications between individual professionals in IDRC and ICARDA through the lens of scientific review during project development and management;
- funding training sessions and learning workshops mainly oriented to individual researchers in NARS;
- leading-edge research: strategic support for particular kinds of research, in order to extend experience, capability and regional influence of ICARDA in these fields.
- networking with other researchers and practitioners to gain synergies from related research and identify new insights and applications for research work.

Peer-to-peer learning is central to the engagement of IDRC with ICARDA. This is a two-way process that is different from mentoring or guidance as a capacity development approach. It is more like a relationship between research collaborators in different fields. The role of IDRC program officers can vary, but tends to be one of sharing critical insights on the work and directing researcher attention to potentially fruitful areas that ICARDA scientists may not have considered. In iterative interactions throughout the project, and indeed often over the course of several phases of related projects, the IDRC program officer builds up professional relationships with ICARDA scientists and contributes substantially to their selection of research topics, choice of methodologies, selection of partners, interpretation of results and transfer of lessons to other users through networks or workshops.

Assessment of the effectiveness of these capacity development interventions is challenging because in most cases, while they were intentional and transparent, their intended outcomes were not very explicit. Documentary evidence of CD outcomes is sparse for several reasons:

- The explicit objectives of most projects did not include capacity development, so reports focused primarily on research outcomes.
- Those projects with a strong CD component typically justified this in terms of problems or contexts of “need” for this capacity, but seldom monitored whether the CD activities contributed to addressing the need originally identified.
- In the case of enhanced research skills and experience, the CD outcomes were assumed as part of the research project, and were implied by the quality of the research products themselves.

However, by comparing the characteristics of practices in these projects with those identified as representing “good practice” to support capacity development², we can confirm that they were consistent. If the defined good practices are intended to model effective capacity development support processes, then one could conclude that, by

² IDRC Evaluation Unit 2008

IDRC's own standards, its capacity development support to ICARDA should have been effective.

Despite the application of good practices, there is little evidence of the persistence of the capacities developed through these projects. It would be very difficult on the basis of the available information to demonstrate sustainability or continuity of the skills developed, either at ICARDA or at its NARS partners. This can be attributed partly to staff turnover in ICARDA itself (departure of experienced staff), and partly due to the lack of followup NARS research programming in countries where security and governance are problematic.

IDRC and ICARDA understand capacity development in different ways. Most researchers would say that both the application of novel methods in a new area of research, and peer review of methods and results, are valuable tools for learning and research skills development. Both of these are examples of what IDRC would probably call capacity development (signaling their intent to support specific types of skill sets and methodological innovations), and what ICARDA would see as essential parts of the research enterprise, or "research-as-usual". There is little disagreement about what is going on between the organizations, but they label it differently.

In addition, the support to NARS capacity development as part of a broader research project is largely a reflection of what IDRC sees as "good practice". IDRC would expect support in such cases to include broad engagement in research issues, including problem identification, analysis, communication of results, and networking. On the other hand, ICARDA seems likely to view capacity support primarily in terms of training, with engagement in data collection or analysis to follow.

Implications

Both organizations support capacity development, but they seem to conceive of it differently. When ICARDA identifies that it has a capacity development role in its relations with NARS, it may mean something qualitatively different than what IDRC typifies as good CD practice. This is likely to lead to divergent expectations in projects where NARS capacity development is a significant element of the work program and could lead to misunderstandings and frustration on both sides.

IDRC staff tend to treat capacity development more like a set of "good practices" than as a focused strategic outcome of programming investments. There is considerable attention during project development and initiation to CD intent, and to processes of peer-to-peer interaction, inclusion, training and shared learning in the course of undertaking collaborative research. But it is often not clear what types of capacity IDRC expects to be enhanced through a project, and outcomes of CD are typically not clearly identified or reported by either IDRC or by ICARDA.

Looking Ahead

IDRC's programming strategy with ICARDA focuses on research that explores challenging integrative methods, builds bridges from science to participatory development, encourages multidisciplinary, sharpens social and gender analysis in natural resource management, and then builds and transfers these novel and challenging approaches in regional networks and supportive interaction with weak NARS. The skills needed for these kinds of projects are not only new research skills, but conceivably also skills in coordination, training, coaching and mentoring, and in cross-cultural communications. It appears from IDRC's choice and design of projects with ICARDA that it is trying to foster such skills through collaborative research and training. However, without identifying explicitly together the skills and tools that are needed to support capacity development of NARS, it may be difficult for IDRC and ICARDA to hold a discussion about how to do this better.

This subject would seem to offer potential for further dialogue between the two organizations. ICARDA may be interested in exploring how to conceptualize, define, measure and evaluate its own approach to CD, for purposes of program planning, accountability and management effectiveness. IDRC may have lessons to share from this strategic evaluation.

Methodology:

The fundamental unit of analysis is the research project, around which most professional interaction, resource flows and strategic decisions in both organizations are made. The study sampled all IDRC / ICARDA projects from the past 12 years meeting these criteria:

- Project documentation available.
- Objectives explicitly or implicitly included capacity building.
- Formally or substantively complete.
- Most recent phase only in multiphase projects.
- Exceeds median value of all projects (i.e. substantive).

This resulted in a sample of four projects. All IDRC projects with ICARDA have been funded from the ENRM program area, almost all of them by RPE.

Information about ICARDA context, relationship with IDRC and project interaction between IDRC and ICARDA staff was derived from reports prepared by Dr R. Mackay. These were based on a thorough document review and from interviews he conducted between July and November 2007 with IDRC and ICARDA staff and stakeholders in Cairo, Aleppo and Ottawa. Additional information specific to the sampled projects came from project documentation and from 7 new interviews with current and former IDRC and ICARDA staff.

Analysis relied on the research capacity typology developed by Bernard (2005), on the characterization of IDRC capacity development by Neilson and Lusthaus (2007) and on the Evaluation Unit's synthesis of "good practices" for capacity development (IDRC Evaluation Unit 2008). The main limitations of the methodology were that it relied largely on previously collected data and that it examines practices rather than outcomes (in the absence of much evidence about outcomes).

IDRC Capacity Development Strategic Evaluation

Case Study:

International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA)

1. Background and Introduction

This document reports on an evaluation study of the capacity development activities undertaken by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in its programming with the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA). The study is one of six organizational case studies undertaken as Phase 4 of a strategic evaluation of capacity development led by the IDRC Evaluation Unit. In Phases 1 – 3, consultants identified what IDRC means by “building” or “developing” capacities as well as how the organization supports capacity development and with whom. An initial set of typologies were developed to assist in conceptualizing, monitoring and evaluating capacity development; and a set of “good practices” were elaborated that capture elements of IDRC support that staff and partners view as being critical to research organizations and systems.

IDRC's approach to capacity building was found to be normally instrumental or functional in nature, and focused on tangibles, such as professional competencies, capabilities, and the tools needed to conduct research. These skills included the ability to identify research problems, to design and implement projects, to monitor and evaluate, to achieve good financial management, to link with other researchers and with donors, to publicize results, and so on. For IDRC therefore, capacity building means working with partners to conduct better research in a specific field and that any change that occurs as a result of this capacity building is at the problem or research area level rather than at the institutional or systems level. And yet, analysis undertaken during the first three phases of the strategic evaluation also indicates that IDRC partners are always connected to others within the research problématique or system. As such, at IDRC, capacity development often takes a systems approach. In other words, it not only addresses the individual(s) directly involved in the project(s) or program, but also looks at how these individuals are connected to others: other individuals, organizations, and/or networks.³

³ IDRC Evaluation Unit. Strategic Evaluation on Capacity Development: Terms of Reference for Organizational Case Studies.

While capacity development is agreed by IDRC management and staff to be central to the organization's mission and *modus operandi*, there is no simply stated and widely shared definition of what it means, what its objectives are, or how it ought to be assessed (Neilson and Lusthaus 2007). As a result, the practice of supporting capacity development in IDRC is varied, flexible, and difficult to generalize. The case studies are meant to present evidence from a range of organizational partners of IDRC practices in supporting capacity development, their efficacy and consistency.

The intent of the case studies is to develop examples of narratives, covering a range of projects and activities within the same organization, to demonstrate the diversity of capacity support interventions employed by different IDRC programs and units. The case studies will be used by IDRC staff to improve the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of capacity development projects and activities as part of the Centre's programming. The case studies will also be used by IDRC senior management to better understand IDRC's approach to capacity development as a corporate result area.

1.1. Organization of this report

The report generally follows guidelines suggested by the Evaluation Unit for organization and structure. The opening section of the report explains the methodology used in this study and the selection of projects through which capacity development practices were assessed. This is followed by a section that reviews the research for development context of ICARDA, explains the history of the ICARDA / IDRC relationship, and explores various examples of capacity development in the context of the projects selected for more detailed examination. The main findings of the study are contained in section 4, which describes capacity development activities, processes and practices in IDRC's projects with ICARDA. Section 5 summarizes the conclusions and discusses implications for future IDRC activities.

2. Methodology

The six organizational case studies that are part of this strategic evaluation were selected by IDRC's Evaluation Unit as a purposive sample using maximum variation sampling. The intent was to enable in-depth examination of the Centre's experience in order to identify common lessons about IDRC's practices and abilities for supporting research capacity in different types of organizations and research environments.

One of the principal sources of information for this study was the reports of document reviews and interviews conducted by Dr. Ronald Mackay, who visited IDRC's regional office for the Middle East and North Africa in Cairo, and ICARDA in Aleppo, Syria, to interview program officers and ICARDA staff over a period of several weeks in October 2007. He also interviewed IDRC staff in Canada. The focus of his investigation was the relationship between the two organizations and the capacity building experience linked to developing and implementing IDRC-funded research projects. Dr. Mackay prepared two versions of a report in which he explored issues of capacity development and program influence (Mackay 2007; 2008).

While I acknowledge my substantial debt to the data collection undertaken by Dr. Mackay in his previous study, the conclusions drawn here are my own. Likewise, any errors or factual inaccuracies in the current report are the sole responsibility of the author.

With the benefit of this data, there was only limited need for additional information from IDRC or ICARDA staff. The methodology of this study also relied on review of IDRC documentation for each of the projects selected to illustrate the features of capacity development in IDRC / ICARDA project relations. Documents provided by IDRC for each of the projects included official Project Approval Documents (PAD), Project Completion Reports (PCR), as well as interim and final technical reports, project monitoring (trip reports), and selected official email correspondence from the project file, if these were also available. A list of project documents reviewed for this study is presented as an appendix.

The fundamental unit of analysis for this study was the research project. The project provides a useful analytical focus from which to examine capacity development because it is the basis for most substantive relations between IDRC and its partners, including ICARDA. The project is the programming vehicle through which IDRC delivers financial and technical resources. It forms the basis of the legal undertaking between IDRC and its partner through which they agree on objectives and outputs for activities over a fixed period of time. The project activities (research and various research support activities) constitute the key substantive elements that IDRC funds, and for which partners are accountable. Project development, monitoring, oversight, review, followup and evaluation comprise the focus of program staff attention at IDRC, and it is through their engagement with projects that IDRC staff support capacity development.

Table 1: IDRC Project Funding to ICARDA 1996 - 2008	
Total Number of Projects funded	15
Total value (\$CAD)	\$4,280,587
Largest grant	\$1,300,000
Smallest grant	\$10,000
Median grant value	\$220,280

2.1. Project selection

The selection of projects for this study was based on the following criteria:

- Available documentation included PAD and PCR as well as either technical reports or trip (monitoring) reports.
- Objectives explicitly or implicitly included capacity building.
- Formally or substantively completed.
- Recent (where multi-phase projects were supported, only the most recent phase was selected).
- Substantive in size (at or above median value)

These criteria were intended partly to facilitate the collection of data (by ensuring access to documentation and aiding contact and recall of interview subjects), and partly to ensure relevance (substantive activities that included some kind of capacity development). Application of these criteria resulted in only four eligible projects, all of which were included in this study, as described in Table 2.

One of these projects (102803-01, Deepening the Methodological Basis for Participatory Plant Breeding) had been effectively covered by Dr Mackay in his study and so relevant interview notes were already available as cited in his reports. For each of the other three projects, the documentation was reviewed and the responsible IDRC program officer was interviewed. The study also included interviews with ICARDA staff responsible for two of the three new projects. A list of interviews is provided in the Appendix.

Table 2: Project sample for this study

IDRC Project Number	Project Title	IDRC Program Area and PI	Amount	Start date	Formal Completion
100366	Mountain Terraces, Yemen - Phase III	ENRM / PLAW	\$411,800	1/20/00	7/20/03
101344	Strengthening Seed Systems for Food Security in Afghanistan	ENRM / RPE	\$500,000	9/18/02	9/18/06
102803-01	Deepening the Methodological Basis of Participatory Plant Breeding: Umbrella Project (Global)	ENRM / RPE	\$220,280	10/31/04	6/1/08
104258	Supporting Research Capacity in Afghanistan	ENRM / ECOHLTH	\$281,650	12/21/06	n/a

2.2. Study Framework

Capacity enhancement is a fundamental element of development, and so for many decades the terminology of capacity building has been used as shorthand for what is a conceptually complex and practically challenging activity. The complications derive partly from the lack of agreed definitions, either within IDRC or more broadly in the development community, on what capacity development means and how it differs in relation to capacities of individuals, of organizations, or of societies. But they also derive from the continuous processes of systemic change within which individual and organizational capacity are always embedded. These complexities drive the realization that capacity development is always endogenous: it must be owned and driven by change processes intrinsic to the individuals or organizations targeted, although it can be influenced by external agents (Deby and Gillespie 2005). Capacity building also gets mixed up with learning, which is argued to be largely an internal and individual process:

Capacity objectives can be set and opportunities for learning provided, but what is learned, to what level of competency and how sustained it is are ultimately in the control of no one but the learner – and not even totally then. Capacities, then, cannot be ‘developed’ as such; they can be encouraged, guided and facilitated, and, where care is taken to meet certain best-practice conditions, may very effectively develop from within (Bernard 2004, p. 2).

This complexity is further compounded when it is recognized that most of the measures IDRC uses to identify capacity outcomes are changes in individual behaviour (e.g. use

of new research methods, or application of development insights to decision making). Behavioural outcomes are always set within a social context that conditions their potential viability and meaning, so the interpretation applied to these behaviours by outsiders is not always consistent with how the actors themselves see things.

This study of capacity development in the case of IDRC-ICARDA relations recognizes this challenging set of concepts, but the author begs the reader's indulgence in order to use shorthand expressions to encompass this broad range of issues, and to simplify them somewhat for the sake of representation and analysis. The study considers the support that IDRC provided through research projects to individual researchers organized in teams at ICARDA and other regional research agencies. In recognizing the complexities of capacity development concepts and approaches, it will focus on the nature of the relationship between IDRC and ICARDA, on the practices employed by IDRC to facilitate capacity development, and on examples that illustrate whose capacity was developed, and the interventions used to undertake this support ("how" it was done). As evidence for outcomes is limited, it will also compare these practices to IDRC's evolving list of "good practices", and draw some conclusions for future capacity development efforts. The analysis draws on frameworks of CD described by Bernard (2005) and Neilson and Lusthaus (2007), who summarize the larger report of Universalia (2007), as well as on IDRC's synthesis of good practices that contribute to capacity development (IDRC 2008).

Neilson and Lusthaus (2007) describe IDRC approaches to capacity development as focusing primarily on the individual or research team, but also on the organizational and network level. In the case of ICARDA, there is less emphasis on organizational capacity development for reasons that will be explained further below. Most of the discussion and analysis of CD as described in this report will address the development of individual skills and attitudes to strengthen research. Neilson and Lusthaus also recognize that resources for CD are inevitably tied to IDRC programming priorities and outcome areas (e.g. multidisciplinary, participatory research, use of research results). In this sense, IDRC investments in support to CD are strategic, and not merely responsive to the priorities of partner organizations.

They emphasize that CD is the process through which individuals, groups or organizations acquire abilities for themselves that enable them to diagnose and resolve critical development issues over time. This distinguishes the principal actors in CD as being IDRC partners, rather than the Centre itself. Assessment of the Centre role in CD therefore comes down to the nature and processes by which the Centre supports this process amongst its partners.

One of the conclusions that Neilson and Lusthaus draw about this process is that in many cases, the capacities being developed through IDRC support are not those of the Centre's immediate partners, but of its partners' partners. In other words, the Centre intends that through its grant support to immediate partners, the capacities of *other* organizations will be further developed. This insight was helpful in framing the analysis within this report, and seems particularly relevant to the ICARDA case.

IDRC's Evaluation Unit has identified "Good Practices" for capacity development from a variety of sources (IDRC, 2008). Because of the limited access to key informants or field information in this study, it was very difficult to measure or evaluate the actual outcomes of CD in the sample projects with ICARDA. The IDRC-EU good practices were used instead to provide an analytical lens for assessing the efficacy of CD interventions.

The categories of research capacity described by Bernard (2005) were also helpful in the study. They provided useful definitions of different kinds of individual and organizational capacities by which to sort and categorize the intentions of IDRC and its partners, as well as outcomes from the projects. These five categories of capacity development, reflecting what an individual or organization is expected to be able to do, or do better, as a consequence of the Centre's interventions, are:

1. Conducting research;
2. Managing research activities and organizations;
3. Conceiving, generating and sustaining research with respect to a sector/ theme or country/ regional priorities;
4. Using / applying research outcomes in policy and / or practice;
5. Mobilizing research-related policy and program "systems" thinking.

2.3. Limitations

This study relied on limited new evidence. The study was designed to complete, rather than to revisit, work that had already been undertaken. For the small number of interviews judged essential for this study, ICARDA and IDRC staff graciously made themselves available. But for some of the project examples selected it was impossible to reach those organizations who were the intended targets of CD (in Yemen or Afghanistan), and so assessment of outcomes in those cases is limited. The inability to independently validate significant outcomes is a limitation in the study, addressed as explained above by comparing IDRC practices to good practice models.

Relative to the intentions of the case study approach, another limitation of this study in broadly representing IDRC practices is that only a limited number of IDRC program staff have been involved actively in programming with ICARDA. Over the entire 12 year time period covered by the universe of projects referred above, the majority of project interactions were handled by only two IDRC professional staff. This is common in IDRC's relationships with any particular sectoral partner, but the reader is cautioned against drawing organization-wide conclusions from any individual case study.

3. Research for development context and relationship with IDRC

The International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA) was established in 1977 and is one of the 15 international agricultural research centres supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Its main research station and offices are at Tel Hadya, just outside Aleppo, Syria, but ICARDA maintains a network of sub-regional offices to facilitate project management and local connections in North Africa, the Nile Valley, the Arabian peninsula, West Asia, Central Asia and the Caucasus, and Latin America.

ICARDA's geographic mandate includes the countries of Central and West Asia and North Africa (CWANA), as well as other developing countries with subtropical and temperate dry areas. ICARDA's research mandate includes both global and regional focal areas:

ICARDA serves the entire developing world for the improvement of barley, lentil, and faba bean; and dry-area developing countries for the on-farm management of water, improvement of nutrition and productivity of small ruminants (sheep and goats), and rehabilitation and management of rangelands. In the Central and West Asia and North Africa (CWANA) region, ICARDA is responsible for the improvement of durum and bread wheats, chickpea, pasture and forage legumes and farming systems; and for the protection and enhancement of the natural resource base of water, land, and biodiversity.⁴

ICARDA may be described as an international research centre that seeks to apply agricultural research and technological innovation to development. The organization presents its mission as follows:

ICARDA's mission is to improve the welfare of poor people and alleviate poverty through research and training in dry areas of the developing world, by increasing the production, productivity and nutritional quality of food, while preserving and enhancing the natural resource base...ICARDA pursues this mission in partnerships with national agricultural research systems in developing countries and with advanced research institutes in industrialized countries.⁵

ICARDA's budget has fluctuated in the past few years at just under \$US 30 million / year. It receives core funding from over 20 international bilateral or multilateral donors, including the Government of Canada. IDRC contributions to ICARDA are relatively

⁴ From ICARDA website: <http://www.icarda.cgiar.org/Mandate.htm>

⁵ <http://www.icarda.cgiar.org/Mission.htm>

insignificant in relation to the organization's overall budget, and fall entirely into the category of restricted grants (i.e. tied to specific research project activity, rather than intended for core support functions).

ICARDA reaches farmers and pastoralists through partnerships with National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) to develop agricultural technologies and systems that are more productive and sustainable, and that contribute to the alleviation of poverty in the dry areas. ICARDA undertakes research to contribute to poverty alleviation through four strategic approaches: (1) technologies that simultaneously improve productivity and sustain natural resources and can be applied by poor people using low levels of external inputs; (2) resource management practices that conserve soil, water, and vegetation and do not decrease productivity; (3) more diversified farming systems that reduce economic risk, contribute to greater resource use efficiency, and provide higher returns to the farm community; and (4) improved vertical integration from producer to consumer, including enhanced quality and added value of farm products, improved post harvest processing and storage, and employment generation. ICARDA's research agenda has evolved since its founding, and now revolves around these strategies, with research projects that specifically address one or more of these approaches. A core area of interest remains plant breeding to improve performance of food and forage crops (especially legumes, barley and wheat) for the benefit of poor farmers in dry areas.

ICARDA has a clearly defined legal structure, overseen (as with all CG centres) by a Board of Trustees. It has a formal agreement with the Government of Syria respecting its headquarters operations, and separate agreements with the governments of most of the countries where it operates. In accordance with CG governance norms, ICARDA's research program is strongly influenced by the CGIAR Science Council through its rolling two-year Mid Term Plan (MTP), which provides the main operational guidance for ICARDA's research program. The Science Council provides services to the entire CGIAR system, and has four main functions: a) ensuring the relevance of scientific research undertaken by the Centres; b) ensuring the quality of their research; c) assessing the impact of CGIAR research; and d) mobilizing global scientific expertise. Every five years, the Science Council reviews the research and management activities of each global research Centre by means of an independent External Program and Management Review (EPMR).

ICARDA undertakes most of its research in collaboration with other research partners. While it maintains formal collaboration with dozens of international universities, Advanced Research Institutes, and international agencies, ICARDA also maintains close collaboration with NARS partners in the countries in which it works and in regional networks. ICARDA scientific staff are increasingly recruited from NARS and maintain their professional and collaborative relationships after joining ICARDA.⁶ ICARDA

⁶ S. Christiansen interview.

identifies a continuum from basic research to diagnostics, field surveys, technology development, on-farm trials to pilots, commercialization and adoption / impact studies. Except for basic research, ICARDA sees considerable NARS involvement in all other areas.⁷

In addition to collaborative research, ICARDA runs large scale training programs with the objective of improving the skills and capabilities of agricultural research scientists. Most of this training activity comprises specialized 1 – 3 week short courses at ICARDA HQ, but long courses and in-country courses are also provided. In the last 30 years ICARDA has trained over 10,000 people from more than 100 countries.⁸

ICARDA relations with its national NARS partners are generally positive. A 2004 survey of these partners generated 111 responses from 27 different countries. At the time, the most important areas of collaboration included cereal and legume improvement, human resource (skills) development, and institutional strengthening, while newer areas of ICARDA research engagement such as integrated resource management, soil and water management, and IPM, were mentioned less frequently. Of the respondents, 90% rated the benefits of collaboration with ICARDA as good or excellent. The most favoured forms of collaboration were training or collaborative research, and most were willing to contribute their own resources to these joint efforts, a measure of their favour (ICARDA 2004).

There are a couple of obvious implications of this organizational context for the current study. First, this is a large and well-resourced international organization with a global and regional mandate and a diverse, highly qualified professional staff. ICARDA has a much larger research presence in the region (measured by budget, offices, staff) than does IDRC. Second, ICARDA already sees itself as serving an important regional capacity development role with respect to NARS in the research domains on which it is focused. It evidently has credibility with regional research organizations, and a strong network of regional scientific and policy contacts. These factors play important roles in the IDRC / ICARDA relationship.

3.1. Nature of IDRC – ICARDA relationship

IDRC was a key player in the founding of ICARDA in 1977, and has been engaged with the organization ever since. Over the years, the research programs of each organization have shifted, driven by their different mandates and governing structures, but they have consistently found areas of common interest to justify continued collaboration. These areas of common interest generally lie on the margins of ICARDA's research program

⁷ "Basic Research to Technology Transfer Continuum", powerpoint slide, courtesy of S. Christiansen.

⁸ <http://www.icarda.cgiar.org/Training.htm>

rather than at the core areas of crop improvement and genetic resource management. In the past decade or so they involved innovations in integrated and multidisciplinary resource management approaches (particularly in relation first to farming systems and then to water management), the application of gender and social analysis to agricultural research, and the application of sustainable livelihoods frameworks to farmer-centred agricultural research and technology strategies. IDRC support to the introduction of some of these (then novel) techniques in the 1990's often led to their subsequent adoption by ICARDA and other regional research organizations (Mackay 2008, pp. 28-30).

There is a high degree of mutual respect in this relationship. Senior staff from both organizations reported in interviews that despite its relatively small financial scale, the relationship is a strategic one that is valued by each organization. From its standpoint, IDRC values the regional networks, scientific and administrative expertise of ICARDA. IDRC sees ICARDA as a reliable partner that can deliver quality research results even under difficult conditions. The organization can be relied on to generate project proposals even on short notice (e.g. in the case of project #104258 Supporting Research Capacity in Afghanistan), to prepare professional technical reports, and it is an efficient administrator of funds. IDRC has an interest in building regional leadership and research expertise in areas that are a priority to its program, and ICARDA is seen as a primary player in this kind of regional research leadership role.

ICARDA values the expertise and the regional knowledge of IDRC program staff, which give credibility to their feedback on project proposals and monitoring. ICARDA sees IDRC as more directly engaged in, and sensitive to, the practical challenges of research for development than many other donors. From ICARDA's perspective, IDRC is also a desirable partner even if their funding is small, because of their collaborative, supportive and flexible approach to project implementation even as conditions change.

We prefer working with IDRC because IDRC staff are career professionals who know the region. They know ICARDA, and visit often. We can depend on each other... IDRC is relatively unfettered by political constraints and we share common views of what needs to be achieved... What's nice about IDRC is that they spend a lot of time up front making sure that our impressions are the same as their impressions...⁹

Both organizations report the nature of their interactions as being characterized by peer-to-peer relationships (Mackay 2008, pp. 8, 16, 28). It is normal for donors to have an interest, and some influence, on the programs they are supporting at ICARDA. However, interviews suggest that the professional contacts between ICARDA scientists and IDRC staff go beyond normal donor-recipient relations. They have proven to be particularly fruitful to ICARDA in terms of strengthening project proposals, identifying

⁹ S. Christianson interview

valuable areas for innovative research, and providing constructive feedback on project progress. For their part, IDRC staff also report that they see evidence of learning in both directions of their professional relationships with ICARDA staff.

Projects funded by IDRC have tended to emphasize scientific and methodological innovation, elaborating novel techniques for integrated and participatory resource management and sharing these with regional partners. Across the portfolio of projects in the past 12 years, most IDRC support to ICARDA has involved taking advantage of their scientific capacity and regional networks to undertake challenging integrative research projects. By reference to the list of research capacities presented above (section 2.2), it is evident that ICARDA, as an international research centre, has demonstrable strengths already in all five categories. While this is not to say that their capacities cannot be improved, their existing strengths meant that development of these dimensions of research capacity has not been a major focus of IDRC support.

3.2. *Nature of Projects and Capacity Development Intentions*

Table 2 (in Section 2 above) summarizes the four projects examined to illustrate in more detail IDRC practices with respect to CD in relations with ICARDA. Two of these projects were late phases of long-term research programs involving multiple phases of support (Mountain Terraces Yemen; Deepening the Methodological Basis of Participatory Plant Breeding). All of them involved ICARDA with international linkages. In the case of the Yemen project, the linkages were with that country's NARS (particularly the Agricultural Research and Extension Agency, AREA). In the case of the Participatory Plant Breeding (PPB) project, the linkages were with NARS and farmer groups in Jordan and Syria, as well as with a global network of other research institutes similarly engaged in PPB studies. The other two projects were unique activities in Afghanistan, where national research capacity is very limited. Of the four projects, only one was explicitly focused on capacity development. In the other three, CD is either a minor objective of the project (e.g. Yemen); or it is not a formal objective at all, but is implied in the nature of the project. There is relatively little by way of CD intentionality on the part of either IDRC or ICARDA at the outset of the projects, with the notable exception of the Supporting Research Capacity in Afghanistan project.

Brief descriptions of the selected projects and their genesis provide some insight into both the relationship between IDRC and ICARDA as well as their intentions at the outset of the project. The earliest project among this sample was Mountain Terraces Yemen Phase III. As the title implies, this was a new approach to a research theme that had been previously explored in two prior phases dealing mainly with diagnostic and technical issues. This was a substantial multidisciplinary research project working at three different field sites in Yemen. The local fieldwork and project research was largely undertaken by AREA, the main local NAR institution in Yemen. However, IDRC was not confident in the capacity of the Yemeni institution to undertake complex integrative research work, or to tackle participatory on-farm studies of the type envisioned for this

project. In essence, these techniques were all new to the Yemeni researchers. For that reason, ICARDA was approached by IDRC to lead the project, bringing together a multidisciplinary team of experts and installing a project manager in Yemen at AREA to provide direct oversight. This project was focused on research about the livelihoods and behavioural decisions of poor farmers in the mountain terrace regions, but one of its explicit objectives was also to build the capacity of the Yemeni research teams in these new methodologies. The role of ICARDA in building NARS capacity through its leadership of the project was explicit on both sides at the outset of the project.

The project Deepening the Methodological Basis of Participatory Plant Breeding (hereafter referred to as PPB) was similarly a new phase of a longer-running series of research projects involving an international network of researchers elaborating PPB methodologies and lessons. ICARDA took the initiative on this project, originally proposing a continuation of their previous work, but at the suggestion of IDRC, the project leader agreed to add some different, and for him, novel objectives. Through interaction with IDRC program officers in the project development stage, the new orientation of the project took shape. The project had no explicit capacity development component and focused on three main areas of research: evaluating costs and benefits of PPB; extending PPB experience in Syria and Jordan; and developing mechanisms to better integrate PPB lessons into the formal seed system. Most of the research was focused on Syria and Jordan, but the activities were also linked to parallel research being undertaken in West Africa and China by other organizations. The intention of both ICARDA and IDRC from the outset of the project was to use strongly participatory methodologies, which are known for, and in part selected because of, their support to capacity development at the level of local farmers and farmer organizations. IDRC's PAD, for example, cites prior work (Vernooy 2003), that addresses capacity development specifically as a positive feature of PPB. So while CD was not an explicit objective of the project, there was clear intent on the part of both IDRC and ICARDA to employ methodologies whose benefits included capacity development among participating farmers and research organizations.

The project "Strengthening Seed Systems for Food Security in Afghanistan" was developed in response to a concept note initiated by ICARDA following the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan. It responded to an urgent and practical post-conflict problem in the country (availability of seed and seed distribution systems) but was primarily oriented to research and study of this issue based on the Afghan context and the humanitarian response there. The project was implemented through an existing ICARDA project office in Kabul, and involved the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation as well as local NGOs in northern Afghanistan. Capacity development was not a major objective, but the intent to build capacity among local organizations was explicit in IDRC's Project Approval Document (PAD). This intent was promoted strongly by IDRC staff in planning the project, but was not as clearly taken up from the ICARDA side, where the preoccupation was with the research issues and the practical challenges of implementing them in the Afghan context, with high staff turnover and difficult security

conditions.¹⁰ While CD support was limited in this project, the intention of ICARDA had been to follow the project with a second phase aimed more at action research for the development of Village-based Seed Organizations, whose efficacy had been demonstrated in the initial phase. This would have entailed much more CD among local research and implementation organizations, but the second phase was not funded by IDRC after its Sustainable Use of Biodiversity program initiative was re-organized.¹¹

The fourth project, “Supporting Research Capacity in Afghanistan”, is the only one in which capacity development was the principal focus of the project. This project was opportunistic for both IDRC and ICARDA. It arose when IDRC approached ICARDA for assistance in identifying a suitable project in Afghanistan at a time when IDRC was considering how to respond to Canadian foreign policy priorities. For its part, ICARDA was at the same time administering the UK-Dept for International Development (DFID) supported Research in Alternative Livelihoods Fund (RALF) in Afghanistan, a program to reduce opium poppy cultivation. A mid-term review of that program concluded that ICARDA had paid insufficient attention to building the capacity of local partners in using participatory and multi-disciplinary research approaches, social and gender analysis (SAGA), and sustainable livelihoods analysis in their research projects. ICARDA suggested to IDRC that a program to build the capacity of RALF’s 11 national research partner organizations would be an appropriate investment to meet both organization’s needs. The project was approved quickly to meet IDRC deadlines and provide urgent support to RALF, which was already more than half completed. IDRC funding was used primarily to engage two consultants from the region to lead a program of formal workshop-based training. In this project, capacity development was a central objective and received the full attention of both partners from the outset of the project.

All four of the projects demonstrated IDRC confidence in ICARDA and recognition of their capacity in some respect: their scientific and methodological leadership on a global program (PPB); their scientific and administrative leadership in a difficult research environment (Yemen, Afghanistan Seeds project); and their experience in developing capacity of weak NARS (Afghanistan capacity support, Yemen). It is also worth noting that in the case of both Afghanistan projects, IDRC called on ICARDA to organize and deliver projects in a very challenging context.

Despite this confidence, IDRC recognition of ICARDA strengths in project leadership and capacity development still had its limits. For example, in the Afghan Capacity Support project, IDRC relied on independent consultants outside ICARDA for developing and leading the training program for Afghan researchers on participatory action research (PAR) and SAGA. IDRC’s regional office pressed for the engagement of

¹⁰ Amegbeto and Fajber interviews

¹¹ ICARDA continued working with Village-Based Seed Organizations in its ongoing program in Afghanistan, but IDRC was not involved in these activities.

these particular trainers (rather than ICARDA staff) because of previous experience with these trainers in other programs, and because this was not an area in which ICARDA had training experience.¹²

Except for the Afghan Capacity Support project, the central focus of all of these projects was on research. All of these research projects emphasized multi-disciplinary, farmer-centred approaches to rural livelihood issues, in which participatory research methods figured prominently. These research approaches are challenging and novel for agricultural research organizations whose strengths are normally in the natural sciences (Sayer and Campbell 2004; Tyler 2006). Therefore it is reasonable to suggest that engagement in the research itself offered an important opportunity for capacity development for national research partners, especially when coupled with the associated training (see next section).

Interviews with IDRC staff made it clear that they valued opportunities for CD for NARS partners, even if these did not form a major part of the proposed research projects, and even if CD was not an explicit objective of the project.¹³ Part of the underlying rationale for the design of the project and the engagement with NARS in collaborative research was assumed by IDRC to be CD. ICARDA scientists, on the other hand, primarily considered these projects as research projects, and focused on the research issues. Capacity development was of course the focus of one project (Afghan Capacity Support), but in the other cases ICARDA viewed CD as being intended to support the project's research objectives. Training was designed to equip collaborative partners to contribute to the research program rather than to respond to particular diagnoses of NARS capacity needs.

These subtle differences in intention appear to have had relatively few implications in practice for the IDRC – ICARDA relationship, as both organizations were able to reach agreement early in each project as to the training needs and approaches relevant to the respective projects. In this respect, whether the NARS CD issue is highlighted in project objectives, or raised by IDRC program officers as part of workplan implementation discussions, the Centre's approach has been consistent over time and across projects. Each of these projects is oriented to CD opportunities for NARS and local organizations. But these intentions are more deliberate and consistent on the part of IDRC than they are for ICARDA.

3.3. Description of CD interventions

¹² el-Fattal interview

¹³ note that this is broadly consistent with the "Good Practices" identified by IDRC (2008), which emphasize the importance of building relationships, respecting partners, and building on existing capacities based on local agendas.

The range of CD interventions in IDRC projects with ICARDA are fairly limited, when compared to the long list of possibilities (see box). This is partly because CD is typically not the central objective of these projects. All of the projects worked with national

**Potential Capacity
Development Interventions**
(Neilson and Lusthaus, 2007)

Training courses
One-on-one exchanges
Study exchanges/visits
Conferences, workshops
Networks/networking
Awards programs
Linking senior – junior researchers
Recipients working with experts
Writing experiences
Technical Assistance
Centers of Excellence
Sustained mentoring
Small grants funding

research organizations, and all used training (usually in the form of workshops) to build research skills directly relevant to the research project itself. In most cases, this training included only the research team members, and often only a subset of the team (e.g. training on interviewing and data collection for field teams in the Afghan Seeds project).

Most fundamental to the CD support observed in these projects is that it was delivered directly by ICARDA. IDRC deliberately structured the projects so as to benefit from ICARDA's regional linkages and research leadership in relationship to NARS. In 3 of the 4 projects, IDRC had virtually no involvement in planning or structuring the CD interventions. In this sense the main IDRC intervention was its selection of ICARDA to

implement the projects. IDRC was instrumental in all cases in assuring that CD played a role in the research project, either by including CD as an explicit project objective (Yemen project); by identifying NARS partners for collaboration and CD as part of project startup (Afghanistan Seeds); or by promoting research methodologies that incorporate CD as part of their approach (PPB). But in these cases, the detailed planning and delivery of CD interventions was left to project leaders. In all three of these cases, the interventions were closely linked to research and project implementation.

This direct linkage between training and research was beneficial to trainees because in most cases they were able to apply lessons from training courses to the research projects in which they were engaged. So, for example, the Yemeni researchers from AREA who were involved in fieldwork at different sites all benefited from initial training in participatory research methods organized by ICARDA. Then they actually had to apply the methods to their own field sites, and interpret the results. The evidence from project reports and Project Completion Report suggests that despite their limited experience, the researchers (and their superiors) were able to gain a positive appreciation for the techniques and the insights they offered to livelihood challenges. Similarly, in the Afghan Seeds project, local NGOs and research organizations contributed educated field staff, who were trained in interview techniques and other data collection methods, and then engaged to undertake surveys and group interviews.

This approach, of training junior or inexperienced NARS researchers in new techniques and then applying them in research, suggests the value of research itself as a CD intervention. Universalia (2007) include "applying new approaches and methodologies to research, building long-term research skills" as one of IDRC's capacity support

activities (p. 38), but the case could be made that supporting capacity development is an important (if implicit) objective of most IDRC research projects and most program officer interactions with partners.

...All projects that IDRC does in terms of receiving concept notes and project proposals, engaging with the scientists, thinking through their research questions, setting out hypothesis, field monitoring, and the writing of technical reports – all this to IDRC is explicit CD.¹⁴

Enhanced capacity to undertake innovative research arises largely from incorporating and applying new knowledge, or training in new methodologies, to real problems and project fieldwork. This “learning by doing” is reported to be a typical approach by IDRC to capacity development (Neilson and Lusthaus 2007). So while the focus of the project is on “research”, the innovative elements of the project methods result in enhanced capacity of the partners for undertaking that kind of research (e.g. participatory plant breeding; integrated natural resource management; social and gender analysis). From IDRC’s perspective, this kind of outcome is labeled as CD, but from ICARDA’s perspective, it is seen as successful research. This difference in perspective is discussed further in section 4.5 below.

Capacity building or capacity development gets in the way of pursuing information.¹⁵

The Afghan Capacity Support project was a bit different because it focused on training for a large cohort involved in the DFID – RALF project. Unlike the integrated training and research of the other projects, in this case the research activities were separately managed under RALF, and largely drawing to a close by the time the IDRC-funded training had been completed. So in this case the local NARS partners had less opportunity to apply new skills to actual research work.

The entry point for CD was in most cases the research organization. For example, the Yemen project clearly targeted AREA, as the Yemeni organization responsible for agricultural research and extension. The PPB project paid little attention to CD at its outset, but engaged a range of local and national organizations in Jordan and Syria in the implementation of novel PPB methods. IDRC promoted the insertion of CD as a minor element of the Afghan Seeds project, with reference to the local NGOs and government agencies who were expected to gain from their involvement in the project. The Afghan Capacity Support project identified 11 research organizations (mostly universities and government agencies) in different parts of the country that were to benefit from capacity development support. In most cases, the project intentions identified only the organizations that were expected to benefit from capacity

¹⁴ IDRC PO, quoted in Mackay (2008), p. 18

¹⁵ ICARDA scientist, quoted in Mackay (2008), p. 47

development, but all the CD interventions (see next section) in the projects were directed to individual researchers (e.g. training in research methods, engagement in supervised data collection or fieldwork, research support, engagement in informal networks).

In summary, the main type of CD intervention in these projects was training, typically conducted through specialized workshops. In most cases, this training was specifically tied to the research activities that were the primary focus of the project. The target groups supported for capacity development were mainly NARS partners, and planning and delivery of the CD was generally left to the research project leaders (ICARDA) to organize. The linkages between the training and research, and the engagement of the less experienced NARS in different aspects of the research activities, from planning through implementation and reporting, constituted an important element of the CD exercise. Engagement in innovative and novel research was also an important way for ICARDA staff to build their own capacities for research in thematic areas that were of strategic value to IDRC. While the main entry point for CD was through research organizations, the main targets were individual researchers who could develop their skills and conceptual understanding through both training and engagement in new kinds of research activities.

3.4. Performance and Continuity of Centre-partner Relationship

Both IDRC and ICARDA staff have characterized the relationship between the organizations as being one of peer-to-peer relations. Both describe these relations as very important to the success of their partnership. Section 3.1 above refers to the history of IDRC founding support and consistent research engagement with ICARDA. Among ICARDA's many donors, IDRC is relatively insignificant from a financial standpoint, ranking 34th among all donors in quantity of funds contributed in 2006.¹⁶ IDRC also primarily interacts with only a small group within ICARDA whose research responsibilities coincide with Centre programming priorities. However, especially among senior ICARDA staff in this group, IDRC is recognized and respected both as a donor of strategic importance and as a like-minded international organization with knowledgeable and capable staff. For its part, IDRC sees ICARDA as a leading regional research organization and preferred partner in the region for tackling challenging projects, both in terms of introducing innovative new research methods and undertaking capacity development.

IDRC is really piggy-backing on the core funding of the breeding program in ICARDA. IDRC does not fund the core breeding program. But without the breeding program, there would be no foundation to investigate the issues that IDRC is interested in.

¹⁶ <http://www.icarda.cgiar.org/Donors.htm>

We have given experimental support to an idea that IDRC would like to spread. My work gives credibility in the scientific field. I felt a strong support from IDRC – that there is science in PPB. IDRC has used my work to make their own case stronger.¹⁷

The reasons for the high degree of mutual respect have been described above in section 3.1: both IDRC and ICARDA benefit, above and beyond the normal development donor-recipient relationship, from their partnership. Over the years of their engagement, IDRC has consistently encouraged ICARDA to extend or continue its research into topics once perceived as marginal to mainstream agricultural research, and they have supported and promoted ICARDA's own efforts in this regard. For example, ICARDA's support of research and inputs to agriculture in marginal lands was controversial because it countered the favoured-area agricultural policies of most governments in the region. Encouragement from IDRC to follow this line of thinking supported and promoted ICARDA's approach (E. Rached interview). This applies to some of the early work on water management, and especially to multidisciplinary and integrated natural resource management, participatory research methods and social and gender analysis. A frequent element of IDRC support has been its orientation to regional and global research networking, to provide a broader platform for exchange and support from which ICARDA can build its own capacity development efforts to reach NARS. While the amounts of IDRC support have been limited, the Centre's expertise and influence in these thematic areas is acknowledged by ICARDA. IDRC support has been intentional, consistent and strategic for at least the past 20 years.¹⁸

The relationship is of course coloured by the different orientations of the organizations.

"IDRC is a development organization that uses research as a tool. ICARDA is a research organization that applies results for development. Some differences in orientation will be inevitable."¹⁹

In the world of research for development, there are competing intellectual approaches. In order for a proposed project to receive support within the framework of the IDRC – ICARDA relationship, it must meet both the prevailing program priorities of IDRC and those of ICARDA's MTP. As discussed above, these areas of overlap tend to be on the margins of ICARDA's program, and of mainstream agricultural research. With the different orientations of the two organizations, a good portion of the peer-to-peer relationship plays out in the communications between the two organizations around project proposals, expectations and planning. These communications tend to reflect that

¹⁷ ICARDA scientists, quoted in Mackay (2008), p. 39 and 47

¹⁸ Mackay (2008) pp. 28 – 35, 60

¹⁹ IDRC program manager

IDRC is more concerned with the development impacts and reach of the work, while ICARDA is more concerned with the science of the research.

This relationship plays out in practice through the project cycle. IDRC's role as a donor affects the peer-to-peer relationship, but it is evident that the Centre has intellectual as well as financial leverage in its dealings with ICARDA. The relationship between IDRC and ICARDA is advanced by the communications between professional staff in both agencies. These peer-to-peer communications are most intensive at the proposal development stage, but can also be substantive at key monitoring periods in the life of the project, such as the planning of workshops, the review of progress reports, or decisions on project extensions, changes or subsequent phases.

For example, in the PPB project, the IDRC program officers reviewing the proposal provided feedback that suggested re-orientation towards comparative assessment of costs and benefits, and connection to national seed programs, instead of merely continuing the previous work. These suggestions speak to the application of the scientific conclusions from previous phases in the context of development decision making. ICARDA's researchers, based on their own extensive scientific and practical experience, recognized the merit of these suggestions and modified their proposal. They subsequently acknowledged the value of these suggestions in extending their own knowledge and professional careers, exposing them to new international networks, providing new opportunities for publication and conference invitations.

IDRC informs me of any changes in potential funding arrangements. And so most recently has told me that access and benefit sharing is a way to continue supporting this research. This is the first time we have written a project proposal where we are working in a territory unfamiliar to us. And this was IDRC's idea.²⁰

Similarly, in the Afghan Seeds project, even though funding had already been assured by executive decisions, the program officers worked over the course of several months with ICARDA colleagues and international advisors to ensure that final project documents and workplans reflected stronger connections to development decision making. In this case, the research issues (post conflict seed distribution) were of practical import to international humanitarian and crisis response organizations active in Afghanistan and elsewhere, as well as to national agriculture and seed management agencies in many countries facing the aftermath of conflict. IDRC's programming interventions re-directed the project emphasis to focus more on the practical implications of the research, including particularly the stronger engagement of local partners in planning, implementing and following up on the research.²¹ ICARDA staff, while perhaps initially reluctant and frustrated, ultimately recognized the value of the

²⁰ ICARDA scientist, quoted in Mackay (2008) p. 49

²¹ email message from Liz Fajber to W Leppan, L El-Fattal, R Vernooy (22/05/02); Project Approval Document # 101344 (21/03/02); Project completion report #101344 (06/02/07)

issues IDRC was promoting and agreed that these factors improved the quality and relevance of the research.

The relationship between IDRC and ICARDA was also crucial to enabling IDRC to engage in Afghanistan at a time when that was a political priority. In the case of the Afghan Seeds project, IDRC was able to respond quickly to ICARDA's concept note. In the case of the Afghan Capacity Support project, ICARDA responded quickly to IDRC's request for potential collaboration. Both cases demonstrated the high level of mutual respect and appreciation for the partner's strengths that underlie this relationship, as well as the willingness of each to be flexible in response to mutual opportunity.

Over the course of their engagement with ICARDA, IDRC program officers also demonstrate significant learning. They report appreciation for the efforts, and results, of ICARDA's capacity building with NARS (e.g. in the case of the Yemen Mountain Terraces project).²² They recognize the challenges of working in difficult contexts, and those of implementing research results through networks of policymakers and users. ICARDA's regional linkages are seen in this regard by IDRC program officers as important assets in their relationship.

One of the challenges of a relationship between research peers is that partners may choose to consider, but then reject, the advice they receive. There are examples of this in the IDRC – ICARDA relationship as well. In the Afghan Seeds project, despite heavy investments of program officer time and repeated communications on the topic, one element of the project failed to meet IDRC expectations because the researchers could not get beyond the narrow scientific research to address its broader practical implications.²³ In the case of the Afghan Capacity Support project, extensive involvement of IDRC program staff and consultants with ICARDA in planning the CD workshops was frustrated by project leadership ultimately implementing a workshop structure that diverged substantially from mutually agreed expectations.²⁴ IDRC program officers attempted through their interactions with ICARDA research staff to promote particular approaches and attitudes towards the research projects, but sometimes failed to communicate, or convince, their ICARDA colleagues.

IDRC program officers demonstrate *persistence* over a series of linked projects, and across different projects with ICARDA. They use interactions with project researchers both to nudge ICARDA's work towards a focused agenda of challenging research areas, and to create opportunities for capacity development for NARS and other local organizations. Across all the projects studied here, and those examined in related

²² Project Completion Report #100366 (11/07/04)

²³ Project completion report #101344 (06/02/07). There was also a discontinuity in leadership of this project due to staff turnover at ICARDA which may have contributed to this gap.

²⁴ Moussa 2007

studies, IDRC program staff have been consistent in strategy and orientation of their actions.²⁵ In some cases, they have been able to maintain a strategic focus over several different phases of project support, building on conceptual foundations to extend into integrated and participatory research methods and to capacity development (e.g. PPB and Yemen projects). In the case of the Afghan Seeds project, plans for continuing implementation of Village-Based Seed Enterprises in a subsequent phase were disrupted by the loss of IDRC's biodiversity program.²⁶

In summary, we can identify how relationships between IDRC and ICARDA have built on peer-to-peer communications to achieve strategic objectives relevant to both organizations. IDRC support has led to greater ICARDA expertise, regional exposure, NARS capacity development and influence for its development-oriented research priorities; while ICARDA has been able to broaden its multidisciplinary research programs and regional networks, and strengthen analysis or implementation of the development linkages related to its work. These outcomes have been achieved largely as the result of persistence and continuity in IDRC program officers' feedback and suggestions to ICARDA over the course of the project cycle; and as the result of ICARDA's professional delivery of the resulting research, networking and NARS capacity development.

²⁵ Mackay (2008) p. 49

²⁶ Amegbeto interview

4. Main findings: IDRC Capacity Development practices with ICARDA

The relationship between IDRC and ICARDA is a long and mutually supportive one. ICARDA is a global centre of scientific expertise in specific agricultural and agronomic domains. IDRC is very familiar with ICARDA and recognizes its strengths. By IDRC's own appraisal, ICARDA has strong capacities to conceive, design, and implement research projects; as well as strong organizational capacities for project administration and support. It has an effective regional operational network, with good national level connections to NARS and to policy makers. It has high quality research infrastructure and is well connected to international networks of research and communication of research results. ICARDA can justifiably point to its accomplishments and regional leadership in all five of Bernard's (2005) categories of capacity (section 2.2): conducting research; managing research activities and organizations; conceiving, generating and sustaining research in a particular theme or region; using / applying research outcomes in policy and/or practice; and mobilizing research-related policy and programs "systems" thinking. Not only does ICARDA demonstrate high levels of these "hard" research capacities or capabilities, but it also demonstrates "soft" capacities such as credibility, regional recognition and leadership. Indeed, *IDRC sees ICARDA as an important strategic partner in the Middle East and North Africa region precisely because of ICARDA's relatively high organizational capacity to manage and deliver complex and rigorous research.*

Because of this, many of IDRC's broader organizational strategies for capacity development with partners have limited relevance to the Centre's direct relationship with ICARDA. There is no evident need for organizational development, administrative support, infrastructure support, or for basic scientific research capacity development at ICARDA. Nor does IDRC devote effort to this with ICARDA. This is in contrast to other national level institutions where the Centre has invested directly in support of this kind to individuals and organizations.

The focus of most IDRC projects with ICARDA is on high quality research and regional networking. This is the strength of ICARDA and the orientation of its scientific staff. Capacity development does play a role in some IDRC projects with ICARDA in two related ways:

1. IDRC takes advantage of ICARDA's strengths to help deliver research projects that involve weak partners in the region. Part of IDRC's intention in structuring projects this way is to reduce risk and improve the quality of research outcomes, but part of the intent is also to build the capacity of the weaker NARS partners through their engagement with ICARDA in the research work.²⁷

²⁷ The fact that IDRC capacity development efforts are targeted not at their grant recipients, but at the recipients' partners, is apparently common (Universalia 2007).

2. IDRC supports research and networking projects with ICARDA to help strengthen ICARDA's regional role in areas that are of mutual interest to the two organizations, but where ICARDA experience may be limited (e.g. interdisciplinary research, social and gender analysis, participatory research). This is not merely a question of supporting "good research", but of deliberate strategic intervention by IDRC to extend the experience of ICARDA scientists so that they are better able to lead research projects in IDRC priority thematic areas. In some cases, IDRC was instrumental in introducing these research approaches to ICARDA programming. In others, IDRC has supported approaches that did not attract much internal interest at ICARDA. Part of the intent in supporting these challenging research themes is often to connect ICARDA expertise to other regional partners. This approach therefore links to, and reinforces, the one identified above. In some cases, both approaches were used in the same project.

These two approaches are described in more detail in the next section.

One of the premises of the case study approach, as set out in the Evaluation Unit background documents and in the methodology section above, was that it would reveal a "rich institutional relationship" around the question of capacity development between IDRC and an important regional research partner with whom it has done a lot of work. In fact, while there is a long and accomplished history of interaction between IDRC and ICARDA, this interaction has not been structured in a formal or programmatic way, but has tended to be more opportunistic. Neither has it focused on capacity development, in the sense described above. The relationship is built almost entirely on discrete projects and on the interaction between IDRC program officers and senior ICARDA staff around project development and delivery. In other words, contrary to expectations perhaps, these projects do not reveal an extensive interaction around issues of capacity development. Most of the interaction between IDRC and ICARDA has focused on substantive research questions and methods.

IDRC staff are well acquainted with ICARDA strengths and weaknesses, and are more likely to involve ICARDA when conditions are challenging, such as one or more of the following:

- There is a need for a strong intermediary in undertaking research with weak partners (e.g. Yemen or Afghanistan);
- The project is developing or transferring innovative multidisciplinary or participatory research methods or themes with national partners;
- There is a need for extensive familiarity with regional and local contacts;
- A proposal is needed on short notice.

The next section explores in more detail the practices IDRC employs for capacity development in these kinds of projects with ICARDA.

4.1. Processes by which IDRC supports capacity development

The two ways in which capacity development is supported in IDRC's research projects with ICARDA are 1) structuring the project to focus ICARDA attention on building the capacity of weak national partners; or 2) structuring the project to focus on innovative research methodologies (e.g. integrated NRM, participatory NRM, SAGA). Sometimes, both of these approaches may be used in the same project.

In the first type of situation, IDRC or ICARDA has typically identified an interesting research issue with local partners in a country with weak research capacity. IDRC may be reluctant to fund the project with local partners directly because of the limited capacity of these partners to undertake the research. Direct support would involve high risks due to potential failure of the research itself, or due to lack of financial oversight, or due to political and security issues. IDRC can fund ICARDA to lead the research project in close collaboration with local partners with confidence that ICARDA knows the national and local organizations involved, and can better manage these risks.

At the same time, ICARDA leadership of the project will include training and research oversight while engaging national partners in the research itself. This approach offers capacity development by way of training for individuals involved in the project, in order that they can apply new approaches and methods to the research project tasks, strengthening their personal skills and contributing to the capacity of their organizations.

Examples of this approach include the Yemen Mountain Terraces project, where IDRC identified the opportunity and invited ICARDA to help define and lead the project with the collaboration of the NARS partner; and the Afghan Capacity Support project, where IDRC approached ICARDA for an urgent response and ICARDA suggested the project.

The second type of capacity development approach is best illustrated by the PPB project. In this case, IDRC anticipated primarily the pursuit of cutting-edge research questions dealing with the costs, benefits and practical implementation issues associated with this innovative approach to the testing and release of new seed varieties. The key element of capacity development in this project was that ICARDA researchers themselves extended and deepened their expertise in novel directions. This led to greater exposure for their work, and enabled ICARDA to play a stronger leadership role in the region in this field.

So I feel that I am gaining. My PPB program has a wider scope. So now when I make a presentation, I can talk about a wider range of matters. So it is greater exposure for me. And it probably gets me a greater number of invitations.²⁸

The Afghan Seeds project had limited capacity building elements, and probably fits more closely with the second category. The question of post-conflict seed distribution

²⁸ ICARDA scientist, quoted in Mackay (2008), p. 48

was one on which IDRC had supported research already in Africa, but there had been limited work in Asia on this topic. The issue was strategically important and novel for Afghanistan, and offered an unique opportunity for research that would be of value to international humanitarian agencies.

The projects in our sample demonstrate that these categories are not mutually exclusive. The Yemen Mountain Terraces project was not only targeted at building the capacity of NARS in Yemen, but also of encouraging ICARDA and Yemeni researchers to undertake innovative work in participatory livelihoods assessment and integrated resource management. This work was not new to ICARDA, but the challenge of not only undertaking these methods, but of also training and supervising other researchers in their application, contributed to building ICARDA capabilities in regional research leadership. Similarly, both the PPB and the Afghan Seeds projects also engaged with local organizations of several different types, from government agencies to NGOs and farmer organizations, and trained local collaborators in order that they could contribute to the research and begin to adopt some of the methods themselves.

These are the capacity development *intentions* that IDRC planned in these cases.²⁹ There were four main *processes* through which the Centre influenced the delivery of CD:

- peer-to-peer learning: communications between individual professionals in IDRC and ICARDA through the lens of project development and management;
- funding training sessions and learning workshops mainly oriented to individual researchers in NARS;
- leading-edge research: strategic support for particular kinds of research, in order to extend experience, capability and regional influence of ICARDA in these fields.
- networking with other researchers and practitioners to gain synergies from related research and identify new insights and applications for research work.

Peer-to-peer Learning

Peer-to-peer learning is central to the engagement of IDRC with ICARDA. This is a two-way process that is different from mentoring or guidance as a capacity development approach. It is more like a relationship between research collaborators in different fields. Each brings strong expertise and experience to the table, but they see problems in different ways. Through their engagement with ICARDA researchers in the iterative development of research proposals, and in the monitoring of projects and review of milestones, IDRC program officers can play a strong role in setting the direction of the project. This interaction typically takes the form of “urging” or nudging researchers in a

²⁹ Note that capacity development was only identified as a specific project objective in the Yemen and Afghan Capacity Support projects, and even in the Yemen case it was the last of six project objectives. The main objectives of all these projects were tied to research.

methodological direction that IDRC has identified as a strategic and intellectual priority given the region's development context. ICARDA staff report that IDRC program officers provide high quality feedback to project proposals, and because of their research expertise and regional knowledge, this feedback is given special consideration.

IDRC staff are seen as colleagues. Their views are taken seriously...ICARDA staff are always open to suggestions from IDRC.³⁰

IDRC PO's provide strong and extensive feedback on research proposals, as peers, to help improve their quality, ensure that multidisciplinary gaps that may affect the value and relevance of the research are addressed, and to push researchers towards broadening their agendas or strengthening their development impacts. ICARDA researchers may find this feedback exasperating in the short term because of the extra work required, but acknowledge its value in the long term, both in terms of its contribution to the quality of the research and to their own professional careers.

IDRC shows strength in having (POs) in the donor office who share(s) the interest of the scientist.... The Cairo Office gives input, asks questions, and adds value. This is more than just getting editorial comments on a paper, from POs. The POs we deal with are very hard and inquisitive about the reports. If there is anything fishy, they will catch it. So the final product is greatly improved. Indeed, in some cases, the IDRC PO has the status of a co-author.³¹

The peer-to-peer interactions of IDRC program officers with ICARDA are iterative (Table 3). One of the issues in encouraging innovation through collaboration is that partners don't understand one another. Particularly at the outset of a project, this can take considerable interaction to sort out. All ICARDA staff interviewed verified that IDRC program officers played an active role in shaping these projects at their outset. The role of IDRC program officers can vary, but tends to be less one of providing instruction or guidance, than of sharing critical insights on the work and directing researcher attention to potentially fruitful areas of work that they may not have considered. This in itself offers little by way of capacity development directly, but in iterative interactions throughout the project, and indeed often over the course of several phases of related projects, the IDRC program officer builds up professional relationships with ICARDA scientists and contributes substantially to their selection of research topics, choice of methodologies, selection of partners, interpretation of results and transfer of lessons to other users through networks or workshops (see Table 3).

³⁰ S. Christiansen interview.

³¹ ICARDA scientists, quoted by Mackay (2008) p. 39

Point of Opportunity	Peer-to-peer communications reported or observed
Preliminary concept discussion	Face-to-face discussion; correspondence
Concept Note	Written feedback; face-to-face discussion
Draft Project Proposal	Written feedback; face-to-face discussion
Project Proposal	Written feedback; face-to-face discussion
Progress report	Written feedback
Monitoring / trip report	Face-to-face discussion, written comments
Draft Project Technical Report	Written feedback
Draft Project Narrative Report	Written feedback
Next steps / related research	Written suggestions; Face-to-face discussion; correspondence,
Dissemination / Workshop(s)	Face-to-face / Peer-to-peer discussion

Note that IDRC program officers take these feedback opportunities as a crucial element of their project management responsibilities. In the case of the projects in Afghanistan and in Yemen, monitoring was either difficult or impossible for security reasons. Both program officers involved in these projects reported frustration that they had been unable to verify project field details firsthand and engage directly with multiple project partners.³³

There is more to IDRC's influence than just donor coercion. ICARDA scientists recognize the prerogative of donors to influence the course of proposal development, especially as the organization's core funding has declined, but IDRC probably has less coercive power than most ICARDA donors because it is a relatively small funder, whose projects are only loosely related to the core themes of ICARDA's program. Even when funding has already been approved (as in the case of the Afghan Seeds project), program officers were able to have a substantive influence on re-orienting the project proposal to include elements of high priority to IDRC, including stronger engagement and capacity development for local partners.³⁴

³² adapted from Mackay (2008) p. 18

³³ Fajber and el-Fattal interviews

³⁴ Project completion report #101344 (06/02/07)

Support for Training Workshops

As a tool for capacity development for individual researchers, various kinds of focused trainings and workshops were features of every one of the ICARDA projects studied. In the PPB project, the researchers used different kinds of training workshops to support the fieldwork of the project, interacting with farmer organizations and government agencies. In the Yemen Mountain Terraces project, ICARDA organized training workshops for the AREA researchers, to introduce them to integrated livelihoods research and participatory methods. The Afghan Seeds project made limited use of training to engage local NGOs in support of socio-economic surveys and social and gender analysis in fieldwork and data collection. All of these projects linked the training very closely to implementing research.

Note that in all of these cases, ICARDA itself organized and led the training. IDRC has plenty of experience organizing and leading workshops itself, but also recognizes the capacity advantages and regional networks of ICARDA in undertaking these tasks in the region. ICARDA scientists note that they seldom have opportunity to participate in workshops organized and led by IDRC, but that they have appreciated and learned from the few events in which they have participated.³⁵

The Afghan Capacity Support project was exceptional to this general experience in several regards. Firstly, the principal focus of the project was on delivery of training and research skills development in subject areas in which participants had very limited prior experience. Indeed, even the ICARDA project leader admitted to being unfamiliar with the livelihood, social and gender approaches raised by DFID as ones in which the RALF program was deficient.³⁶ Secondly, because the IDRC project came towards the end of the RALF program life, the trainees had very limited opportunity to apply their skills on research projects. Thirdly, because it focused primarily on training, and because it built on organizations and research teams that had already been constituted for RALF, the project could reach a larger audience than the other examples. The original intent had been to build a modest cohort of leading Afghan researchers who had broad background in SAGA, participatory research and sustainable livelihoods, but the interest in the training expanded considerably from original expectations. Instead of having a cohort of 20 trained researchers, the project led to over 70 researchers with exposure to at least one of the methods introduced.

This project was also exceptional in terms of the role of IDRC in planning and delivering the CD intervention. In this case, the project was developed and approved in a very short period (about 3 weeks) to meet IDRC deadlines. This meant that while there was broad consensus on the scope and intent of the project, IDRC staff had not had the

³⁵ Mackay (2008) p. 61

³⁶ Malik interview

opportunity to collaboratively work out the details of implementation with partners, as was customary. As a result, both the Regional Director and the Senior Program Officer responsible for the project traveled to ICARDA HQ to meet with senior staff and personally engage in project planning and training workshop design. In this case, IDRC also selected the trainers, based on their performance in other IDRC capacity development projects in the region.

Doing Research

IDRC support to the process of doing research also contributed to capacity development. This support led to new research of strategic interest both in the countries where it was conducted as well as elsewhere in the region, but it also built the skills, capabilities and experience of the researchers. The research supported by IDRC crossed several different thematic areas, including integrated livelihoods assessment and resource management, crop breeding and introducing new plant varieties, and farmer seed distribution and access. The common dimensions were that the research was multidisciplinary, participatory and explicitly assessed social and gender dimensions of the agricultural development problems. These research approaches connect scientists more directly with development decision-makers who have to address many more factors than just technical questions.

While these methods have become better anchored in agricultural and natural resource management research over the past two decades, research resources in the region are limited and training conservative, so there are still many institutions whose staff have little experience in these areas. IDRC support to research in these projects chiefly led to the engagement of ICARDA, both on its own and in collaboration with local partners, in the elaboration of new research approaches, or of new applications for them.

IDRC contributed funding as well as other research related resources to these projects. The processes of peer-to-peer communication and of training both fed into the definition and implementation of the research, while links to international networks provided avenues for sharing insights on methods, as well as results.

IDRC in some cases funded ICARDA to undertake the research largely on its own (e.g. Afghan Seeds project; PPB) and sometimes used ICARDA explicitly to manage and supervise research activities undertaken by local NARS (e.g. Yemen). Both strategies had elements of capacity development. In the case of collaboration with NARS, it is more obvious from project design and planning documents that part of the rationale for the collaboration is to foster capacity development on the part of NARS members of the research team. The differences between the projects are differences of degree, as even in the PPB and Afghan Seeds projects, local organizations are involved in aspects of the research, have opportunities for research training and gain knowledge and experience through that involvement. But for these projects, ICARDA staff also have the

opportunity to extend their personal experience and skills in the implementation of challenging and innovative research.

In three of the projects considered in this study, it was this research engagement that provided the best demonstration of the effectiveness of CD. While it was difficult to disentangle the roles of various players in contributing to final products, the project reports and publications demonstrated not only capacity gains by NARS partners but also by ICARDA staff through the research experience.

For example, in the case of the PPB project Dr. S Ceccarelli, the project leader, was an experienced plant breeder with an established scientific reputation in breeding barley. However, he reported the experience of his series of related IDRC projects introduced him to a broader range of issues and techniques, giving him new and powerful research tools and expanding his career interests and reputation (see quote on p. 35).

Networking and Shared Learning

Another process used by IDRC in these projects to support capacity building was national and international networking. Networks of shared interest and experience permit researchers to learn from peers, as well as to connect to different actors around shared problems or interests, with whom they would otherwise seldom interact. ICARDA itself has strong networks for regional collaboration in Central and West Asia and North Africa (CWANA). This is one of the reasons why IDRC sees ICARDA as a high capacity and preferred partner (see section 3). However, in some cases the networking opportunities were encouraged more by IDRC in project planning; and in some cases the networking opportunities emerged only after the project was underway.

For example, in the Afghan Seeds project, ICARDA had presented a concept note that focused primarily on the technical and scientific aspects of the research. In addition to broadening the research agenda to emphasize social and gender issues in seed distribution, IDRC also stressed in the planning phase the value of connecting to international expertise in post-conflict seed systems, based on work it had funded in Africa. IDRC familiarity with experts and research experience elsewhere enabled it to readily bring in such expertise to support the Afghan project and offer learning opportunities to orient the project research more effectively. At the same time, IDRC insistence on early and substantive engagement with national partner organizations (chiefly NGOs with extension programs in the field) helped to link them in learning networks with each other, with ICARDA, and with government agencies.³⁷

³⁷ Project Approval Document #101344 (21/03/02); Project completion report #101344 (06/02/07)

The Afghan Capacity Support project provides an example of network capacity development emerging unexpectedly. While the project was designed around three separate training workshops (and related learning opportunities at ICARDA's Tel Hadya research facilities), the participants also took advantage of these workshops to build new networks of interaction and mutual exchange with both domestic and international colleagues. These networks of interest coalesced into several small, unanticipated initiatives for ongoing CD, including support for publications at several Afghan universities, and the promotion of the idea of an Afghan internet-based directory and networking website.³⁸

Just bringing partners together may or may not lead to CD. There is a certain sense in project planning documents that inexperienced partners will benefit just from being involved. They will gain practical research skills through training, and then apply those skills in research. They will gain a sense of how projects move through the project cycle from proposal development to funding to organization and management, through implementation and reporting to wrap-up. A certain amount of awareness may be transferred simply through participation in the project, but actual learning here probably needs to be structured with some care. If weak NARS partners are not involved meaningfully in proposal development, project management, report preparation and transfer of results, their appreciation for the research project cycle may be fragmentary at best. While projects are structured to engage local organizations and NARS partners, the specific capacity development goals that are implied by such engagement are seldom made explicit.

In addition to the research training workshops that all of these projects featured, some of them also included dissemination workshops that engaged other government agencies and international research organizations to communicate and disseminate project results (the PPB project in particular linked to international research networks in this area and was engaged in international workshops). These kinds of events were important to facilitate learning by other individuals and organizations that had no connection to the research projects themselves.

4.2. Capacities developed

Capacities developed through these processes focused mainly on individual research skills and knowledge. Because of the nature of ICARDA as an international scientific centre with strong organizational capacities, capacity building at the organizational level has not been a focus of IDRC work. The research capacities of some individual scientists at ICARDA have been strengthened through engagement with IDRC projects, but mostly in terms strictly of extending their skills in challenging participatory and multidisciplinary research methodologies.

³⁸ Malik interview and Technical Progress Report, project #104258-01, 28/08/07

In relation to these innovative natural resource management fields, there is evidence that engagement in different IDRC projects contributed to individual capacity in all five of the Research-into-Use dimensions of research capacity (see section 2.2 and Bernard, 2005), in spite of ICARDA's organizational strengths already in these areas. In addition, and often more directly linked to the intent of the projects, there is evidence of capacity development on the part of NARS in many of these dimensions of research capacity.

- Conducting research: the evidence of improved ICARDA capacity to conduct research in a novel research area is strongest in the case of the PPB project, where ICARDA scientists extended their plant breeding experience to include new participatory approaches and integrated multidisciplinary elements such as assessment of costs and benefits. NARS capacity to conduct research was demonstrably strengthened in the case of the Yemen Mountain Terraces project, where the national partner (AREA) subsequently undertook additional participatory and integrated livelihoods research for other donors.³⁹
- Managing research activities and organizations: ICARDA has extensive experience already in managing many different kinds of research, and while several of these IDRC projects were challenging to manage, there is no particular evidence of new or enhanced individual capacities within ICARDA as a result. However, NARS capacities in the management of research were enhanced in the case of the Yemen Mountain Terraces project. The PPB project also increased the capabilities of national agencies and farmer organizations to integrate participatory breeding practices into agricultural research.⁴⁰
- Conceiving, generating and sustaining research: For the leading-edge projects in IDRC's portfolio with ICARDA, the process of iterative peer-to-peer communications for purposes of proposal development sometimes led to a broader appreciation by ICARDA scientists of different conceptual and methodological approaches to the topic (probably most applicable to the PPB project). Outcomes of this research appear to include greater capability on the part of ICARDA scientists to conceive and generate this specific kind of research.⁴¹ One of the unanticipated results of the Afghan Seeds project was that national partners (NGOs and the Ministry of Agriculture) developed a greater appreciation for how to frame research proposals and develop projects in order to gain access to available donor funding in Afghanistan.⁴² In addition,

³⁹ Annual Progress Report Jan-Dec 2001, project #100366. April 2002

⁴⁰ Improving Natural Resources management and Food Security for Rural Households in the Mountains of Yemen, Final Narrative Technical Report, project #100366, August 2003

⁴¹ Mackay (2008) p. 45

⁴² Amegbeto interview

participants in the Afghan Capacity Support project reported that their conception of social and gender issues in research had been considerably expanded as a result of their participation in the training organized by ICARDA and IDRC.⁴³

- Using or applying research outcomes in policy or practice: IDRC support through the PPB project enabled the ICARDA researchers to apply lessons in pilot activities in Jordan and elsewhere. The Yemen Mountain Terraces project generated research results that were relevant for, and targeted at, agricultural policy in that country. In the Yemen case, this was helpful in building the capabilities of the national partners to connect research to policy.
- Mobilizing research-related programmatic / systems thinking: The evidence for capacity development in this dimension is strongest for the case of the Yemen project, where AREA capacities were enhanced not only for conducting multidisciplinary and participatory research, but also for interpreting results and gaining an appreciation of the value of these new techniques in relation to a dynamic production system. However, there is also evidence of how PPB researchers made new linkages to development decision-making as a result of their research engagement (by advising Bedouin people not to release local seed varieties to the government without guarantees of benefit-sharing).⁴⁴

4.3. Whose capacities are enhanced

In the case of the ICARDA projects we have sampled here, capacity development has focused on individual researchers. Both IDRC and ICARDA set out to build research capacity of NARS in the case of the Yemen project and the Afghan Capacity Support project, but the task was framed primarily as building the research skills of individual researchers.

In the case of Yemen, the field research was undertaken largely by a team of Yemeni researchers, with training and oversight from ICARDA. Project documents were produced by ICARDA (including translation of the contributions from Yemeni researchers) so it is challenging to distinguish the different contributions of partners. However, the responsible program officer reported increased capacity on the part of AREA researchers.⁴⁵ In addition to the researchers themselves, regional government

⁴³ Technical Progress Report, project #104258-01, 28/08/07

⁴⁴ Mackay (2007) p. 41

⁴⁵ el-Fattal interview

staff, extensionists and trainers were also trained in relevant PRA and GIS methods, skills which were transferred to other projects in which AREA was engaged.⁴⁶

In the case of the Afghan Capacity Support project, CD support was directed to individual researchers from government agencies, universities and research institutions in different parts of the country.

The two projects that focused particularly on participatory field research methods (Yemen and PPB) had the additional effect of engaging with farmers and farmer organizations. Through this engagement, the projects contributed to the ability of farmers to organize and share lessons for improving agricultural practices. Through networking support the projects also contributed to the knowledge and skills of other actors in the research system (other researchers, government officials, extensionists).

This points to an assumption inherent in both IDRC's and ICARDA's approach to CD. While references to CD (such as they are) in the project documentation usually refer to building capacity of organizations – chiefly research organizations – the mechanisms of CD employed focus only on building individual knowledge, skills and experience. The assessment of individual or organizational capacity deficits, which might guide the design of interventions to respond to these, was not well documented in any of the cases except the Afghan Capacity Support project, where it had been undertaken by a DFID consultant as part of the RALF midterm evaluation. Capacity assessment clearly played an important role in the design of the Yemen Mountain Terraces project (from both interview data and project documents), but it is not clear the extent to which CD interventions in that case were designed to respond to specific weaknesses that may have been identified.

Despite the emphasis on individual capacity development to improve the effectiveness of national research organizations, IDRC appears to have had very limited (if any) influence over the selection of any of the individuals who were ultimately offered CD support.⁴⁷ Nor was there any expectation on the part of either party that IDRC would need to be consulted in such selection. In one sense, this is appropriate for organizational CD, as it encourages the organization itself to reflect on capacity needs and ensure the most appropriate selection and investment of organizational resources. However, this assumes that the national research organization shares IDRC's appreciation of the need for, and objectives of, capacity development, and that other internal considerations do not supercede the objective of developing research capacity. With very limited documentation of this intention, of participant selection, or of the discussion of CD approaches and objectives with NARS partner organizations, these assumptions might reasonably be challenged.

⁴⁶ Annual Progress Report Jan-Dec 2001, project #100366. April 2002.

⁴⁷ Bernard (2005) makes this observation in a general sense for much of IDRC's capacity development interventions.

A demonstration of how IDRC participant selection preferences were acted upon occurs in the case of the Afghan Capacity Support project, where one of IDRC's implicit objectives at the outset of the project had been to engage women researchers in the training. When it proved impossible to organize the training session in Kabul, and the Afghans had to travel to Syria, the national partner organizations were uniformly pessimistic about any women receiving the various cultural and organizational approvals needed to travel independently. With IDRC and ICARDA encouragement however, ultimately over 30% of the Afghani participants were women, even for the workshops in Syria. This was a striking (and unprecedented) accomplishment.

ICARDA project leaders, through their direct engagement on the ground, may have had some influence over the selection of individuals who received training or research mentorship through the projects, but the extent of this influence is not immediately apparent from project documents. The available documentary and interview evidence suggests that the selection of individuals for training and for engagement in research activities was made by local organizations.

4.4. Effectiveness: Adoption of Good Practices

Assessment of the effectiveness of these capacity development interventions is challenging because in most cases, while they were intentional, they were not very explicit in terms of expected outcomes. Documentary evidence of the outcomes of capacity development in these projects is sparse for several reasons:

- The explicit objectives of most projects did not include capacity development, so reports focused primarily on research outcomes.
- The projects with a strong CD component had no clear mechanisms to link the CD activities to outcomes.
- In the case of enhanced research skills and experience, the CD outcomes were assumed as part of the research project, and were implied by the quality of the research products themselves.

Where ICARDA project technical reports refer to CD among NARS partners (and most do), they do not discuss changes in capacity (outcomes), but only activities (training conducted, workshops attended, etc). Therefore, any changes in NARS capacity have to be imputed from other evidence, such as improved research proposals or subsequent research outputs. This evidence is very limited, because in none of these examples has there yet been any followup IDRC supported research. Nor were ICARDA or IDRC staff able to point even to anecdotal evidence of NARS capacity gains in interviews. In the case of the Afghanistan Capacity Support project, where the intent was clearly to introduce new research concepts and networking opportunities to Afghan researchers, they had very limited opportunity to apply these new skills because the training came so close to the end of the RALF program.

Neither has it been possible for IDRC (or the author) to confirm capacity gains in subsequent projects with target NARS partners. In none of the examples studied here has IDRC yet been able to undertake follow-up projects (Yemen and PPB were both the concluding projects in long-running multi-phase research programs; and further work in Afghanistan has been curtailed by IDRC for security reasons).

In order to draw some conclusions about the effectiveness of the CD efforts associated with these IDRC / ICARDA projects, I compare them to a list of “good practices” for capacity development as identified by IDRC staff themselves (see Box 1 on p. 49).⁴⁸

IDRC Characteristics

The relationship between IDRC and ICARDA has already been described in terms of continuity and persistence over several decades. While the opportunity for collaboration and the focus of the shared agendas has evolved, IDRC has approached this relationship consistently and strategically for many years. The Centre has supported ICARDA engagement in novel multidisciplinary and participatory research through iterative support to research projects, involving multiple phases of activity that adjust and build on experience from previous work. The relationship between the agencies reflects mutual appreciation of the credibility and legitimacy of the other, and substantial evidence of trust between them (e.g. willingness to “pre-approve” projects and sort out workplan details later). The flexibility that IDRC demonstrates in its research and capacity support is much appreciated by ICARDA. In the case of ICARDA, both it and IDRC have demonstrated agility in responding to emerging opportunities for innovative research or capacity development projects, as demonstrated by the two projects in Afghanistan. There is thus consistent evidence that IDRC practices identified as contributing to capacity building have been applied in this case.

Building partnerships

Capacity development in the IDRC – ICARDA relationship is fostered mostly through the interactions of partners. At one level are the interactions between IDRC staff and ICARDA researchers, which have been characterized here as peer-to-peer communications of mutual respect and recognition. But IDRC strategies for capacity development also rely on ICARDA linkages with NARS, and on the interactions between ICARDA and NARS researchers. These interactions were related to training, applied research, and to dissemination of research results. It is through this network of collaborative interactions that much of the learning and capacity development in these projects takes place.

IDRC’s direct relationship with ICARDA is ongoing, but draws as much on the range of expertise at ICARDA as it does on the range of expertise at IDRC. Because of

⁴⁸ IDRC (2008)

ICARDA's stature and international reputation, it has no need to derive self-esteem, legitimacy or credibility through its relationship with IDRC, a relatively minor donor. However, ICARDA staff do appreciate the opportunity to work with IDRC, both because they respect the expertise and regional knowledge of IDRC staff, and because the Centre implements its research projects in a flexible and responsive way that ICARDA finds supportive.

IDRC's good practices emphasize the value of face-to-face interaction in support of capacity development. However, ICARDA staff report limited face-to-face contact with IDRC program officers. This may reflect the degree of familiarity between the two organizations, and IDRC's confidence in ICARDA's project management abilities. Some ICARDA interviewees suggested that they would welcome more interaction with IDRC (including specifically for purposes of discussing and sharing new research concepts and methodologies). The value of face-to-face interaction is recognized by IDRC, as demonstrated by the effort put into the planning of the Afghanistan Capacity Support project, when the Regional Director and Senior Program Officer both visited ICARDA HQ in person to plan the project with senior ICARDA staff.

It is in the area of peer-to-peer interaction around research and development learning that IDRC exercises most of its direct support to capacity development with ICARDA. These processes, as described in section 4.1 above, are based on mutual respect and led in these examples to introduction of new research methodologies and tools, as well as to clarification of the need for engagement of local partners in CD during the course of the research projects. The IDRC – ICARDA relationship does seem to demonstrate most of the features of good practice from IDRC's desiderata, although there may be less attention to face-to-face interaction than there might be in the case of weaker or less familiar partners.

BOX 1: IDRC Good Practices in Capacity Development***IDRC Characteristics*****Persistence**

- Sustained mentoring
- Continuity, prolonged engagement
- Iterative learning process
- Aim to build legitimacy, credibility and trust
- Commitment to partners

Flexibility

- Funding arrangements
- Location within Canadian government system
- Agility to respond to developing country needs

Resilience

- Stay engaged under difficult circumstances
- Provide legitimacy, credibility and trust

Sensitivity

- Awareness of operating environment
- Alertness to diversity in people, culture and places
- Ascertain if mutual understanding exists

Building Partnerships**Relationships**

- Networks of individuals and organizations/institutions
- Inter-organizational linkages
- Face-to-face interactions between/among IDRC staff and researchers
- Providing legitimacy and credibility to partners and beneficiaries

Harnessing Existing Capacities**Strategic Intelligence**

- Scan locally and globally, reinvent locally – regional presence to determine existing capacities
- Staff knowledge of regions

Build on existing capacities

- Sustained mentoring – provide long-term support beyond “one-off training” sessions
- Regional presence – to determine existing capacities
- Use local, existing capacities rather than creating parallel systems

Relevance of the Problem**Locally-driven agenda**

- Local ownership
- Local and global participation in determining the agenda
- Programs continually evolving to meet developing country demands
- Bring southern perspectives and voices to the analysis of development challenges
- Support devolvement of major research initiatives when appropriate

Source: IDRC, 2008

Harnessing Existing Capacities

IDRC is aware of ICARDA's capacities in the region. These capacities are one of the main reasons that IDRC's regional office actively seeks ICARDA engagement in challenging projects and in support of capacity development with NARS. This strategic engagement demonstrates the way that the regional office uses intelligence about regional development priorities and partner capacities to help develop research and CD programming. IDRC's regional presence and expertise are both positive factors in building the Centre's credibility with ICARDA, crucial to its ability to influence emerging research concepts or build arguments for novel methodologies.

The Centre's engagement with ICARDA in order to support research and capacity development among NARS also demonstrates its commitment to building on the existing capabilities of different kinds of regional organizations. By taking advantage of ICARDA's research leadership to support capacity development of NARS, the Centre is contributing both to the continuing evolution of ICARDA's research leadership in the region, and to the strengthening of national research capabilities. These programming judgments clearly rely on regional presence and linkages with multiple organizations at the local, national and regional scale – both on the part of IDRC as well as ICARDA. Thus in terms of harnessing existing capacities, the evidence from these examples demonstrates again that the IDRC has performed consistently with its organizational good practices for support to capacity development.

Practices related to problem relevance are also reflected in the projects studied here. However, the performance here is mixed. For example, in the Afghan Seeds project, while IDRC encouraged a stronger degree of local involvement in determining and implementing the research agenda relative to local and national priorities, this effort had only mixed success: some of IDRC's intentions in gaining greater relevance for local decision makers were not fulfilled in the final project.⁴⁹ As a research centre with a global as well as regional mandate, ICARDA is well positioned to put forward the global agendas for natural resource management research. IDRC has promoted local agendas through both its suggestions for thematic focus and structure of the research projects, sometimes meeting resistance from ICARDA. There is also evidence of evolution of IDRC programs, and of its strategic emphasis in research funding to ICARDA, over time. However, this evolution has been rather gradual, with the result that IDRC's perspective and strategic expertise would probably be characterized by ICARDA as consistent and steady, rather than adaptive. Overall, the evidence of IDRC performance in its relations with ICARDA conforms fairly well to these organizational good practices. If the good practices are intended to model effective capacity development support processes, then one could conclude that, by IDRC's own standards, its capacity development support to ICARDA should have been effective.

⁴⁹ Project completion report #101344 (06/02/07)

It is somewhat striking therefore that there is so little evidence of the persistence of the capacities developed through these projects. It would be very difficult on the basis of the available information to demonstrate sustainability or continuity of the skills developed, either at ICARDA or at its NARS partners. This is partly because capacity development focused on individuals, and staff turnover at ICARDA is fairly high (indeed, this was a problem for continuity and caused delays in some of the IDRC projects). So individual research capacities built through peer-to-peer exchange or doing research only adheres in ICARDA to the extent that the individual stays with the organization.

While the focus of IDRC's research-support-as-capacity-development has been strategic and consistent over time, individual project CD efforts may not always go anywhere. For example, in both the Yemen and Afghanistan cases, further IDRC research programming has not been possible due to security and governance issues. This is an unavoidable challenge of working in the less developed countries of this region in particular. In these cases, IDRC strategic interests were diverse and included Canadian policy concerns, but there is every indication from project development documents and interviews that original programming intentions included longer term capacity development and research. The discontinuity in IDRC support meant that initial CD efforts associated with these projects could not be consolidated by IDRC itself. However, in both Yemen and Afghanistan there is some anecdotal evidence that individuals trained were able to apply new skills to other donor supported projects.

4.5. *Differences between IDRC and ICARDA capacity development approaches*

IDRC engages with ICARDA strategically to build capacity of NARS, and ICARDA itself defines capacity building as a crucial part of its role. For these reasons it is interesting to compare their approaches. There would appear to be substantial differences in the assumptions that the two organizations make about what capacity development is, how it happens, how it is best supported and potentially measured.

ICARDA takes for granted that research builds professional capacity, and that engagement with new methodologies and research approaches that support its strategic research priorities are important ways to contribute both to individual professional development and to scientific knowledge as a global public good. It mostly leaves this process of learning and developing new skills to its individual scientists. For their part, scientists derive personal and professional satisfaction from new challenges, but also receive wider recognition and expose themselves to new career opportunities when they extend their expertise beyond a traditional narrow disciplinary base and get involved in new research methods and approaches.

In other words, most researchers would say that both the application of novel methods in a new area of research, and peer review of methods and results, are valuable tools for ongoing learning and research skills development. Both of these are examples of

what IDRC would probably call capacity development (signaling their strategic intent to support specific types of skill sets and methodological innovations), and what ICARDA would see as essential parts of the research enterprise, or “research-as-usual”. There is no disagreement about what is going on between the organizations, but they label it differently.

The support to NARS capacity as part of a broader research project is largely a reflection of what IDRC sees as “good practice”. IDRC would expect capacity development support in such cases to probably include a broad dimension of research system issues, including engagement in problem identification, analysis, communication of results, and networking. On the other hand, ICARDA seems more likely to view capacity support mainly in terms of training, often with the intention of supervised engagement in data collection or analysis to follow.

The differences are evidenced by the effort IDRC program officers went to in several of the projects to increase meaningful involvement of local partners and NARS on their own terms as respected partners in project planning or learning. The differences in approach can also be seen in the organization of training workshops under the Afghanistan Capacity Support project, where IDRC consultants and program officers expressed disappointment with format, content and presentation of some of the ICARDA elements of the first workshop.⁵⁰

Both organizations support capacity development, but they seem to conceive of it differently. This points to the need for care in using the terminology, and for more careful communication between the two organizations if CD is to continue to play a strategic role in their relationship. When ICARDA identifies that it has a capacity development role in its relations with NARS, it may mean something qualitatively different than what IDRC typifies as good CD practice. This is likely to lead to divergent expectations in projects where NARS capacity development is a significant element of the work program and could lead to misunderstandings on both sides.

⁵⁰ Moussa 2007, Project completion report #101344 (06/02/07)

5. Conclusions and Implications for future work

While capacity development has not been a major component of most IDRC projects with ICARDA, both organizations see capacity development as a central part of their respective missions. ICARDA's existing capacities to lead innovative research, administer complex projects, and reach out effectively to national and regional organizations make them an attractive strategic partner for IDRC in developing and promoting novel research approaches in the region.

The main type of CD intervention in the sample projects assessed as part of this study was training, typically conducted through specialized workshops. In most cases, this training was specifically tied to the research activities that were the primary focus of the project. The target groups supported for capacity development were mainly NARS partners, and planning and delivery of the CD was generally left to the research project leaders (ICARDA) to organize. The linkages between the training and research, and the engagement of the less experienced NARS in different aspects of the research activities, from planning through implementation and reporting, constituted an important element of the CD exercise. Engagement in innovative and novel research was also an important way for ICARDA staff to build their own capacities for research in thematic areas that were of strategic value to IDRC. While the main entry point for CD was through research organizations, the main targets were individual researchers who could develop their skills and conceptual understanding through both training and engagement in new kinds of research activities.

IDRC has been quite consistent in promoting a particular suite of research methods and approaches to ICARDA over the past couple of decades and supporting opportunities for ICARDA scientists to develop their capacity and provide regional leadership in research areas that are of mutual interest to the two organizations.

IDRC practices related to capacity development have relied on several support processes: peer-to-peer engagement with ICARDA staff; research training and education linked to engagement in field research projects; and networking. IDRC support has led to greater expertise, regional exposure, NARS capacity development and influence for ICARDA's development-oriented research priorities; while ICARDA has been able to broaden its multidisciplinary research programs and regional networks, and strengthen analysis or implementation of the development linkages related to its work. These achievements have largely resulted from persistence and continuity in IDRC program officers' feedback and suggestions to ICARDA over the course of the project cycle; and as the result of ICARDA's professional delivery of the resulting research, networking and NARS capacity development.

One of the ways that IDRC engagement with ICARDA supports capacity development in the region is through the delivery of research projects that involve NARS. Part of IDRC's intention in structuring projects this way is to reduce risk and improve the quality of NARS research outcomes, but part of the intent is also to build the capacity of the weaker NARS partners through their engagement with ICARDA in the research work.

While IDRC and ICARDA staff, along with program documents, almost always refer to building the capacity of partner organizations (typically NARS), in practice the supportive interventions are mostly directed to individual researchers. It is not immediately obvious that this is sufficient to achieve the desired organizational capacities. Nor is it clear that either IDRC or ICARDA have much control over which specific individuals are selected for training. Given the scope for diverging understandings and criteria for selection, it is hard to determine the effectiveness of these approaches.

IDRC's relationship with ICARDA generally follows relevant good practices to support delivery of capacity development. IDRC uses persistence and continuity to build its partnership with ICARDA, and benefits from flexibility in project administration and long-term engagement. Both organizations use regional networks of organizations and individuals to build linkages and support the evolution of new research concepts and methods. IDRC uses peer-to-peer interactions and learning to enable capacity development and encourage greater local engagement in research projects. Its relationship with ICARDA is based on regional priorities and brokered by regionally experienced staff.

However, despite the long relationship between the two organizations and the importance of capacity development to each of them, they have not really sorted out the differences between their views and assumptions of capacity development. This can lead to misunderstanding and frustration, particularly in projects for which capacity development is a major objective.

Implications for future work – dialogue on CD with ICARDA and NARS

Given the fundamental importance of capacity development both to IDRC's development practices, and to ICARDA's research engagement with NARS, this subject would seem to offer potential for further dialogue between the two organizations. ICARDA may be interested in exploring how to conceptualize, define, measure and evaluate its own approach to CD, for purposes of program planning, accountability and management effectiveness. IDRC's experience with the Strategic Evaluation might be of some interest to them, even given the different focus and priorities of the two organizations.

For researchers, an important way to build capacity is by doing research, particularly using novel, complex or multidisciplinary methodologies. Even highly experienced and skilled researchers recognize the value to their careers and capabilities of engagement in a challenging major research project. For the projects sampled here, engagement with research was an important part of the capacity development agenda for NARS. Much of the planning and organizational responsibility for this task was generally left to ICARDA, as the research project leader and source of regional expertise. But IDRC may need to consider more explicitly what it expects by way of needs assessment and engagement of NARs in research project planning, design and execution in order to

maximize the learning potential of these projects while still ensuring the rigour of the research.

IDRC's programming strategy with ICARDA focuses on research that "pushes the envelope", exploring challenging integrative methods, building bridges from science to participatory development, encouraging multidisciplinary, sharpening social and gender analysis in natural resource management, and particularly building and transferring these novel and challenging approaches in regional networks and supportive interaction with weak NARS. The skills needed for these kinds of projects are not only new research skills, but conceivably also skills in coordination, training, coaching and mentoring, and in cross-cultural communications. It appears from IDRC's choice and design of projects with ICARDA that it is trying to foster such skills through collaborative research and training. However, without identifying explicitly together the skills and tools that are needed to support capacity development of NARS, it may be difficult for IDRC and ICARDA to hold a discussion about how to do this better.

Implications for future work – more explicit CD strategy

Capacity development is an important strategic objective for IDRC programming, but in this case its achievement seems to be mostly recognized through good practices rather than specific outcomes. Whether capacity development is best measured by practices or by some kind of outcomes, it would be valuable for the Centre to make its strategic intentions explicit. A more explicit strategy for capacity development efforts would make them easier to evaluate. One might assume, for example, that the objective of organizational capacity development is to improve the quality of the organization's (future) research, but if IDRC is not involved in that research then the Centre may not have an obvious way to assess such outcomes. This applies more in the case of NARS than of ICARDA itself, where there is a long-term and cumulative relationship. For example, in the sample of projects reviewed here, while it was possible to identify a number of NARS capacity development intentions and activities, none have yet been followed up by further IDRC-supported research that would demonstrate capacity gains.

Implications for future work - Whose capacity is developed?

In most of these cases, organizational capacity was targeted but individuals were trained and engaged. There are many ways in which individual skills and capabilities may fail to contribute to organizational research capacity (e.g. people leave the organization, or are frustrated by inadequate organizational infrastructure, ability to obtain funding, lack of leadership or internal disorganization). Most of these involve risk factors beyond IDRC's control. However, if they were included in risk assessments of capacity development projects it would ensure that the connection between individual capacity development and organizational research capacity is made more explicit, that the inevitable risks are documented and potential mitigating strategies considered. This may also lead to better organizational assessment.

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7. Appendices

7.1. *List of Acronyms*

AREA – Agricultural Research and Extension Authority, Yemen

CD – capacity development

CWANA – Central and West Asia and North Africa

DFID – Department for International Development (UK)

ENRM – Environment and Natural Resource Management program area, IDRC

ICARDA – International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas

IDRC – International Development Research Centre

MERO – Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (IDRC)

MTP – Mid-term Plan

NARS – National Agricultural Research Systems⁵¹ (including one or more research institutes)

PAD – Project Approval Document (IDRC administrative document)

PCR – Project Completion Report (IDRC administrative document)

PPB – Participatory Plant Breeding

RALF – Research

RPE – Rural Poverty and Environment program initiative, IDRC

SAGA – Social and Gender Analysis

USAID – U. S. Agency for International Development

⁵¹ Typically include one or more research institutes, as well as government agencies responsible for agricultural extension.

7.2. Project Documents and Reports Reviewed

100366 Mountain Terraces (Yemen):

- Project Approval Document
- Project Completion Report
- Annual Progress Report 2001
- Final Narrative Technical Report 2003

101344 Strengthening Seed Systems for Food Security in Afghanistan:

- Project Approval Document
- Project Completion Report
- Technical Progress Report 2004-2005
- Technical Report (Extension period) 2006
- Project development correspondence
- Technical report feedback correspondence

102803 Participatory Plant Breeding Umbrella project

- Project Approval Document
- Progress Report 2005
- Progress Report 2006

104258 Supporting Research Capacity in Afghanistan

- Project Approval Document
- Project Completion Report
- ICARDA Workshop Evaluation Report (Moussa, June 2007)
- Technical Progress Report 2007
- Trip Report to ICARDA HQ May 2007 (L el-Fattal)
- Trip Report to ICARDA workshop (Min of Agriculture and Livestock)

7.3. List of Interviews

All interviews conducted by telephone or Skype

Dr Jean Lebel, Program Director, Environment and Natural Resources, IDRC, Ottawa – July 15, 2008

Dr Eglal Rached, Regional Director, Regional Office for Middle East and North Africa, Cairo – Aug. 24, 2008

Dr Lamia El-Fattal, Senior Program Officer, Cairo – July 21, 2008

Ms Liz Fajber, former IDRC program officer, Vancouver – Aug. 12, 2008

Dr Scott Christiansen, Exec Assistant to the Director General, ICARDA, Aleppo – Aug. 18, 2008

Dr Koffi Amegbeto, Agricultural Economist, ICARDA, Aleppo – Aug. 18, 2008

Dr Najibullah Malik, former RALF project leader, Ottawa – Aug. 6, 2008