

## An Enduring Partnership:

Organizational Case Study of Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD)  
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*By building a culture of applied research to tackle development issues, IDRC has provided direct organizational support and has engaged one-to-one with researchers in one of Africa's oldest universities.*

Almost two decades of IDRC support to capacity development at Senegal's Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) have strengthened researchers by increasing knowledge, expertise, visibility, and professional opportunities. Paradoxically though, the greater capacity a researcher acquires, the greater seem to be the chances that he or she may be drawn away from Africa to more attractive research opportunities in Europe or North America.

The case study found that like most of their colleagues elsewhere in Africa, researchers at UCAD – one of the most respected universities in West Africa – face innumerable challenges in pursuing their research interests. For one, UCAD's adherence to a framework established by the African and Malagasy Council of Higher Education (CAMES) means that pure research is prioritized over the type of applied research that addresses development issues. UCAD has no budget for research, which means chronic shortages of resources for research, limited infrastructure, and inadequate or outdated equipment. Teaching loads can be so great as to leave staff little time for research.

Understandably, these problems often lead to “brain drain,” when university staff are lured to overseas institutions by better salaries and more favorable conditions for research. “You have to have very strong beliefs and a deep commitment to our country to stay when everything – the working conditions, a researcher's salary, the lack of recognition for our work – pushes us toward positions elsewhere,” says one UCAD professor interviewed for the study. “I have turned down two offers in France, knowing that if I accepted, the chances were very good that I would never return.”

In this challenging context, over the past decade IDRC has played three roles in terms of capacity support to UCAD – *financial partner, technical advisor, and liaison agent* with external partners. IDRC has become UCAD's most important partner in supporting research, with over \$8 million invested in projects since 1989. Although funding for research is at the core of the Centre's relationship with UCAD, IDRC staff's deep understanding of Senegal and of UCAD researchers has solidified the partnership. It has allowed the Centre to work with UCAD to identify the major development issues facing the country and to find local solutions through research, an approach the evaluation found that is appreciated within both UCAD and government circles. The physical proximity of IDRC's West Africa Regional Office (WARO) in Dakar to the UCAD campus and the fact that a number of WARO staff are former UCAD researchers have helped to deepen and facilitate relations. Key informants from UCAD and the Senegalese government noted that although research funded by IDRC had to be aligned with IDRC programs, this requirement had never constrained local research priorities and needs.

## **An emphasis on individuals**

The major contribution of IDRC projects to capacity development at UCAD has been to the capacities of individual researchers or research teams to do research related activities. The most obvious benefits to researchers at UCAD have been in acquiring knowledge, competencies, or expertise in their field. Other results have included an increase in the quantity of research and publications; higher visibility and renown for UCAD researchers on the international scene; broader professional horizons for researchers through assignments for governments or development agencies; greater opportunities for networking; and, better access to funding.

These positive outcomes were achieved through a variety of methods, depending on the nature of the project. In some cases, thematic experts, researchers, or resource people were made available to the UCAD research team. This was true in the project “Distance learning: information and communication technologies for basic education in Senegal,” which brought in ICT specialists from the University of Ottawa.

In other cases, training sessions were built into projects and secretariats – such as a series of workshops to train researchers in the methodology used in the ecosystem approach to human health. Seminars, conferences and workshops are another method, one that was part of the project “Seminar/workshop on tobacco control policy in Senegal.” Support to networks that allow researchers to exchange knowledge, resources and tools was also found to have contributed to capacity development, notably in the case of the Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa (SISERA).

Researchers at UCAD have also sharpened their skills through grants for study abroad, a mechanism used by five individuals in the project “Institutionalisation of gender, rights and women’s citizenship in higher education at UCAD.” IDRC has also invested in improving equipment and infrastructure, helped with publishing and disseminating research, and in setting up documentation centres.

## **A focus on organization and institution**

Beyond the level of individual capacities, some projects with UCAD had encouraging results in increasing capacity at the organizational level in various aspects of research for development. For instance, IDRC helped create the ICT Resource Centre within UCAD’s Computer and Mathematics Department. This Centre developed capacities for managing research, for communicating research findings, and for making the research relevant to society. Similar capacities were developed by the Applied Economic Research Centre (CREA), which IDRC helped establish through SISERA. However, owing to difficulties within CREA, the research team that had been trained through IDRC support broke away to form the Economic and Social Research Consortium (CRES), still associated with UCAD but on a different operating basis. CRES is now a dynamic research group recognized and consulted by national decision-makers.

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In recent years, some of IDRC's capacity development efforts aimed to create a stronger link between supply and demand in research. The goal has been to stimulate research that is more influential and useful to decision-makers. Some progress has been made in this respect, notably the role assumed by CRES in undertaking economic research commissioned by the State or multilateral agencies. Although the emergence of a national culture receptive to Senegalese research goes well beyond IDRC's mandate and mission, WARO is contributing by acting as an interlocutor between the UCAD research community and various government departments and agencies, organizing seminars and conferences on pertinent policy issues, and supporting publications such as CRES research syntheses that presented research results in capsule format.

The UCAD case study revealed certain shortcomings on the part of IDRC in capacity development. One of these was in the area of uptake and use of project evaluation findings. The case study authors found that these findings have not been systematically shared with UCAD researchers resulting in a lost opportunity to extract lessons that can be applied in future endeavours.

## Looking ahead

The case study also points to other areas of capacity development that UCAD researchers believed could be useful. These include better training for researchers in project management skills, and study grants to Senegalese researchers to master English and thereby overcome a language barrier between themselves and much of the anglophone research world. UCAD researchers also mentioned that a culture of research could be more firmly entrenched at UCAD through support for studying at universities where teaching methods allow for more innovation and experimentation.

**The International Development Research Centre (IDRC)** is a Canadian crown corporation, created to help developing countries find solutions to the social, economic, and natural resource problems they face. Support is directed to building indigenous research capacity. Because strengthening and mobilizing research capacity is a cornerstone of IDRC's work, in 2005 the Evaluation Unit launched a strategic evaluation on capacity development focusing on the processes and results of IDRC support of its Southern partners. The evaluation design and studies can be found at: [www.idrc.ca/en/ev-70623-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-70623-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)