

**IDRC'S STRATEGIC EVALUATION OF  
CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT: A CROSS-CASE  
STUDY ANALYSIS**

**FINAL REPORT**  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IDRC supports capacity development among its Southern partners as part of its mandate “to initiate, encourage, support and conduct research into the problems of developing regions of the world and into the means for applying and adapting scientific, technical and other knowledge to the economic and social advancement of those regions” (IDRC Act 1970, cited in Gillespie 2005, 23). More specifically, as part of this mandate, IDRC seeks “to assist the developing regions to build up the research capabilities, the innovative skills and the institutions required to solve problems” (ibid). Since capacity development constitutes a fundamental aspect of all IDRC work, IDRC’s Evaluation Unit is conducting a strategic evaluation to investigate the Centre’s contributions to the development of capacities of partners with whom the Centre works. The evaluation aims to provide IDRC’s own staff and managers with an intellectual framework and common language to help harness the concept and document the experiences and results that the Centre has accumulated in this domain. Specifically, the strategic evaluation focuses on the intentions, processes and results of IDRC support for the development of capacities of its southern partners – what capacities have been enhanced, whose, how, and how effectively.

This phase of the evaluation consists of six organizational case studies undertaken with partner institutions. The six case studies, selected by IDRC’s Evaluation Unit include:

- 1) The Association for Progressive Communications (global)
- 2) Cheikh Anta Diop University, Senegal
- 3) The Consortium for Economic and Social Research, Peru
- 4) International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas - ICARDA (global)
- 5) Makerere University, Uganda
- 6) Ministry of Environment, Cambodia

Organizational case studies have been chosen in order to capture how, over time, IDRC’s sustained support contributes to capacity development at the individual/group of researchers, organizational and network levels in the field. The case studies examine different types of organizations in different geographic regions and with diverse sectoral concentration, which have received significant IDRC support since 1996.

The purpose of the cross-case analysis is to review the background documents and outputs produced under phases 1-3 of the strategic evaluation and the six case studies, with an eye to identifying patterns or trends between the documents, with a particular emphasis on the six organizational case studies. The starting point for the analysis has been the questions that constituted the core of the Terms of Reference of the organizational case studies (Appendix 1). The findings from the case studies and the cross case content analysis are intended to enable IDRC to look back at its collective work with selected organizations to question and to evaluate, in its own terms, the Centre’s ability to apply what has come to be seen as its own tacit list of “good practices” for capacity development. The organizational learning that is derived from these studies is also intended to support the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of IDRC’s future capacity development projects and activities.

## **IDRC's often-implicit approach to capacity development**

While capacity development is fundamental to all IDRC work, the cases studies suggest that it is often not made explicit. Whereas formal capacity development activities, such as training, awards programs, seminars and conferences constitute the more visible, tangible and explicit side of IDRC's support of capacity development, much of IDRC's capacity development remains largely implicit in the sense that it has not been captured in IDRC documentation. The case studies suggest five possible reasons for this. First, IDRC's institutional structure and program orientation along thematic research lines means that the explicit emphasis of most projects is more on research than on capacity development *per se*. This is not to suggest, however, that capacity development is somehow "secondary" to IDRC's research support – quite the contrary. Rather, the case studies suggest that capacity development is a fundamental, if implicit, aspect of all IDRC support. A second reason for the often-implicit nature of IDRC's approach to capacity development is that IDRC's understanding of what constitutes capacity development and how to operationalize it, particularly at the organizational level, remains limited in some important respects. Currently, IDRC does not have an institution-wide framework, or set of policies, to ensure that IDRC staff understand and are able to apply organizational capacity development concepts and approaches, including, for example, organizational capacity assessment, monitoring and evaluation. The third reason for the often-implicit nature of IDRC's capacity development support is that it is often informal, characterized by on-going peer exchange and mentorship between IDRC POs and researchers, which is not easily documented or otherwise captured in project documentation. Lastly, at least one case study found that IDRC program staff is aware of the sensitive nature of capacity development work and the kind of top-down, hierarchical relationship often implied by the language of "capacity development" and as such often choose to avoid explicit reference to capacity development.

Interestingly, while partners value IDRC's less formal, hands-on approach to capacity development (an approach that is grounded in ideas of partnership and mutual learning) the case studies also illustrate the potential short-comings and/or trade-offs associated with a less than explicit approach. While an implicit approach to capacity development may be well suited to particular partners and the development of particular capacities, the APC study insists that organizational capacity development requires an explicit, clearly-defined capacity development framework or set of policies which has been historically absent in the Centre. If, as the APC study suggests, IDRC's capacity development intentions remain partially implicit and un-captured as a result of often-limited understanding among IDRC staff of what constitutes capacity development, and how to operationalize it – particularly at the organizational level – a useful starting place might be the development and communication of a capacity development framework that might serve as a practical guide for PIs. Such a framework may well serve to strengthen the capacity of Centre staff to understand and apply organizational capacity tools in an appropriate way according to the needs of individual partner organizations. Importantly, this need not function as a straightjacket, but rather as a comprehensive framework building on "IDRC Good Practices for Capacity Development" and on the Research-into framework developed by Anne Bernard, which serves to guide and inspire, rather than dictate. Capacity development at IDRC can continue to a peer-based, organic, evolving process that is appropriate and responsive to local conditions and partners

needs while drawing from a larger IDRC framework. Importantly, a set of institution-wide capacity development resources would not only serve to strengthen the capacity of IDRC programs to conceptualize and implement organizational capacity development, and to monitor and evaluate capacity development progress and outcomes, while also helping to ensure that there is a measure consistency, across programs, in support for capacity development. Moreover, as several studies argue, the Centre ought to be more explicit and in some cases, more transparent about its capacity development intentions and expectations to ensure that IDRC and its partners have a shared vision when it comes to capacity development and that all capacity development retains a measure of local ownership.

### **The “who” of capacity development**

Although differing in some important respects, the six case studies share an understanding that, at its core, IDRC’s collaboration with partner institutions is intended to contribute to the development of research capacities – whether the capacities of individual researchers and/or research teams, the capacities of community members and/or groups involved in IDRC-supported research, the capacities of departments and/or institutions in which research teams are situated, the capacities of national or regional networks working on issues related to IDRC-supported research, or capacities of policy makers and other “users” of IDRC supported research.

Support for research and capacity development at different scales reflects an understanding within the Centre that, to be effective, support for innovative and policy relevant development research cannot occur at only one level in isolation from the others. This is not to suggest, however, that IDRC invests its time, energy and resources equally at all levels. The case studies reveal that while IDRC makes selective, strategic investments in capacity development at institutional and network levels, it appears that the Centre concentrates its capacity development interventions, first and foremost, at the level of the individual or groups of individuals. Interestingly, with the notable exception of IDRC’s support for capacity development in community-based and/or participatory research fields, wherein IDRC targets the capacities of both researchers and local community members to undertake and participate in research, IDRC’s capacity development efforts at the individual level focus predominantly on researchers, with comparatively less attention given to strengthening the capacities of research users such as individuals from government, the private sector, and civil society.

The case studies suggest several reasons for IDRC’s focus on individuals, rather than institutions, in its support of research and capacity development. The first, and most pragmatic, explanation relates to IDRC’s relatively modest budget compared to that of other development donors (and to the needs and wants of IDRC’s partners). Given IDRC’s limited funds, one study argues that that IDRC’s focus on individuals – the “people side” of research capacity – achieves “good value for money” and questions whether IDRC could be similarly effective when using its existing financial resources for the purposes of broader organizational development (Makerere Study 2008). Another common explanation for IDRC’s focus on individual capacity strengthening is found in IDRC’s organizational structure\_and programming which is problem or theme centered, differing sharply from many other donors. Given IDRC’s structure and thematic orientation, Lusthaus and Nielson (2005, 39) argue that the Centre understands change occurring from capacity building in

relation to the development problematic and/or the research area, rather than in relation to change at the institutional level. In IDRC's view, change occurs first and foremost at the individual, not the institutional, level. Several case studies remark that working along problem or thematic lines, at the level of individual research projects, with individual researchers and their research teams, has become IDRC's niche. This reveals an interesting dissonance between what IDRC does and what it says it does. As Lusthaus and Nielson explain, according to IDRC corporate documents, the Centre identifies organizations as one of the principle targets for capacity development support. Yet, both the case studies and Lusthaus and Nielson's review of IDRC projects approved between the year 2000 and 2004, demonstrate that IDRC research projects target funding more at the individual level than at the institutional level (ibid).

While IDRC does support organizational capacity development of partners, it does so on a strategic and selective basis. Since organizational capacity development involves the development and implementation of new systems and procedures, and usually requires the dedication of considerable human and financial resources to be successful, it is understandable that the Centre cannot support organizational capacity development with all partners. From the case studies, it appears that whether, and the extent to which, IDRC supports organizational development depends considerably on the institutional structure of partner organizations and partners' organizational capacities needs. Where institutions are "loosely coupled", as with universities (with different departments working in very different research areas), IDRC targets its support at the level of individual research teams (and their departments) since support for capacity development at the institutional level would not likely produce outcomes that would "trickle-down" to individual departments and/or research teams. However, IDRC does support organizational capacity development in networks that, while "loosely coupled" in some respects, share a thematic research focus and are often characterized by joint, coordinated projects. For research networks to flourish, they require often significant investments (of time, energy and financial resources) in capacity strengthening at all scales – individual, institutional and network. In the case of both CIES and APC, IDRC has targeted its OCD support to strengthening the administration, coordination and governance of networks while also supporting individual research projects undertaken by network members.

Interestingly, the Cambodia case study suggests that IDRC also strategically invests in OCD with newly emerging institutions (where IDRC is in a position to influence the direction and mandate of the institution), or (by inference) with organizations whose capacities are sufficiently limited to undermine its capacity to conduct research.

It is important to note, however, that these insights have only been inferred from the case studies as IDRC is less than explicit about how it makes these strategic decisions concerning when, and to whom, it gives OCD support. To ensure that IDRC's limited resources are optimized, as well as to ensure transparency and fairness, it is important that IDRC make explicit (and perhaps formalize) the criteria, factors and considerations that drive its decision-making to support organizational capacity development with particular partner organizations (and not others). Ideally, again, this would be addressed through the development and communication of clearly-defined institution-wide capacity development framework or set of frameworks to guide the capacity development efforts of the Centre,

and individual PIs, in designing and implementing capacity development interventions and in monitoring and evaluating their progress and outcomes.

### **The “how” of IDRC’s capacity development work: The Centre’s niche**

The case studies reveal a spectrum of activities and strategies that IDRC employs in its efforts to build the research capacities of its partners. At the individual level, these include, for example, awards programs, small grants programs, training courses, seminars/workshops/conferences, study exchanges, networking, as well as technical assistance of various kinds. Perhaps with the exception of networking and study exchanges, which are often encouraged and supported over extended periods, many of these activities constitute “one-off” or “stand-alone” interventions that are intended to address specific “hard” technical and/or functional capacities – these might include, for example, introducing or expanding researchers capacities related to new research methods and approaches or to new information systems or other technology. These activities are tangible and concrete, they have timelines and require a specific investment of PI resources and, as such, they constitute the more visible side of IDRC’s capacity development work.

While “hard” capacities are perhaps more commonly addressed through concrete investments in specific capacity development interventions, IDRC’s support for capacity development also includes, and is perhaps defined by, developing and nurturing professional peer relationships between IDRC and its partners that are of a more informal, implicit nature. Both IDRC staff and its partners share the perspective that IDRC’s greatest strength, and what sets it apart from other international development donors, is its commitment to establishing and maintaining professional peer relationships with their partners. Through peer-to-peer exchange and mentoring, Centre staff and managers are able to share a program initiative’s range of experience and expertise with individual researchers and research teams through communication and partnership in a context of “mutual learning” that compliments, but also far exceeds, the benefits of isolated, “one-off” training opportunities. Throughout the project cycle, IDRC program officers function as “advisors” or “mentors” during the conceptual and methodological development of project concept papers and proposals, during project implementation (including data analysis and interpretation), and/or in the writing and dissemination of research results. Interestingly, the case studies demonstrate that peer exchange between IDRC program staff and partners is not only “one way” but, rather, is characterized by mutual learning in the sense that the capacities of IDRC program officers are also strengthened through their work with partners.

Given IDRC’s approach to capacity development, characterized not only by formal training but also peer-to-peer exchange and mentorship between IDRC program staff and researchers, and given the regional specificity of development problems and the external environment in which partner organizations must operate and conduct research, the case studies highlight the critical importance and value of IDRC regional offices and staff for capacity development. IDRC’s regional approach enables POs to develop a more extensive and immediate working knowledge of both the regionality of development challenges and the environment (political, cultural etc.) in which partner organizations are situated. In doing so, it often facilitates stronger and more productive peer relationships between POs and researchers than is possible through electronic communication and field visits from POs

based in Ottawa. Further, the findings suggest that there may be aspects of capacity development for which regional offices and program staff seem particularly well suited, and ideally placed, to facilitate and enable. Given the “local knowledge” of regional POs, they may be ideally placed (and have the necessary local and regional contacts) to support capacity development aimed at encouraging dialogue between researchers and stakeholders in government, the private sector, and civil society as a means to ensure that IDRC-supported research addresses the needs and interests of research end users.

Importantly, the study also makes clear that IDRC POs cannot “be all things to all people”. Understanding that programs do not always have sufficient time and human resources to address the capacity needs of partners, IDRC POs also function as “facilitators”, encouraging peer-to-peer networking between researchers/teams working in similar thematic areas and/or experimenting with common research approaches (such as participatory research).

### **The “what” of IDRC’s capacity development efforts: what capacities and with what results**

While IDRC’s support for capacity development targets the full spectrum of research capacities, the Centre focuses more on “research supply” than “research demand”. Given IDRC’s historical emphasis on developing capacities that target “research supply”, findings from the case studies reveal that while IDRC has targeted and achieved positive outcomes in and across all of the five categories of capacity development in the Research-into-Use framework, IDRC has paid closer attention to, and has therefore achieved more substantive results in, strengthening the capacities of organizations to conduct and manage research, with comparatively fewer results in strengthening the capacity of partners to use research results (category 4) and to create or mobilize research links to systemic policy formation or change (category 5).

### **Five Categories of Capacity Development Activity in IDRC**

In the context of IDRC's research-for-development mandate, capacity development activities are intended to create and strengthen the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for good quality, relevant and useful research. Based on the 40-project review, these can be grouped into five broad capacity categories, each reflecting something an individual or institution is expected to be able to do or to do better, as a consequence of the Centre's intervention. These 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, and
5. **mobilizing** research-related policy and programme "systems" thinking.

These capacities are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they reflect the various tasks or dimensions of a full research enterprise, the kind of overall competency which should be available within any country's research environment, to address any development problem. (Bernard, 2005: 1)

Specifically, given the often scarce financial resources available for research in many regions of the South, the case studies highlight the outcomes of IDRC's formal and informal capacity development efforts (e.g. through research grants competitions, PO mentorship, networking etc.) to improve the capacities of researchers to conduct research projects and to understand and apply innovative research methodologies and approaches in their research.

However, the case studies highlight that the results of IDRC-supported capacity development extend beyond improved capacities of researchers and organizations to "conduct research" as individual researchers and teams, and increasingly demonstrate the capacity to challenge existing research paradigms and to create and advance new ways of conceptualizing and investigating development problems. This includes, among other things, the capacity to understand and work with (and often advance) complex ideas and approaches; to generate and implement systematic data gathering, analysis and synthesis procedures; to scale research activities up and/or out; and to apply results towards the advancement of a research field, in policy or in some other way. While it is clear that IDRC is increasingly committed to ensuring that IDRC-supported research is used either to influence policy or in other meaningful ways, the case studies suggest that IDRC is still in the process of defining and working through these deeper, more systemic aspects of capacity development and so its support of partners along these lines has, understandably, not progressed as far as it has in other capacity development categories. The case studies do, however, offer some evidence that IDRC has targeted and achieved positive outcomes in strengthening the capacities of researchers to produce research that is relevant (and accessible) to policymakers and other research end users, including for example, evidence of improved capacity, on the part of researchers, to tailor their research questioning, methodologies, analysis and communication of results in terms of specific application to specific users. With the exception of the CIES study, comparatively less is said in the case studies of IDRC's efforts, and the outcomes achieved, in building research links with systemic policy formation and/or change. Interestingly, the case studies emphasize a strong

demand by partners for IDRC to more intensively and systematically support capacity development in both of these areas to ensure that research is, or becomes, more relevant, appropriate and accessible to a diversity of potential research users (including policymakers, the private sector, civil society, local communities etc.).

### **Factors that affect IDRC's capacity development efforts and outcomes**

From the case studies, several factors appear to shape IDRC's capacity development efforts and their outcomes. First, organizations confront regionally specific challenges that that can inhibit, or place unique demands on, IDRC's support for capacity development. For example, organizations are sometimes situated in regional and national contexts that are not open to, or inclined to support, research (or particular research themes).

Second, IDRC supports many different kinds of organizations – including universities, government agencies, research centres, and research and/or advocacy networks – that differ considerably in institutional form and function. Although not explored in detail in the case studies, each implies a (somewhat) different kind of change process and the need for a tailored approach to capacity development that is sensitive to these differences. This is an area where IDRC may wish to undertake further analysis to: 1) explore the different kinds of partner organizations with whom the Centre works, 2) the unique challenges that different institutional forms imply for IDRC's capacity development work, and 3) how IDRC might tailor its future capacity development efforts to better reflect the institutional diversity of its partners.

Third, the case studies reveal that the potential to invest in and build research capacity among IDRC's partners is shaped not only by the nature, organization, and priorities of individual institutions but also by larger governance structures in the regions where IDRC supports research. The case studies demonstrate that the capacity of IDRC-supported researchers to undertake particular types of research or to explore new thematic areas and methodological approaches is often governed by external coordinating bodies that set the parameters and priorities of the research system and, in so doing, can potentially inhibit IDRC's support for capacity development in these areas.

Fourth, although IDRC's approach to supporting development research is grounded in a core value and concern that it focus on local development problems and support research that produces locally relevant solutions to those problems. Likewise, the Centre's preferred approach to capacity development, detailed in its "IDRC Good Practices for Capacity Development", emphasizes the need for capacity development to be part of, and contribute to, locally-driven research agendas. However, the case studies suggest that in its support for research and capacity development there is a discernible tension between ensuring that IDRC's support reflects the funding priorities of the Centre and individual PIs and encouraging research and capacity development interventions that are locally driven and owned.

Fifth, while IDRC has and continues to support a broad range of capacity development interventions, targeting an array of capacities – both research and organizational – among a diverse set of partners organizations across the regions of the South, it is only commonsense that IDRC does not have the resources, expertise, and intention to "do it all". Given IDRC's

modest budget, compared to many other donors, and its preference and clear comparative advantage in supporting the research capacities of partners, particularly at the individual level, it makes sense that IDRC focus its efforts at what it does best, while also seeking to expand and strengthen its capacity development support in selected areas – for example, in supporting the application and use of research to inform policy and societal change. Should IDRC wish to continue to focus its efforts at the level of research capacity development, it may still be able to contribute, albeit indirectly, to organizational capacity development by coordinating its capacity development efforts with other donors investing in capacity development at the organizational level. Such a strategy has the potential to complement IDRC’s own capacity development agenda while also taking advantage of the kinds of synergies that often come from greater coordination of donor efforts.

However, if IDRC wishes to expand its support for partners in the area of organizational capacity development, the case studies suggest that it may need to build greater in-house expertise in this area which, at present, are not sufficiently developed to enable PIs to develop and implement coherent and comprehensive organizational capacity development strategies with its partners – a finding supported by IDRC staff themselves.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

APC	Association for Progressive Communications
CAMES	Conseil Africain et Malgache pour Enseignement Supérieur
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CCCA	Cross Case Content Analysis
CD	Capacity Development
CGIAR	Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research Centres
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CIE	Economic Research Consortium (Peru)
CIES	Social and Economic Research Consortium (Peru)
CREA	Centre de Recherches Économiques Appliquées
DPA	Director of the Program Area (IDRC)
ENREM	Environment and Natural Resources Management
EPA	Environmental Policy Advisor
EU	Evaluation Unit (IDRC)
GEM	Gender Evaluation Methodology
GRACE	Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment
IARC	International Agricultural Research Centre
ICARDA	International Centre for Research in the Dry Areas
ICT4D	Information and Communication Technology for Development
INSPRO	Capacity Building and Institutional Support for the APC
ISP	Internet Service Provider
LACRO	Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office
MERO	Middle East Regional Office
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NREM	Natural Resources and Environmental Management

OCD	Organizational Capacity Development
PAD	Project Approval Document
PI	Program Initiative (IDRC)
PO	Program Officer (IDRC)
PPB	Participatory Plant Breeding
SIDA/SAREC	Swedish International Development Agency, Department for Research Cooperation
SISERA	Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa (IDRC)
UCAD	Cheikh Anta Diop University (Senegal)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WARO	West Africa Regional Office

## Contents

<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>13</b>
1.1 PURPOSE OF THE CROSS-CASE CONTENT ANALYSIS .....	14
1.2 ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT .....	14
<b>2. METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS .....	14
2.2 LIMITATIONS / CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY .....	16
<b>3. IS IDRC EXPLICIT ABOUT ITS CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT INTENTIONS? .....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 WHY ARE IDRC’S CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT INTENTIONS OFTEN IMPLICIT? .....	20
3.2 THE IMPLICATIONS OF A LARGELY IMPLICIT APPROACH TO CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT .....	22
<b>4. WHOSE CAPACITIES: INVESTING IN CAPACITIES AT DIFFREENT SCALES .....</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1 STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES IN INDIVIDUALS .....	25
4.2 STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES IN ORGANIZATIONS .....	28
4.3 SUPPORTING CHANGE AT THE LEVEL OF THE RESEARCH SYSTEM .....	32
<b>5. WHAT CAPACITIES: DOES IDRC TARGET THE FULL SPECTRUM OF THE RESEARCH-INTO-USECAPACITIES? .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>6. THE ‘HOW’ OF IDRC’S SUPPORT FOR CAPACITY DEVLEOPMENT.....</b>	<b>39</b>
6.1 IDRC’S FORMAL / “TANGIBLE” SUPPORT FOR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT .....	39
6.2 “IDRC’S NICHE”: NURTURING PEER RELATIONSHIPS FOR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT .....	40
6.2.1 <i>IDRC’s regional presence</i> .....	41
6.2.2 <i>“Positive relationship work” and capacity development</i> .....	42
6.2.3 <i>“Partners in learning”</i> .....	47
6.2.4 <i>Encouraging opportunities for program level and corporate learning</i> .....	49
6.2.5 <i>Promoting peer-to-peer networking and mentorship</i> .....	49
<b>7. RESULTS OF IDRC’S CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF PARTNERS.....</b>	<b>52</b>

7.1 CAPACITY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH .....	52
7.2 CAPACITY TO MANAGE RESEARCH.....	55
7.3 CAPACITY TO CONCEIVE, GENERATE AND SUSTAIN RESEARCH .....	57
7.4 CAPACITY TO USE RESEARCH RESULTS .....	58
7.5 CAPACITY TO CREATE OR MOBILIZE RESEARCH LINKS TO SYSTEMIC POLICY FORMATION OR CHANGE	60
<b>8 FACTORS THAT AFFECT IDRC’S CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT RESULTS .....</b>	<b>63</b>
8.1 GEOGRAPHY MATTERS: WORKING IN DIFFERENT REGIONAL CONTEXTS .....	63
8.2 A DIVERSITY OF PARTNERS WITH DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONAL FORMS .....	64
8.2.1 <i>The unique challenges of universities</i> .....	64
8.2.2 <i>Support for capacity development in networks</i> .....	66
8.2.3 <i>Support for capacity development in government agencies</i> .....	66
8.3 GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND THEIR IMPACT ON IDRC’S SUPPORT FOR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT.	67
8.4 “OWNERSHIP IS KEY”: CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT, IDRC PROGRAMMING, AND THE QUESTION OF LOCAL OWNERSHIP.....	68
8.5 IDRC’S LIMITED “IN-HOUSE CAPACITY” FOR SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT: A CASE FOR GREATER COORDINATION WITH LIKE-MINDED DONORS?.....	71
<b>9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS DERIVED FROM THE CASE STUDIES .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>76</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

IDRC supports capacity development among its Southern partners as part of its mandate “to initiate, encourage, support and conduct research into the problems of developing regions of the world and into the means for applying and adapting scientific, technical and other knowledge to the economic and social advancement of those regions” (IDRC Act 1970, cited in Gillespie 2005, 23). More specifically, as part of this mandate, IDRC seeks “to assist the developing regions to build up the research capabilities, the innovative skills and the institutions required to solve problems” (ibid). Since capacity development constitutes a fundamental aspect of all IDRC work, IDRC’s Evaluation Unit is conducting a strategic evaluation to investigate the Centre’s contributions to the development of capacities of partners with whom the Centre works. The evaluation aims to provide IDRC’s own staff and managers with an intellectual framework and common language to help clarify the concept and document the experiences and results that the Centre has accumulated in this domain. Specifically, the strategic evaluation focuses on the intentions, processes and results of IDRC support for the development of capacities of its southern partners – what capacities have been enhanced, whose, how, and how effectively.

This strategic evaluation is composed of five phases. The first phases of the strategic evaluation sought to explore what IDRC’s documentation – at the corporate, program and project level – reveal about the different understandings that IDRC holds about capacity development and how it approaches the development of research capacities in its work with southern partners. This phase of the evaluation consists of six organizational case studies undertaken with partner institutions. The six case studies, selected by IDRC’s Evaluation Unit, are as follows:

- 7) The Association for Progressive Communications (global)
- 8) Cheikh Anta Diop University, Senegal
- 9) The Consortium for Economic and Social Research, Peru
- 10) International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas- ICARDA (global)
- 11) Makerere University, Uganda
- 12) Ministry of Environment, Government of Cambodia

According to the Evaluation Unit, the case studies represent a purposive sample, chosen on the basis of maximum variation, with the aim of capturing and describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation. For the purposes of this strategic evaluation, it is expected that this approach will bring about important learning on IDRC’s experiences and abilities for supporting research capacity development in different types of organizations and research environments. According to the terms of reference for the case study part of the evaluation, organizational case studies have been chosen in order to capture how, over time, IDRC’s sustained support contributes to capacity development at the individual/group, organizational and network levels in the field. The organizational case studies examine different types of organizations in different geographic regions and with diverse sectoral concentration, which have received significant IDRC support over the last ten years. Specifically, all of the case studies selected for this strategic evaluation have been chosen on the basis of being within the top fifty southern-based recipient organizations of IDRC financial support since 1996. The case studies take a longitudinal perspective, examining the cumulative results of IDRC’s significant investment (more than \$2 million in each case)

extended through a number of projects or capacity support interventions, by different IDRC programs over a significant period of time. The organizational case studies examine both the processes and the results of capacity development with Southern partner organizations.

### **1.1 Purpose of the cross-case content analysis**

The purpose of the cross-case analysis is to review the studies and outputs produced under phases 1-3 of the strategic evaluation and the six organizational case studies, to identify patterns or trends between the documents, with a particular emphasis on the six organizational case studies. The starting point for the cross case analysis has been the questions that constituted the core of the terms of reference of the organizational case studies. The findings from the case studies and the cross case content analysis are intended to enable IDRC to look back at its collective work with selected organizations to question and to evaluate, in its own terms, the Centre's ability to apply what has come to be seen as its own tacit list of "good practices" for capacity development. The organizational learning that is derived from these studies of IDRC's support for capacity development in practice is also intended to support the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of IDRC's future capacity development projects and activities.

### **1.2 Organization of the report**

Following the introduction, the next section outlines the methodology of this cross-case content analysis and highlights the challenges and limitations of the study. The body of this report provides a critical, comparative analysis of the case study findings, highlighting issues and trends with respect to IDRC's support for capacity development. Substantive attention is given to IDRC's capacity development at different scales (at the level of the individual, the organization, and research system); the kinds of capacities IDRC looks to strengthen in its partner institutions; the range of strategies and approaches used by IDRC program staff develop research and organizational capacities; the kinds of results IDRC and its partners have achieved through the Centre's capacity development work, and the challenges IDRC confronts in its efforts to build capacity. The report's final section offers a series of conclusions and recommendations gleaned from the case studies.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study involved the review of the documentation produced to date as part of this strategic evaluation, including the documents produced in phases 1-3 and the six organizational case studies commissioned under phase 4. The phase 1-3 documentation was intended to provide background information concerning the Centre's understanding of, and approach to, capacity development in its support of southern research partners, and to inform an analysis of the organizational case studies. The six organizational case studies form the basis of this cross-case analysis (CCA) study.

### **2.1 Cross-case analysis**

The six organizational case studies selected by IDRC's Evaluation Unit represent a purposive sample, chosen on the basis of maximum variation. Maximum variation sampling aims to capture and describe central themes that cut across a great deal of variation. For the purposes of this strategic evaluation, the EU sought to ensure that the case studies included

different organizational types (research centers, universities, government agencies, networks), geographic regions (Africa, Asia and Latin America), and sectoral concentration (e.g. Information Communication Technologies for Development - ICT4D, Environment and Natural Resource Management - ENRM, Social and Economic and Policy - SEP). For small samples, the focus on “maximum variation” turns the apparent weakness of heterogeneity into a strength by applying the logic that “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomena” (Patton 2002 cited in CCA Terms of Reference, 2008). With this understanding, the purpose of the CCA has been to analyze and document common patterns that emerge across the different case studies. At the same time, the study is intended to highlight points of divergence and differentiation among them.

The purpose of this study is to examine the content of the six organizational case studies to discern common patterns or trends related to, for example:

- a) IDRC’s intentions vis-à-vis capacity development (what the Centre and individual PIs hope to achieve through strategic investments in capacity building and the extent to which these intentions are made explicit or implicit by the Centre);
- b) whose capacities are targeted through IDRC’s support of capacity development (with particular attention to the issue of scale);
- c) the types of research and organizational capacities the Centre looks to support and strengthen;
- d) the kinds of strategies and approaches the Centre employs in their capacity development efforts;
- e) the range of capacity development outcomes the Centre has achieved in its support of southern partners; and,
- f) the kinds of challenges IDRC confronts in its efforts to build the organizational capacity of its partners.

As a means to analyze and document IDRC’s intentions, approach, and outcomes of capacity development, the cross-case analysis draws, where possible, on the Research-into-Use capacity development framework developed by Anne Bernard (2005b).

Given the variation across the six organizational case studies, the CCA is intended to draw out what the different case studies share – that is, the common patterns or trends related to IDRC’s support for capacity development. Trends that emerge across case studies differentiated by organizational type, geographic region, and sectoral concentration offer insights into IDRC’s collective understanding of, and approach(es) to, capacity development. At the same time, the CCA is intended to examine how IDRC’s support for capacity development has differed along these same lines of differentiation. This study considers, for example, how different organizational types, geographic regions, and research sectors present unique challenges that the Centre has confronted, and sought to address, in its capacity development efforts.

And finally, this study is also intended to synthesize the lessons and recommendations that are either specific to individual case studies or that are shared among them. These may include, for example, what the case studies reveal about IDRC's core strengths and weaknesses in its support of capacity development, perceived gaps in IDRC's capacity development work, and/or areas where IDRC might intensify and/or strengthen its efforts in the future.

## **2.2 Limitations / challenges of the study**

As a comparative cross case study, analytical emphasis is given to the relations and processes – more specifically, the intentions, approaches and outcomes – of IDRC's support of capacity development with the six partner organizations that serve as case studies. However, comparative analysis of the case studies was challenged by the significant variability in how the studies were conceptualized, undertaken and documented. First, the level of detail and extent of analysis is not equal across all six case studies. Second, although the case studies shared the same terms of reference, each study is unique given the specific geographical and institutional contexts of the cases and the evaluation and writing styles of the individual case study evaluators. For example, the case study reports do not provide a complete and comprehensive review of the full spectrum of capacity development intentions, strategies and outcomes. Rather, each case study elaborates selected aspects of IDRC's capacity development work with individual partner organizations, emphasizing the capacity development processes, strengths and weaknesses, outcomes, and lessons considered most salient from the case study and/or most relevant and germane to IDRC's strategic evaluation. Some studies, for example, focus considerable attention on the “process” of capacity development (as was the case with the APC and Makerere University reports), whereas others gave greater emphasis to specific capacity development intentions, activities, and/or outcomes (as was the case with the UCAD and CIES reports). Thus, while each study shared the same evaluation objectives and addressed these evaluation criteria in the case study reports, the reports differ in their emphasis (on specific issues, processes, challenges, and/or outcomes), in the level of detail in both overview and analysis of the case study, and so, in the case study findings overall. While the heterogeneity in the case study reporting is not a limitation per se, but rather reflects the differences of the institutions and regional contexts across the six case studies, it did make comparative analysis difficult.

At a more fundamental level, the comparative analysis of the six organizational case studies revealed some interesting challenges in working with the Research-into-Use capacity development framework that are worth mention here. First, while the framework (2005b) provides a very useful basis on which to think about, analyze and understand IDRC's capacity development intentions, approaches and outcomes, the five capacity development categories have been, at times, difficult to work through. In her paper, *Mapping Capacity Development at IDRC*, Bernard defines the five categories of capacity development activity at IDRC as:

- 1) the capacity to conduct research
- 2) the capacity to manage research
- 3) the capacity to conceive, generate and sustain research
- 4) the capacity to use research results

- 5) the capacity to create and/or mobilize research links to systemic policy formation and/or change (Bernard, 2005b, p.1)

While the first two categories – the “capacity to conduct research” and the “capacity to manage research” are straightforward as easy to apply to IDRC’s experience with capacity development, the remaining three categories – “the capacity to conceive, generate and sustain research”; “the capacity to use research results”; and “the capacity to create or mobilize research links to systemic policy formation or change” – are less so. Part of the challenge in working with these categories is that there appears to be considerable overlap between them. For example, “the capacity to conduct research” and “the capacity to conceive, generate and sustain research” share several attributes. Both refer to the disciplinary and/or sectoral knowledge and the methodological and analytical skills needed to undertake and interpret research, as well as to the capacities to communicate results in ways appropriate for policy and other uses. The difference between the two appears to be that the capacity to conceive, generate and sustain research requires the capacity to challenge existing paradigms, and to and to (re)conceptualize, generate and sustain innovative research programs. While this difference seems clear enough, in analyzing the intentions and outcomes of IDRC-supported capacity development it is difficult to discern which of these capacity categories is most appropriate to particular case study examples. Likewise, “the capacity to use research results” and “the capacity to create or mobilize research links to policy change” are strikingly similar in many respects. Both, for example, emphasize the need to network and engage cooperatively with practitioners/users of research and to present and disseminate research and results to policymakers and other communities. While category five clearly places stronger emphasis on advocacy and mobilization, the differences between them are, at times, difficult to discern from a reading and analysis of the case studies. This is not to suggest that the categories are in any way inadequate or ill-suited to IDRC’s capacity development work and experience – quite the contrary. Rather, it is to suggest that it may be helpful to refine (and perhaps simplify) these categories in order to make them clearer and more user-friendly for IDRC’s purposes.

### **3. IS IDRC EXPLICIT ABOUT ITS CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT INTENTIONS?**

As part of this strategic evaluation, IDRC is interested in the extent to which IDRC-supported projects intend to promote and support capacity development as part of their goals and objectives. Odilia Maessen’s study of project objectives, abstracts and appraisal documents from 561 projects approved between April 1, 2000 and September 30, 2004, found, for example, that at least 76% of projects reviewed expressed an intention and/or expectation to “build capacity in the South”, as indicated by explicit statements in their objectives, abstract and/or appraisal documents (Maessen 2005, p.12). Moreover, the study found that when implicit references to capacity development are taken into account, the percentage of projects with an intention to build research capacity is approximately 80% of the sample (*ibid*). Although Maessen’s study found that IDRC projects target capacity development efforts to a range of beneficiaries (including researchers, policymakers, communities etc.) at different scales (individuals, organizations, networks, and even research systems), the lack of consistency in project reporting made quantification of these trends difficult.

Although differing in some important respects, what the six case studies share is an understanding that, at its core, IDRC's collaboration with partner institutions is intended to contribute to the development of research capacities – whether the capacities of individual researchers and/or research teams, the capacities of community members and/or groups involved in IDRC-supported research, the capacities of departments and/or institutions in which research teams are situated, the capacities of national or regional networks working on issues related to IDRC-supported research, or capacities of policy makers and other “users” of IDRC supported research. However, the case studies reveal that the intention to build capacities is not equally explicit with all partners and across all IDRC-supported projects. The CIES, APC, UCAD and Cambodia studies, for example, point to a more explicit capacity development agenda on the part of IDRC. The ICARDA study, on the other hand, suggests largely implicit support for capacity development by IDRC. At Makerere University, findings suggest the presence of both explicit and implicit aspects to capacity development. The differences in IDRC's approach to capacity development with institutions may be attributed to many factors, not all of which are likely elucidated in the case study documents. However, there are several insights that can be gleaned from the studies to suggest possible reasons and/or rationales to explain the varying degrees to which IDRC's support of capacity development has constituted an explicit strategy with partners.

From the case studies, it appears that intentions to develop research and organizational capacities have been most explicitly expressed in IDRC's support of networks such as CIES and APC. This finding is consistent with a study of IDRC's support of network capacity strengthening which emphasizes that the majority of networks supported by IDRC have, to varying degrees, the explicit objective of building capacities (Pyburn and Guijt 2006, cited in CIES Study 2008, p.19). Networks are a critical modality of research support within IDRC in part because networks enable IDRC to reach, and foster collaboration among, different institutions working in similar or complementary research areas regionally or globally. The challenge of networks is creating the conditions necessary to make national, regional and/or global collaboration possible – including building administrative mechanisms to support inter-institutional collaboration, creating opportunities for inter-institutional peer engagement and exchange and for the formulation and undertaking of joint research projects and programs, and enabling the dissemination and use of research results in different regional contexts – while also strengthening the capacities for research at the researcher and team levels in member organizations. In order to flourish research networks require often-significant investments (of time, energy and financial resources) in capacity strengthening at all scales – individual, institutional and network. In the case of both CIES and APC, IDRC has taken a long-term perspective, and made substantial investments in strengthening and consolidating the research and institutional capacities of these networks and their member organizations, as well as at the level of individual projects. It is perhaps because of the coordinated, multi-faceted, long-term, and always evolving nature of IDRC's support of networks that the Centre's intentions and expectations in the area of capacity building have been made more explicit relative to IDRC's other research modalities.

In IDRC's partnership with Cambodia's Ministry of Environment it intends to develop the capacities of Ministry researchers to produce policy-relevant community-based ENRM research and the Ministry's institutional capacities to appreciate, absorb and utilize this research to formulate and implement ENRM policies and programs are made explicit. For UCAD and Makerere Universities, the case studies found that capacity development

intentions were at least partially explicit, particularly at the level of individual capacity building. Efforts aimed at organizational capacity building in these two case studies were fewer and less explicit than that of CIES, APC and Cambodia's Ministry of Environment. As will be discussed later in this report, IDRC has focused less concertedly and explicitly on organizational capacity development with UCAD and Makerere given the "loosely coupled" institutional structure and organization of universities.

Despite the often-explicit nature of IDRC's intentions vis-à-vis capacity development in the case studies, the cross-case analysis also reveals that a good deal of IDRC's capacity development work remains implicit and uncaptured in IDRC's project documentation. The Makerere study notes, for example, that the target beneficiaries for most of IDRC's explicit capacity building objectives are often only broadly defined. The most explicitly identified group in IDRC-supported research at Makerere is "the research team" or "researchers" – referring to the specific individuals working on a given project – while other envisaged beneficiaries of capacity building are more "vaguely defined", and include, for example, "the research community", "Institutions", "Policy Makers" and "other research users" (Makerere University Study 2008, 27).

Interestingly, the study finds that neither Makerere University (as an institution) nor any of its departments or faculties are among the explicitly intended targets of IDRC's capacity development efforts (ibid). Although not highlighted in the other case study reports, Maessen's (2005) study notes the varying degree to which IDRC project documents make explicit the intended beneficiaries of capacity development. While some of the projects reviewed in Maessen's study explicitly identified the targeted beneficiaries of capacity building (for example, individual researchers, policymakers, specific departments, organizations, communities etc.), the author found that project documents often refer to target beneficiaries in very general terms and are often collectively referred to as "stakeholders" or "partners" (ibid, 19). Neither Maessen's study, nor the case studies, suggests a reason for the often vague or implicit reference to the intended beneficiaries of capacity development in IDRC's work. It is not clear, for example, whether the lack of explicitness concerning targeted beneficiaries in some project documents is due to the style of IDRC reporting (in which specificity of intended beneficiaries, beyond general categories, is not a requirement) or to a lack of clarity and systematic analysis of the intended beneficiaries of capacity building during project development. If the latter, these findings suggest the need for more systematic analysis, at the outset of the project, of precisely what and whose capacities are to be targeted. This is important both to ensure that IDRC staff and partners properly identify and target critical capacity gaps and to enable effective monitoring and evaluation of capacity development goals – as an example, Maessen found that the lack of consistent clarity and explicitness concerning the intended beneficiaries of capacity development made analysis of IDRC's efforts to develop the capacities of different beneficiaries difficult (ibid).

The Makerere and APC studies also draw critical attention to the often-limited information in project documents concerning how explicit capacity development objectives were to be "operationalized". At the level of research, for example, the Makerere study notes that in only two of the twenty-two projects reviewed did project documents identify specific tools such as training, seminars, workshops or mentoring for capacity development (Makerere Study 2008, p. 27). Although several other case studies do make reference to a range of

formal capacity development initiatives supported by IDRC, they suggest that IDRC's less formal capacity development work - including peer exchange and mentorship between POs and researchers – tends to remain an implicit aspect of IDRC approach to capacity development in the sense that it is not captured in IDRC project documentation.

### **3.1 Why are IDRC's capacity development intentions often implicit?**

The case study reports raise some of the possible reasons for the often-implicit nature of IDRC's capacity development intentions. The Makerere and UCAD studies, for example, point to IDRC's institutional structure and program orientation as one source of explanation for the lack of explicit reference to capacity development in project documentation. IDRC's structure and programming are oriented around thematic research areas and so the point of departure for IDRC-supported projects tends to be a research/development problem (UCAD Study 2008, p.20). Given this, the explicit emphasis of most projects (and project documents) is not on capacity building per se, but rather on a thematic research area. As the UCAD study describes: "As a project took shape, the focus was on determining its modes of intervention. However, the researchers note that, as the process of mounting a project went on, their exchanges with IDRC increasingly dealt with objectives of research capacity building, which subsequently were stipulated in the project document" (UCAD Study, p.20). In other words, IDRC's support centers on a thematic research area (for example, urban agriculture, gender and ICTs, or economic policy research); the intention to develop research and/or organizational capacities tends to be secondary to, though not necessarily less important than, the intention to support development research in partner organizations.

Another reason for the often-implicit nature of IDRC's capacity development intentions is that a good deal of IDRC's support for capacity development is often not identified or made explicit as "capacity development". Whereas in IDRC's support of CIES, providing financial resources to support research through competitions is explicitly understood as a capacity development activity (CIES Study 2008, p.23), in other projects support for research, while understood as a mechanism for strengthening capacities, is not identified as "capacity building" in project documentation. The Makerere study found that IDRC program officers and university researchers had a shared understanding that IDRC's support of development research is always, already a capacity building exercise, yet, in Makerere project documentation this link between support for research and capacity building is not made explicit. According to the study, IDRC staff argue that the capacity building dimension of research support is often not made explicit because it is considered "obvious". Support for research at Makerere provides opportunities for students to pursue and complete a PhD or Masters degree during the research project and with funding from the project. Support for research also provides opportunities for all involved team members to gain experience in all matters related to planning and implementing a research project (including multi-disciplinary work) and to gain knowledge in relation to a research or thematic area through the process of working on a research question. Moreover, provided that the research produced is seen to be relevant and credible, supporting research work creates opportunities for senior researchers to gain acknowledgment and strengthen their professional reputation as a researcher through increased experience, exposure and visibility, and through and publication of their work (Makerere Study 2008, p.27). Although explicit reference to "capacity development" may not always be found in the general or specific objectives of Centre-supported research at Makerere (or other organizations where IDRC supports

research) there is an underlying assumption (held both by IDRC staff and researchers) that providing researchers and research teams with an opportunity (and funding) to undertake research *is capacity development* through and through.

Moreover, the Makerere, UCAD and APC studies draw critical attention to the very implicit character of particular aspects of IDRC's capacity development work. While it is clear from the case studies, and from the background studies undertaken as part of this strategic evaluation, that IDRC makes substantial investments in explicit capacity development modalities such as training, seminars and conferences, IDRC's support for capacity development far exceeds these tangible "one-off" or "stand-alone" interventions that address 'hard' technical and/or functional capabilities (Lufthaus and Neilson 2005, 23). While "hard" capacities are perhaps more commonly addressed through concrete investments in specific capacity development interventions (a training course, a seminar, a conference), and so may be more likely to be made explicit in IDRC project documentation, there is an array of capacity development work supported by IDRC that is of a more informal nature and, as such, have remained largely implicit in that they have not been captured in regular project reports or been made explicit by other means. Indeed, rather than understand capacity development as a separate activity, most IDRC program officers and staff see capacity building as an implicit part of all IDRC work. Specifically, "capacity development" in this sense is operationalized through what the APC study (2008) refers to as "positive relationship work" – the nurturing of professional peer relationships characterized by mentorship and mutual learning, between IDRC program officers and project partners. Yet, because this kind of relationship work is not directly tied to concrete, planned activities and budget lines, it remains at least partly implicit despite its extraordinary contribution to the Centre's goals of strengthening the capacities of its Southern partners.

The ICARDA case study highlights another rationale for the often-implicit nature of IDRC's capacity development intentions. The ICARDA case study found that IDRC program staff are keenly aware of, and respect, the "sensitive" nature of capacity development work and the kind of top-down, hierarchical relationship often implied by the language of "capacity development". Although, as Baser and Morgan (2008, 72) explain "capacity development has frequently been portrayed as an apolitical process during which participants willingly learn skills, techniques and behaviours that allow them carry out their task", many capacity development interventions are saturated with relations of power, politics, identity and authority. Unlike many of IDRC's lesser-experienced partners, ICARDA is an International Agricultural Research Centre, one of sixteen that make up the CGIAR system. ICARDA is staffed by scientists holding doctoral level degrees (and in many cases have received academic and professional training in the North), many of whom are considered "experts" in their field. Given this, the case study found that IDRC POs have a sensitive relationship with ICARDA. Although IDRC POs do engage in explicit capacity development with ICARDA scientists, this intention remains implicit in IDRC's professional exchanges with scientists – specifically, the language of "capacity development" is carefully avoided. With ICARDA, this implicit approach to capacity development focuses on professional engagement and dialogue – through the mechanism of peer review – at different stages of the project cycle. Such an approach, the study argues, offers "a low-key way of helping them [ICARDA] to grow in, for example, the sociological, socioeconomic or gender aspects and implications of their research which might not otherwise be addressed" (ICARDA Draft Study, p.16). Although the case study focuses largely on the relationship between IDRC and

ICARDA, it is worth noting that IDRC works with highly qualified scientists in many different kinds of organizations (universities, national research centres etc.) in the South, and so the need for a sensitive, and sometimes implicit, approach to capacity development is likely not confined to CGIAR research centres. It seems reasonable that IDRC's subtle, often-implicit approach to capacity development reflects a sensitivity to the power-laden nature of all capacity development work and, so, raises interesting and important questions about the extent to which IDRC may wish to become more explicit about its capacity development agenda.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the APC study argues that much of IDRC's capacity development work remains implicit and uncaptured as a result of often-limited understanding among IDRC staff of what constitutes capacity development, and how to operationalize it – particularly at the organizational level. More specifically, the APC study points to the lack of a clearly-defined organizational capacity development framework in the Centre:

Historically, IDRC has not had a coherent organizational capacity building framework that drives its efforts. While it has invested in the development of a performance assessment framework in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank and Universalia, until now the Centre appears to have spent considerably less effort in determining how best to nurture the capacity for high performance among its organizational partners. The result is that while IDRC staff may be aware of what capacities in general partners should have, they are unsure of how to foster these capacities.

Organizational capacity building frequently occurs, therefore, as an undercurrent within all interactions between IDRC and its partners, rather than as a discrete activity – or series of activities – *per se*. (APC Study 2008, p. 4, emphasis in the original)

This insight is supported by Lusthaus and Neilson (2005) who argue that although IDRC's Corporate Assessment Framework provides a starting point for thinking about capacity development at IDRC, the Centre does not currently have a clear corporate level understanding of, and approach to, capacity development. They argue that a shared understanding of what capacity development means, and what it entails in practice, is critical, though they stress the need for balance. According to Lusthaus and Nielson (2005, 20), many staff within the Centre feel that IDRC's strength is in its flexible approach to capacity development, and so they argue that a delicate balance needs to be struck between flexibility and direction. Interestingly, the case studies support this finding. Though several case studies praise IDRC's less formal, flexible approach to supporting capacity development, there appears to be some consensus among them that IDRC's often-implicit approach to capacity development is problematic in some respects. Specifically, the studies highlight a number of potential limitations and/or trade-offs associated with IDRC's current approach.

### **3.2 The implications of a largely implicit approach to capacity development**

Building on insights from the APC study, it would seem that the lack of an explicit and coherent capacity development strategy at the Centre level means that IDRC's capacity development work depends more on the skills and interests of individual POs than on a shared vision and set of guidelines for capacity development across the Centre. It seems reasonable to infer that this translates into a potential lack of consistency, across IDRC programs, with respect to how capacity development is conceptualized and implemented with partners.

The absence of an explicit capacity development strategy or framework to guide PIs also has implications for how capacity development interventions are assessed. The Makerere study, for example, found that where project reports and other documents make little explicit reference to capacity development as either objectives (in the case of Project Approval Documents and proposals) or as results (in the case of mid-term and final reports), the capacity of IDRC program staff to monitor and evaluate capacity development, and to document capacity development processes and outcomes, was undermined (Makerere Study 2008, p.36). As part of a larger, institution-wide strategy, documenting the intentions, processes, and outcomes of capacity development in IDRC supported projects would make possible the systematic monitoring and evaluation of capacity development enabling programs to reflect on and learn from capacity development experiences (including successes and failures) and to utilize lessons learned in future project planning and implementation across the Centre.

The case studies also emphasize that IDRC's less-than-explicit approach to capacity development has implications in terms of transparency. Specifically, the UCAD and APC studies draw attention to partners' often-limited knowledge or comprehension of IDRC's capacity building objectives and expectations at IDRC's corporate and PI levels, emphasizing that the implicit character of IDRC's capacity development efforts is not consistent with the Centre's core values of transparency and openness with partners (which also form part of IDRC's Good Practices for Capacity Development).

As mentioned earlier, IDRC's capacity development approach with ICARDA is deliberately implicit, grounded in a perceived need for sensitivity vis-à-vis ICARDA's substantial existing capacity and its identity as an IARC. Because IDRC does not use the term "capacity development" with ICARDA, ICARDA does not view its partnership with IDRC, nor IDRC's intentions and expectations in its support of ICARDA, in capacity development terms. Despite their not sharing the capacity development agenda, the study found that ICARDA scientists do value opportunities for peer exchange with IDRC. Given the Centre's emphasis on local ownership in its "IDRC Good Practices for Capacity Development", ensuring that any capacity development agenda is the outcome of open dialogue between IDRC and its partners is critical. Clearly, what emerges from the ICARDA study is a contradiction between, on the one hand, taking a subtle, implicit approach to capacity development that is sensitive to the often hierarchical, power-laden aspect of all capacity development work and, on the other hand, ensuring that IDRC's capacity development work is open and locally-driven.

More broadly, the case studies point to the value of IDRC becoming more open and transparent with partners about its own strategic directions and priorities at the corporate and PI levels. The APC study notes that IDRC staff need to reflect on and understand how

their organization has changed, and continues to change, as well as “how their own corporate culture and organizational history has impacted on its relationship with partners” (APC Study 2008, p.65). The Centre also needs to be able to effectively communicate this to partners to ensure that partners understand IDRC as an institution, including its goals, directions and priorities, and how these may be changing in response to various internal and external pressures. This information is critical to ensuring that IDRC’s partners understand the Centre’s mission and mandate and how these translate into IDRC’s current funding priorities - including the kinds of research and capacity development IDRC program initiatives look to support. The ICARDA study notes, for example, that despite the fact that IDRC needs to ensure that the research it funds is in line with the criteria laid out in PI prospectuses, these prospectuses are not routinely shared with ICARDA (beyond their availability on IDRC’s web site) – as the study explains “none of the ICARDA managers or scientists interviewed were aware that these prospectuses exist and yet more than one PO described the prospectuses as IDRC’s essential guidelines” (ICARDA Draft Study 2008, p.20). The ICARDA, APC and UCAD studies each emphasize that this situation could be easily remedied by sharing IDRC’s PI Prospectuses, as well as its strategic plans and reports to the Board of Governors, with partners as part of regular corporate practice. The willingness of IDRC to share its own institutional journey with its partners has the potential to not only foster greater transparency and understanding between IDRC and its partners, but also, as the APC study (2008, 65) suggests, to contribute to institutional capacity strengthening of partners who may be going through similar transformations.

### **Does IDRC need an explicit institution-wide capacity development framework?**

Overall, a theme that emerges across the case studies is the need for IDRC to be more explicit about its capacity development intentions and expectations. Of course, this first requires that IDRC strengthen its own, in-house capacity to understand what constitutes capacity development and how to operationalize it – particularly at the organizational level. A useful starting place might be the adoption and mainstreaming of a capacity development policy framework that might serve as a practical guide for PIs. As part of this strategic evaluation, Anne Bernard’s (2005a) study highlights the potential value of a set of institution-wide policies to guide the Centre’s approach to, and investments in, capacity development. Such a framework, or set of policies, may well serve to strengthen the capacity of Centre staff to understand and apply organizational capacity frameworks in an appropriate way according to the needs of individual partner organizations. Importantly, this need not function as a straightjacket, but rather as a comprehensive framework building on “IDRC Good Practices for Capacity Development”, which serves to guide and inspire, rather than dictate. Capacity development at IDRC can continue to be an organic, evolving process that is appropriate and responsive to local conditions and partners needs while drawing from a larger IDRC framework or set of policies. Importantly, a set of institution-wide capacity development policies would help to ensure a measure of consistency, across programs, in their support for capacity development. Making IDRC’s understanding of, and approach to, capacity development more explicit at the Centre-level would also go a long way towards ensuring that it is made more explicit with partners. For example, an IDRC capacity development framework could serve as a practical means to communicate IDRC’s capacity development goals to partners and to inform dialogue between POs and partners during project planning, monitoring and evaluation related to capacity development.

#### **4. WHOSE CAPACITIES: INVESTING IN CAPACITIES AT DIFFREENT SCALES**

As part of this strategic evaluation, the Evaluation Unit seeks a more comprehensive understanding of “whose capacities” are targeted in IDRC’s support of capacity building. As will be discussed below, the case studies demonstrate that IDRC’s support for capacity development targets multiple scales, including individual researchers and research teams (and occasionally other stakeholders), but also the institutions and larger research system in which they are situated. Research institutions and the characteristics of the larger research system, nationally and regionally, play a critical role in shaping the extent to which research is valued, how research is conceptualized and implemented, the kinds of research themes that are prioritized, and so on. Support for research and capacity development at different scales reflects an understanding within the Centre that, to be effective, support for innovative and policy relevant development research cannot occur at only one level in isolation from the others. This is not to suggest, however, that IDRC invests its time, energy and resources equally at all levels. As will be discussed, the case studies reveal that while IDRC makes selective, strategic investments in capacity development at organizational (and network) levels, it appears that the Centre concentrates its capacity development interventions, first and foremost, at the level of the individual researcher and/or research team. The following section explores what the case studies reveal about IDRC’s support of capacity development at different scales.

##### **4.1 Strengthening capacities in individuals**

The question of “whose capacities” and, more specifically, IDRC’s preferred scale of intervention in its support of capacity development, is addressed in Lusthaus and Nielson’s background study. Interestingly, their review of corporate documents suggests that IDRC, as an institution, identifies organizations as principle targets for capacity development support. Yet, in their review of IDRC projects approved between the year 2000 and 2004, Lusthaus and Nielson (2005, 39) found that IDRC research projects target funding more at the individual level than at the institutional level – a finding, note the authors, which is supported by ideas espoused in their interviews with IDRC staff. From their interviews, they found that most IDRC staff understood the optimum entry point for capacity change to be at the individual, rather than institutional level – “they support individuals not institutions” (ibid, p.24). This finding is supported by Maessen’s study (2005), which found that almost half of the capacity building projects supported by IDRC target individuals.

Although IDRC’s support of APC and CIES explicitly targets capacity development at the organizational and network levels, there is considerable agreement among the remaining four case studies that IDRC targets its support for capacity development, first and foremost, at the level of individual researchers and their research teams. From the case studies, several reasons can be gleaned for IDRC’s preferred focus on individuals, rather than organizations or institutions, in their support of research and capacity development. The first and most pragmatic explanation relates to IDRC’s relatively modest budget compared to that of other

development donors (and to the needs and wants of IDRC's partners). The UCAD study found that in the vast majority of projects reviewed, IDRC focused, first and foremost on developing the capacities of an individual researcher or group of researchers, noting the potential incompatibility between the "relatively modest size of IDRC interventions" (and budgets) and the financial resources required for long-term investments in the transformation of institutions (UCAD Study 2008, p.23). Given IDRC's limited funds, the Makerere study finds that IDRC's focus on individuals – the "people side" of research capacity – achieves "good value for money" and questions whether IDRC could be similarly effective when using its existing financial resources for the purposes of broader organizational development at Makerere.

Another common explanation for IDRC's preferred focus on individual capacity strengthening is found in IDRC's organizational structure and programming which is problem or theme centered, differing sharply from many other donors. At Makerere University, for example, the case study notes:

For most external donors, other than IDRC, the relevant unit of analysis and intervention appears to be either defined in organizational terms (e.g. the university), or geographically, (e.g. building the research capacity of Uganda). IDRC's work in contrast largely centers on research questions and development problems that cut across institutional and, largely geographical dimensions. This also means that IDRC's support primarily aims at impacting on a different type of change process than many others. (Makerere Study 2008, p.45)

According to Lusthaus and Neilson (2005), given IDRC's structure and thematic orientation, the Centre understands change occurring from capacity building in relation to the development problematique and/or the research area, rather than in relation to change at the institutional level. Specifically, they note the following:

Centre staff and managers talk about capacity building in terms of working with their partners to conduct better research in their field. Capacity building is about building up the field of research and creating a critical mass of indigenous capacity to carry out research in a particular field (e.g. ecohealth research, urban agriculture research), or using a particular approach to research (e.g. multidisciplinary research, participatory research). The interviews suggest that Centre staff and managers think about capacity building as a means to build up research and development skills and competencies at the sectoral level through individuals, rather than institutions or organizations. (ibid, 23)

In IDRC's view, change occurs first and foremost at the individual, not the institutional, level. In its relationship with Makerere University, the case study explains:

The Centre does not 'do' capacity building of Makerere University, but of individual researchers and teams, 'one person/team at a time'. Rather than following a defined approach to or strategy for capacity building, IDRC activities appear to be guided by the implicit principle that whatever assistance the respective partner may require to do better research is provided within the limits of available time and resources. IDRC supports individual researchers not only as persons working on an individual

research project, but as colleagues with the potential to contribute to knowledge generation and discussion on the respective research problem in the longer term. Researchers are addressed and supported primarily in their capacity as contributors to thematic areas (and a thematic research community) rather than in their role within the university. In this way IDRC's approach differs from and complements that of most other donor organizations supporting research at Makerere, most of whom orient their capacity building work around on or more organizational units, or the institution as a whole. (Makerere Study 2008, p.29)

Several case studies remark that working along problem or thematic lines, at the level of individual research projects, with individual researchers and their research teams, has become IDRC's niche – it is what IDRC does best. As will be discussed later in this report, IDRC has a long established history of, and considerable experience and expertise in, nurturing close working relationships with individual researchers and/or research teams with the intent of building research capacities as a means to strengthen the quality, relevance and use of research to solve local and regional development problems. As the authors of the Makerere study go on to explain:

The Centre's core experience and expertise lies in the area of research for development. IDRC staff are highly qualified to assist researchers and teams in their work on thematically specialized areas, and bring them into contact with others working on the same or similar issues. In the current landscape of research capacity building at Makerere, there is no other entity that would provide similar quality and depth of individualized assistance and networking opportunities along thematic lines. (Makerere study 2008, p.47)

From the case studies, a key component of IDRC's capacity development support to individuals involves informal mentoring and exchange by/with IDRC program officers as a means of building the capacities of researchers to address important conceptual and methodological challenges in formulation and implementation of the research project, but also in the management of research. However, it also includes more formal capacity development support in the form of research awards, training courses, workshops and seminars, and importantly, networking opportunities intended to link individual researchers with others, regionally and globally, working in similar or related thematic research areas. The case studies provide a rich array of examples of these kinds of formal and informal capacity building with individual researchers and research teams.

Interestingly, the case studies do not elaborate IDRC's efforts to strengthen the capacities of individuals other than researchers. With the exception of IDRC's support for participatory and community-based approaches to research (highlighted most clearly in the Cambodia study), through which IDRC supports capacity development not only of researchers but also of community members, local authorities, and often many other stakeholders, there is little evidence from the case studies that IDRC supports capacity development beyond the research sphere. While this may reflect, at least in part, a simple oversight in the case study reports, it may also point to a tendency within the Centre to target its capacity development support more to research supply (e.g. the capacities to conduct research) than to research demand (e.g. the capacities of policymakers and other research users to understand and apply research outputs in policy and/or practice).

Although focusing its capacity development efforts at the individual level appears to be the Centre's preferred approach – and is, perhaps, the approach for which IDRC is best-positioned – it is equally clear from the case studies that IDRC rarely, if ever, targets the individual researcher in isolation. Likewise, among projects whose capacity development agenda targets institutions and/or networks, as is the case with CIES and APC, IDRC simultaneously supports individuals as part of this change process. Given this, it can be said that IDRC's capacity development support includes as a number of nested but overlapping approaches characterized by, in the words of the UCAD study, “repeated passages from one level of intervention to another” (UCAD Study 2008, p.22). From the case studies, the reasons for IDRC's multi-scalar approach to capacity development appear to be (at least) two-fold. The first is that IDRC's ability to influence change in research and research capacities at the individual level are shaped (and often constrained) by the larger institutional and research system contexts in which IDRC-supported research is situated. The second is that there is no guarantee that IDRC's support for capacity development at the individual level will “trickle up” to the institutional and/or research system levels without intentional capacity development interventions, on the part of IDRC, at these higher levels. Strengthening the capacities of research institutions and networks increases the potential for “scaling-up” and/or “scaling-out” – extending the potential reach and influence of IDRC-supported research and capacity development beyond the individual level.

## **4.2 Strengthening capacities in organizations**

While building individual and thematic capacities make up the core of IDRC's capacity development work, it is by no means the only focus. Most of the organizations featured in the case studies recognized the need for organizational and system changes and sought to build capacities at these levels. However, since IDRC does not have sufficient financial resources to invest in institutional capacity development with all partners to the same degree and extent, the case studies suggest that IDRC's support for institutional capacity development has been strategic and selective.

A comparative analysis of the six case studies demonstrates that IDRC does not engage in a systematic and comprehensive strategy to strengthen the organizational capacities with all partner institutions. In its partnership with CIES and APC, and with Cambodia's Ministry of Environment, IDRC support for capacity development at the organizational level was more comprehensive and explicit than in its partnerships with Makerere and UCAD – both universities. At Makerere University and at UCAD, IDRC has focused its capacity development efforts at the individual level, while its support for organizational strengthening has been more modest and selective, targeting particular aspects of what the Makerere study refers to as the “enabling conditions” for research within the university. For example, the UCAD study notes the severe constraints imposed by poor infrastructure on researchers' ability to undertake and sustain research at the university. IDRC's organizational support to UCAD and Makerere has included the provision of project-related infrastructure such as computers and printers for research laboratories and reference materials for university libraries.

The two case studies suggest (at least) two reasons for the comparatively limited scope of IDRC's capacity development efforts at the organizational level at Makerere and UCAD. The first relates to the “loosely coupled” institutional structure of universities, which tends

to favour research and capacity development support along thematic lines. The Makerere study defines a loosely couple system as “a situation in which system elements (e.g. parts of an organization) are responsive to each other, but at the same time retain evidence of separateness and identity” (2008, 10). As will be discussed in slightly more detail later, universities are typically made up of relatively specialized departments that function more or less independently from each other and from the whole. This thematic structure and orientation mirrors IDRC’s programming style, which centers on particular research problems and/or themes, rather than on the basis of research sectors or countries (an orientation more common among other donors). Given this, IDRC appears uniquely placed (in relation to other donors) to strengthen thematic research capacities of individual university researchers and/or research teams, benefiting from a wealth of in-house knowledge, experience and expertise related to building capacities along these lines. The Makerere study offers a second reason for IDRC’s comparatively limited and selective efforts to strengthen the capacities of the university at the organizational level – namely, the presence of several other, better resourced donors focusing their capacity development efforts (and resources) on strengthening Makerere’s institutional capacities (e.g. SIDA/SAREC is taking a broad institutional approach with Makerere in which it is trying to improve the overall enabling environment for research by addressing issues such as university financial management and procurement and infrastructure as part of a larger strategy intended to strengthen Uganda’s national research capacities). Relative to these donors, IDRC is not well positioned (or sufficiently resourced) to implement a comprehensive institutional capacity development strategy at Makerere. At the same time, the case study emphasizes that given IDRC’s institutional structure, oriented along thematic research lines, and its comparative advantage in research capacity development at the individual and team levels, its capacity development strategy with Makerere constitutes the best use of IDRC’s resources, experience and expertise and complements the efforts of other donors targeting capacity issues at the institutional level.

At UCAD, however, IDRC’s support for institutional capacity development has been broader than at Makerere. Beyond the organizational supports aimed at strengthening UCAD’s existing infrastructure, the case study points to a number of activities and interventions intended to strengthen the financial and management skills of UCAD project teams. Importantly, the case study notes that these were generally “more substantial, longer-term interventions” that were supported through larger IDRC network projects, like SISERA (IDRC’s Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa), with a strong focus on organizational capacity development (UCAD Study 2008, p.21-22). The study notes the value UCAD has placed on IDRC’s support for strengthening its management capabilities and its desire to see more of this kind of support in the future.

In its partnerships with the CIES and APC networks, and with Cambodia’s Ministry of Environment, IDRC’s support of institutional capacity development has been more comprehensive than its support for the two universities. Although IDRC’s rationale and intentions for its targeting of capacities at departmental and/or organizational levels are not elaborated in detail in the case study reports, a few explanations appear reasonable. The first is that in the South, in the regions in which IDRC supports research for development, research institutions – and often the larger research and policy systems in which they are embedded – suffer from systemic weaknesses that make IDRC’s support for research and capacity development at the project level difficult to undertake and sustain. In the initial

stages of IDRC's support for CIES (then CIE) in the 1980s, for example, Peru was in a state of economic and political crisis and, as a result, was grappling with the potential deterioration of its economic research capacity given the reduced viability of research in universities and non-governmental organizations and the potential loss of qualified researchers who considered leaving the country (CIES Study 2008, 17). Targeting the capacities of individual researchers, in isolation from these larger concerns, would not have produced sustainable capacity development outcomes. The case study explains that IDRC intentionally invested in the institutional development and strengthening of the CIES in order to rebuild the research system in Peru, including support for research capacity development among member research centers, support for coordination functions, and institutional support at the level of the Consortium. Likewise, Cambodia's troubled political system, characterized by serious governance problems and a lack of research and policymaking capacity in ENRM, also presented a systemic challenge to the potential for IDRC to support ENRM research in the country. Shortly after IDRC began to work in Cambodia, the State Secretariat for Environment (the precursor to the Ministry of Environment) was formed and IDRC agreed to assign an Environmental Policy Advisor to help meet the critical organizational needs of this new government agency (Cambodia Study 2008, p.21). Although not made explicit in the case study report, it is reasonable to infer that IDRC saw this early support for the Ministry's institutional development as a strategic opportunity to begin to create and strengthen the kinds of research and policymaking capacities at the institutional level in Cambodian government that would be needed to support and sustain innovative and policy relevant ENRM research in the country.

IDRC's partnership with the APC network suggests that IDRC also strategically invests in institutional capacity development when partners are confronted with rapid changes in a particular research and/policy environment. Over the last two decades, the South has experienced a rapid expansion of the ICT and ICT4D fields, including an ever-expanding array of new private sector, government and civil society actors and organizations. In this burgeoning field, IDRC's support of the APC network reflects "a shift in the Centre's efforts towards working with national and regional organizations and networks, serving as hubs for ICT4D research and capacity building" (APC Study 2008, p.37). This shift not only enabled IDRC to consolidate its support for research capacity development in ICT4D, but also to more explicitly target larger institutional capacity issues at a time of rapid change and growth both in the sector, and within the APC itself. For example, IDRC sought to strengthen the institutional and research capacities of the network, and its member organizations, in response to particular trends in the ICT sector regionally and globally, not the least of which has been the concern that increasing commercial ISP competition was threatening many of APC's African networks and NGO ISPs more broadly (APC Study 2008, p.23). Through various kinds of institutional capacity support, including Centre support for an APC Africa Strategy Meeting, the IDRC-APC partnership has been geared towards developing and coordinating ICT4D strategies to mobilize existing knowledge about development networking in Africa. The partnership has also endeavoured to expand the capacity of information providers to develop and make local information resources available, to build strategic partnerships between service providers and information content providers and, to build the institutional capacity of development ISPs to meet the needs of their constituencies. This has provided an opportunity for partner institutions (e.g. IDRC's Acacia program and USAID AfricaLink) and APC partner networks in Africa to exchange perspectives, plans and experiences, and to implement Regional Help Desks.

It seems reasonable to infer that IDRC's support for organizational capacity development, particularly with networks, also reflects the more complex nature of networks and the organizational capacities – not only in network administration but in the inter-institutional coordination, collaboration and communication at regional and global scales etc. – they require to be successful. Alongside its support for the development of research capacities at the level of individual researchers and teams, IDRC's support for capacity development with networks also targets these kinds of network-level organizational capacities to ensure that regional and global projects are effectively coordinated.

While it is clear from the case studies that IDRC's support for the institutional development of partners has, to varying degrees, achieved highly positive outcomes, at least two studies raise questions concerning the lack of an explicit, well-defined organizational capacity development “strategy” in its support for these partners. In IDRC's support of both APC and CIES, and indeed in its relationship with the other partners discussed above, the case studies reveal that IDRC has not had a discernible “strategy” to strengthen the institutional capacities of these networks and their member organizations. Rather, IDRC's support has been of a “responsive” nature, targeting institutional capacity needs as they arise. While this less formal, responsive approach has its strengths in that it helps to ensure that IDRC's support is locally relevant and meets the immediate and evolving needs of partners (indeed both studies note clear evidence of positive outcomes in organizational capacity development), the two case studies raise concerns about the absence of a more systematic, comprehensive strategy to address the organizational capacity development of these two partners. For example, it is worth noting that none of the case studies refer to efforts on the part of IDRC to undertake an organizational assessment or some other framework to identify partners' capacity needs and wants. Drawing on interviews with IDRC staff, the CIES study questions whether the relatively “ad hoc” nature of IDRC's support for institutional strengthening of the Consortium resulted in missed opportunities. IDRC staff question whether more could have been done to support CIES's institutional capacity development, particularly in the areas of technical support or assistance in program management processes and with respect to the Consortium's governance and its strategic management (CIES Study 2008, 51).

The APC study voices a more explicit concern with IDRC's current approach to organizational capacity development. The study argues that IDRC's own in-house capacities are not sufficiently developed to enable PIs to develop and implement more coherent and comprehensive organizational capacity development strategies with its partners. As mentioned earlier, the APC study finds that “IDRC had not had a clear idea of what organizational capacities are” and points to the need for greater clarity and understanding of what capacity development – particularly organizational capacity development – means and how to implement it. Importantly, many IDRC program officers and staff are aware of their often-limited capacity to devise and implement comprehensive strategies for institutional capacity development with their partners. In their interviews with IDRC staff, Lusthaus and Nielson note that “many IDRC staff do not feel confident in IDRC's ability to affect change at the institution or organizational level”. Specifically, staff acknowledge that IDRC lacks the professional expertise to manage large-scale institutional development (Lusthaus and Nielson 2005, p.28).

If IDRC wishes to continue, and perhaps expand, its support for institutional capacity development, the APC study argues that the Centre will need to strengthen its understanding of what constitutes “organizational capacities”, including staff’s knowledge and understanding of research and organizational capacity frameworks, their relative strengths and weaknesses, and how to apply them in an appropriate way according to the needs of partner organizations (APC Study 2008, p.64). While IDRC’s informal, relationship-oriented approach appears to work well for research capacity building and to address particular aspects of institutional development (e.g. the development of organizational aspirations and human resources) the APC and CIES studies reveal that it is not suited to more systematic, comprehensive institutional capacity development support. Specifically, the APC study emphasizes that the development of strategy, organizational skills, systems and infrastructure, and organizational structures require a much greater investment of time, resources, knowledge and expertise than IDRC’s current approach entails (APC Study 2008, p.60). Addressing these more complex organizational capacity issues, the authors explain, requires “focused financial support and mentoring far beyond the incidental capacity building which occurs as part of the ongoing relationship” (ibid).

At the same time, it may be the case that, at least in some regional and institutional contexts, IDRC is not ideally positioned or best suited to undertake support for institutional capacity development. At Makerere University, for example, where SIDA-SAREC and other donors are already investing considerable resources and expertise in capacity development at the university and research system levels, this appears to be the case. In such a situation, where IDRC appears to have a comparative advantage in its support for capacity building along thematic research lines, the Makerere study points to the potential benefits and synergies that may be gained by fostering greater collaboration and coordination among donors working on different components of capacity development with a given partner (Makerere study 2008, p.48, 50).

### **4.3 Supporting change at the level of the research system**

Although the case studies focused on organizational capacity development, they also raise important questions about whether IDRC needs to think more about building capacities within research systems more broadly. Though only two of the case studies – CIES and Cambodia – highlight IDRC’s efforts to address capacity development at the system level, several others describe the types of factors beyond or outside of the organization that shape the ability of partners to undertake research and the potential success of IDRC-supported capacity development (see Section 8 for discussion).

From the outset of IDRC’s support of CIES, a network of economic and social research institutions in Peru, the Centre sought to strengthen the Peruvian research system through investment in explicit and long-term capacity development support the Consortium. Given pervasive and systemic weaknesses in Peru’s research environment since the 1980s, IDRC’s support for capacity development has been multilayered, targeting not only individual researchers and organizations, or a particular sector, but also the larger research system of which they are part. Specifically, in partnership with CIDA, IDRC have provided long-term support for the Consortium of partner organizations in Peru as a means to address systemic change in research environment of the country (CIES Case Study 2008, 17). Likewise, in Cambodia, IDRC’s support for capacity development has far exceeded a discreet focus on

an individual institution or sector. The case study report for Cambodia highlights four phases to IDRC's capacity development work in the country. While the first, beginning in the early 1990s, targeted institutional development of Cambodia's newly-formed Ministry of Environment, later phases targeted capacity development efforts to the ENRM sector in Cambodia through support for community-based ENRM policy research projects and later, beginning in 2000, targeted support towards encouraging greater collaboration, networking and peer learning (e.g. IDRC's support for the CBNRM Learning Institute) at the research system level in Cambodia (Cambodia Case Study, 2008, p.20-21).

Although IDRC does not support capacity development at the level of the research system per se, these examples suggest that IDRC thinks about capacity development in terms of "trickle-up", wherein support for individual and organizational capacity strengthening, or strengthening the capacities of a community of practice across institutions, translates into a stronger, more capable research system at national and regional scales.

## **5. WHAT CAPACITIES: DOES IDRC TARGET THE FULL SPECTRUM OF THE RESEARCH-INTO-USECAPACITIES?**

As part of IDRC's research-for-development mandate, the Centre supports capacity development activities and initiatives intended to create and/or strengthen the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to support the production and use of high quality, relevant and useful research (Bernard 2005, p.1). The case studies demonstrate that IDRC has sought to build a wide variety of mutually reinforcing capacities in its partners. While this report cannot provide a comprehensive synthesis of the entire spectrum of IDRC's capacity development interventions, this section draws insights, derived from the case studies, about the kinds of capacities IDRC seeks to strengthen through its support of partners.

As outlined by Anne Bernard in 2005, IDRC's support for capacity development can be grouped into five broad categories, "each reflecting something an individual or institution is expected to be *able to do or to do better*" as a result of IDRC's support (Bernard 2005, p.1, emphasis in original). These include the capacities to:

1. conduct research;
2. manage research activities and organizations;
3. conceive, generate and sustain research with respect to a sector/theme or country/regional priorities;
4. use/apply research outcomes in policy and/or in practice; and,
5. create or mobilize research links to systemic policy formation or change, and to promote systems change (ibid).

Before proceeding, it is worth noting that the case study reports are more explicit in their discussion of "the how" of IDRC's capacity development interventions –the specific, formal capacity building activities and processes that IDRC supports – and comparatively less explicit about "the what" – that is, the types of research capacities that IDRC intends to develop and/or strengthen through its capacity development support.

Although the case studies make limited use of Bernard's categories in their analysis and discussion of IDRC's capacity development intentions, strategies and outcomes with partners, a number of insights can be gleaned about the kinds of capacities IDRC seeks to strengthen in partners, the extent to which IDRC appears to concentrate its efforts in some capacities more than others, and so, possible gaps in IDRC's support for certain capacity areas.

Given the often-scarce resources in research centers and universities in the South, several case studies suggest that IDRC's research and capacity development interventions are primarily intended to provide the kinds of financial resources needed to enable junior and more experienced researchers to undertake research along particular thematic lines. In its support for CIES, for example, IDRC provided financing for research through annual competitions used to award funding to individual investigators for research projects (CIES Study 2008, 22). Supporting research projects constitutes a form of "learning-by-doing" intended, over time, to improve the quality of social and economic policy research produced by the CIES. In addition to its support for individual research projects through the CIES competitive grants mechanism, CIES, with the support of IDRC, has also sought to build the organizational research capacity within CIES for more coordinated, collaborative research among CIES member institutions. Specifically, CIES has supported the development of projects in networks as a way of strengthening collaboration and joint work capacities – a method that has recently been adapted to strengthen the capacities of relatively lesser-developed centers through a network policy that encourages greater collaboration between centers of greater and lesser experience. Importantly, in this case, IDRC's intention has not only been to provide a stable source of funding for individual and collaborative research between member organizations, but also, in so doing, to contribute to the rebuilding of research capacity at the level of the research system in Peru.

IDRC's capacity development support is often more specifically aimed at encouraging more research being carried out in a specific thematic area or on a particular issue. Certainly, IDRC's support for community-based ENRM research in Cambodia can be seen as a strategic effort to build the research capacities of Ministry of Environment staff not only to undertake community-based research but also to work with new kinds of stakeholders at the community level and to use/apply this research to inform the development of the Ministry's policy framework in ENRM. Also related to partners' capacities to undertake development research, a number of case studies point to IDRC's support – either through formal workshops or informal mentoring between POs and researchers – for strengthening the capacities of (usually less experienced, junior) researchers in the more professional and technical aspects of writing project concept papers, proposal and reports.

IDRC's support for capacity development also seeks to strengthen the capacities of individual researchers and/or research teams in innovative methodologies and approaches to development research – including, for example, trans-disciplinary research, participatory methods and approaches and gender analysis – IDRC's support often includes efforts to strengthen the capacities of partners in these areas. Not unlike IDRC's support for community-based participatory research of Ministry researchers in Cambodia, the Makerere and ICARDA studies point to IDRC efforts to encourage researchers to think about and experiment with new approaches to their research, particularly during the development of concept notes and proposals. Where new methodologies and/or approaches have already

been incorporated into IDRC-supported research, POs often support opportunities for peer networking, nationally and regionally, as a means to promote reflection, exchange and learning among like-minded researchers, further strengthening their knowledge and skills. For example, support to informal cross-project networking among CBNRM research teams in Cambodia, over time, evolved into a more formal, networking-based capacity building CBNRM “learning institute”.

Importantly, while these capacity development efforts are intended to strengthen the practical knowledge and skills of researchers to produce high quality research that is relevant to and addresses local development problems, such efforts more broadly \_encourage the capacities of researchers to question, challenge and re-conceive established, and often firmly entrenched, approaches to research. Over several phases of IDRC’s support for participatory plant breeding (PPB) research at ICARDA, for example, IDRC POs engaged ICARDA scientists in on-going dialogue and exchange as a means to encourage otherwise-specialized scientists to engage in interdisciplinary research, to situate breeding science into a broader development perspective, to consider important social variables such as gender (an issue that is little addressed in research in the MERO region) and livelihood issues in their PPB research (ICARDA Draft 2008, p.44).

The case studies also point to IDRC’s efforts to invest in partners’ capacities to manage research – including the capacities to manage human and infrastructure resources at the project and institutional levels; to select, direct and supervise researchers and other staff; to develop, monitor and evaluate work plans; to identify, secure and manage financial resources, etc. For example, through IDRC’s support of SISERA, IDRC explicitly sought to build specific management capabilities at UCAD, including those related to the recruiting, supervising and training of researchers, and in managing a research centre and mobilizing financial resources (UCAD Study 2008, p.22). Through SISERA, IDRC’s support to CREA (Centre de Recherches Économiques Appliquées) included efforts to strengthen CREA’s capacity to manage research through training courses in project management and organizational evaluation (ibid, p.38). Importantly, the UCAD study notes a strong desire, on the part of UCAD staff, to see IDRC’s support for research and organizational management expanded. Specifically it notes an interest in “developing multiple dimensions of management, including leadership, monitoring and evaluation systems, strategic planning, the improvement of work processes, mediation and interpersonal conflict management, financial management and the mobilization of resources” (ibid, p.45).

In its partnership with Cambodia’s Ministry of Environment, IDRC’s support has included strategies intended to strengthen the capacity of Ministry staff to manage research. These included, for example, discussions and negotiations to prepare project proposals (including budgets), building research teams and designing a project’s organization and focus, review and planning meetings with project teams and program officers during project implementation, and regular assistance from external advisors related to research management issues (Cambodia Study 2008, 50-51). Another important aspect of IDRC’s support for management capacity in Cambodia has been improving the capacity of project teams to prepare transparent budgets and to manage project finances. Through correspondence with IDRC’s regional administrative assistant, project teams were asked to articulate and clarify budget lines and project expenditures were checked on a monthly and annual basis (ibid, p.51). These activities were intended both to strengthen the capacity of

teams in financial management and to enhance transparency and trust among team members and project supervisors. The study notes that much of IDRC's capacity development support was not specific to research but was related to general project management skills that needed to be strengthened to ensure that projects functioned smoothly.

With APC, IDRC has taken a more direct and explicit approach to strengthening the management and coordination capabilities of the APC network, through the "Capacity Building and Institutional Support for the APC (INSPRO)" project (APC Study 2008, 24). The INSPRO grant was intended to provide APC with "core support" to initiate a process of staff training, financial systems upgrading, and project management tool building, to support more regular in-person management team meetings, and to establish a fund for APC members to travel to and learn from one another – all of which are critical functions that enable partners to effectively manage research. While this initiative was welcomed and appreciated by the APC, the case study notes a number of important lessons derived from the project. The first is that explicit efforts aimed at strengthening the organizational and management capabilities of partners requires a rigorous assessment of capacity needs during the planning stages. Without an organizational assessment framework, the study found that the initial proposal and activities focused too strongly on the development of individual staff capacities rather than on organizational systems (ibid, p.24-25). Equally important, the study emphasizes the need to differentiate between core funding and organizational capacity development. Whereas core funding is usually intended to support the basic infrastructure of an organization, allowing it the stability to sustain its operations and activities despite the ebb and flow of project funding, it does not usually include change processes. Organizational capacity development involves the development and implementation of new systems and procedures, and usually requires the dedication of considerable staff time to be successful (ibid, p.25).

Given IDRC's role in the establishment of CIES, and its long-term and sustained support throughout its difficult transition from CIE to CIES, IDRC has dedicated more comprehensive support to the development and strengthening of CIES's management capabilities. Among other things, IDRC has sought to develop the capacities of CIES's Executive Office in the areas of general management (e.g. training on monitoring and evaluation) and has provided mentoring to the Executive Office during processes geared to sharpening internal procedures, accounting systems and report-writing capacities. IDRC has also sought to support CIES's administrative and financial capacities through exercises such as Institutional Risk Assessment and audits, as well through support for the Consortium's financial sustainability which included IDRC introducing CIES to, and advising them on, new potential funding sources and advising CIES on its resource management strategy (CIES Study 2008, p.30-31). Given IDRC's substantial investments in the evolution of CIES, its support for the Consortium's management capabilities can be read as a more directed strategy to ensure the sound functioning and sustainability of the CIES as a major IDRC partner.

It should be noted that the capacities cited above target research supply, that is, the capacities of people and organizations to generate research products. While IDRC's corporate understanding of research capacity extends beyond capacities to produce local, high quality research, to include a variety of overlapping and mutually reinforcing capacities as outlined by Bernard (2005), the majority case studies suggest that IDRC appears to focus

its efforts, energies and resources more intensively and explicitly, though by no means exclusively, on the research supply side of the capacity development spectrum (the first three of Bernard's capacity categories), with comparatively less attention (and explicitness) on supporting the capacities of partners in the use and application of research outcomes in policy/practice or in the mobilization of links between research and systemic policy formation or change.

In the case of IDRC's support of CIES and Cambodia's Ministry of Environment, the intent to build capacities related to the application of research in policy is quite evident. In the case of CIES, the Consortium's focus has been on the generation of social and economic policy research. In the early stages of CIES (then CIE), capacity development focused on support for policy relevant research and for the dissemination of the findings of this research to the public and to policymakers in the public sector. However, over time, CIES's goals have broadened to include efforts to strengthen and expand policy design and analysis capacities, to improve the quality and relevance of research for policy design and evaluation, to publish and disseminate study findings, and to contribute to active public debate on economic and social issues (CIES Study 2008, p.18). Although IDRC's direct contribution to these efforts is unclear, the case study highlights discernable efforts on the part of CIES to cultivate capacities in this area.

IDRC's partnership with Cambodia's Ministry of Environment also explicitly supports efforts aimed at strengthening not only the institutional capacities of the Ministry itself, but capacities of its staff to generate community-based ENRM research to inform Ministry policies and programs related to ENRM. Among other things, IDRC supported two community based ENRM research projects intended to "provide substance to an evolving policy framework by linking the policy-making process to lessons learned from the field", and to serve as "scoping" research related to specific components of the Ministry's mandate, while also building the research and technical capacities within the Ministry (Cambodia Study 2008, p.22). Project teams also made explicit efforts to share research results, lessons and experiences with senior Ministry officials at provincial and national levels. For provincial leaders, the main strategy was to involve them as much as possible in project activities. For national leaders, special learning events were organized, including annual field visits by the Minister of Environment and senior ministry staff in which they would not only learn from project team members about what had worked and what had not, but where he would also meet with villagers and their leaders to discuss progress and problems (ibid p.54). These efforts were intended to introduce and expand senior government officials' understanding of ENRM concepts, methodologies and principles and to foster dialogue between government and local stakeholders as a means to enhance the capacities of policymakers to develop policies that are increasingly driven by and reflect local issues and concerns. More directly, the Community Forestry Research Project, together with other partners, also organized a consultative process (a series of national meetings and workshops) in which communities with experience in community forestry were invited to participate in the drafting of the Ministry's community forestry sub-decree. The outputs of these meetings were analyzed, documented and synthesized with recommendations submitted to the inter-ministerial committee responsible for the drafting of the sub-decree (ibid, p.55). What is not clear from the case study is whether the capacity to mobilize stakeholders, and to analyze and draft policy recommendations already existed in project teams or whether these capacities were developed as part of IDRC's capacity development support. Since it is likely the latter, a

discussion of how these capacities for mobilization and policy advocacy were nurtured would offer valuable insight and lessons for IDRC's future support of capacity development in this area.

The remaining case studies highlight IDRC's effort to encourage and support the dissemination, sharing and publication of research findings with relevant stakeholders. For example, the Makerere study points to IDRC efforts to encourage and support team members of the "Private Sector-led Aquaculture and Malaria in Western Uganda" project in developing ways to share research findings with the respective communities they had involved in their research (Makerere Study 2008, p.30). The UCAD study highlights IDRC's support for the "Seminar/Workshop on the Politics of the Campaign against Tobacco in Senegal" which brought together researchers, decision-makers and civil society stakeholders for several days of work on various approaches to the anti-tobacco campaign as well as its support for the "Information and Communication Technologies Resource Centre Phase I", which offered consultation days as an opportunity for researchers to interact with people from the private sector (UCAD Study 2008, p.23). While these constitute solid initiatives intended to strengthen capacities related to the application and use of research in policy, these case studies suggest that – with the notable exception of the CIES and Cambodia cases which focused explicitly on policy oriented research and capacity development – IDRC's support for capacity development in the remaining case studies focused predominately on research supply.

Interestingly, while IDRC has supported APC in the field of ICT policy, including projects to collect and interpret information so that civil society could better monitor and engage on ICT policy issues, it appears, from the case study report, that the emphasis of these projects has, likewise, been placed more on research than advocacy. The APC study argues that in light of IDRC's mandate to support research-for-development, its special attention to the research side of the capacity development spectrum is entirely reasonable. It suggests that IDRC staff concentrate their efforts on individual and organizational capacities to undertake and manage research on the understanding that research utilization (including dissemination of research results and advocacy work) are likely to be ineffective without first possessing the capacity to produce sound, credible and therefore compelling research. The study notes that other staff, however, "have a more nuanced approach and recognize that it will likely be necessary to work with a variety of organizations – some with stronger capacities to conduct research and other with stronger research dissemination and advocacy capacities" (APC Study 2008, p.37). The study also suggests that where IDRC places its emphasis and funding, also has much to do with the priorities of different PIs. In the case of ICT4D, the study argues that gradual shifts in the Program Area towards supporting more academic (rather than practitioner) style research in the ICT4D field may also be contributing to this greater emphasis on research-related capacities over those needed for dissemination and advocacy. This point, however, has implications for IDRC's choice of partners. In the case of the APC, it is precisely these capacities around mobilization and advocacy work that are extremely important with respect to APC's mission and mandate.

The UCAD study explicitly calls for a greater focus on the capacities of partners in the use and application of research outcomes in policy/practice in IDRC's capacity development support. The study emphasizes that UCAD's research capacity and its influence would be greater if there was more dialogue between supply and demand for research. The study finds

that Senegal does not yet have a national culture that is favourable to Senegalese research: “A culture favourable to research would attach greater value to UCAD researchers while preserving their independence, creating a climate in which research would be encourage and supported at once by political figures, public opinion and the media” (UCAD Study 2008, p.46). While the study notes that developing a national culture favourable to research exceeds the mandate of IDRC, it notes the potential (and UCAD’s desire) for IDRC to expand its support for initiatives aimed at cultivating and sustaining dialogue between researchers and stakeholders in government, the private sector, and civil society. Given the regional presence of IDRC program officers, the study notes that POs in the regions may be well placed to identify key stakeholders on particular issues and to cultivate links and encourage dialogue between them. WARO managers also noted the value of strengthening the capacities of researchers to render research products in layman’s language and in a format and length suitable for policymakers and the public.

Both the UCAD and APC studies highlight IDRC’s tendency to direct capacity development support to the “supply” side of the research spectrum with comparatively less attention and investment directed to research dissemination and advocacy work – the “demand” side of development research. It is worth noting, however, that IDRC is increasingly working beyond mere research supply as PIs demonstrate a growing interest in strengthening partners’ capacities to disseminate research and to participate in advocacy for policy change. This shift is expressed, and informed, by the IDRC’s Evaluation Unit Policy Influence study, which not only highlights IDRC’s existing efforts to translate research into policy, but also suggested a need to invest more time and Centre resources into capacity development intended to enable policy influence and implementation (Carden 2005). Given the concerns noted by the case studies above, and IDRC’s own institutional interest and commitment to strengthen capacities in the area of policy influence, the Centre may wish to begin documenting partner’s capacities for using/applying research outcomes in policy and/or practice – Bernard’s fourth category of research capacities - as part of a more systematic approach to organizational needs assessment with partners.

## **6. THE ‘HOW’ OF IDRC’S SUPPORT FOR CAPACITY DEVLEOPMENT**

It is generally accepted throughout the Centre, and in the larger development research community, that while capacity gaps are pervasive across the South, there is no “one-size fits all” approach to capacity development.. Addressing capacity gaps, argue Lusthaus and Neilson (2005, 15-16), requires “tailor-made approaches, based on a good understanding of the context,” in which partners and their research are situated. Moreover, to be effective research capacity development, requires flexible policies and procedures, linked to the needs and circumstances of the countries they serve” and “requires the South to have control over the ownership of priority and processes”. While IDRC’s specific capacity development strategies and interventions are diverse and include a “mixed bag” of activities, Lusthaus and Nielson’s (2005, 29) background study found “no process, or “activity mix” or set of mixes” that would indicate an “IDRC approach” to capacity building. The case studies illustrate a diverse set of formal capacity development activities that IDRC uses to improve the knowledge and skills of partners. They also explore a less formal and less explicit side of IDRC’s capacity development work that sets IDRC apart from other donors.

### **6.1 IDRC’s formal / “tangible” support for capacity development**

The case studies reveal a spectrum of activities and strategies that IDRC employs in its efforts to build the research capacities of its partners – some of which have already been mentioned in the preceding pages. At the individual level, these include, for example, awards programs, small grants programs, training courses, seminars/workshops/conferences, study exchanges, networking, as well as technical assistance of various kinds. Perhaps with the exception of networking and study exchanges, which are often encouraged and supported over extended periods, most of these activities constitute “one-off” or “stand-alone” interventions that are intended to address specific “hard” technical and/or functional capacities. Such activities might include, for example, introducing or expanding researchers’ capacities related to new research methods and approaches or to new information systems or other technology. These activities are tangible and concrete; they have timelines and require a specific investment of PI resources and, as such, constitute the more visible side of IDRC’s capacity development work. Given that IDRC invests considerable time and resources in such “hard” capacity development interventions, it is rather surprising that these activities are not discussed and analyzed in more detail in the case study reports. It may be that seminars, training courses, and the like are considered obvious or self-evident capacity development exercises that require little or no explanation or examination. Yet, analysis of the intentions, processes, and expected/actual outcomes of such capacity development interventions would provide useful insight into how IDRC conceptualizes capacity development, how it operationalizes it in practice, and with what effects or outcomes. Specifically, it would be interesting to capture and document how Centre staff identify capacity needs with partners, how and why specific capacity development activities/events are selected (over others), how the choice of intervention shapes the capacity development outcomes, as well as valuable lessons learned by both partners and IDRC staff. Given the extent of IDRC’s support for these kinds of “hard” capacity development interventions, there is surely considerable program and Centre level experience and learning that could be captured and used to guide the development of future capacity development work.

Interestingly, while the case studies do not provide extensive discussion and analysis of IDRC’s support for the kinds ‘hard’, stand-alone capacity development mentioned above, several of the case studies share a particular interest in other aspects of IDRC’s capacity development work. Without diminishing the value and importance of these ‘hard’ capacity development interventions, IDRC staff insist that one-time, stand-alone interventions are insufficient for strengthening and sustaining the capacities of partners (Lusthaus and Nielson 2005, p.29-33). The case studies reveal that in conjunction with these activities, IDRC engages in more informal “people-centered”, “relationship-oriented” approaches to capacity development over the longer term, which constitute the less tangible and (sometimes) less visible side of IDRC’s support for capacity development.

## **6.2 “IDRC’s niche”: nurturing peer relationships for capacity development**

While IDRC clearly makes substantial investments in explicit capacity building modalities such as training courses, seminars, conferences and the like, IDRC’s support for capacity development far exceeds these tangible “stand-alone” interventions that address “hard” technical and/or functional capabilities. While “hard” capacities are perhaps more commonly addressed through concrete investments in specific capacity development interventions, IDRCs support for capacity development also includes, and is perhaps defined

by, developing and nurturing professional peer relationships between IDRC and its partners that are of a more informal, implicit nature. Interestingly, both IDRC staff and its partners share the perspective that IDRC's greatest strength, and what sets it apart from other international development donors, is its commitment to establishing and maintaining professional peer relationships with their partners. IDRC staff and managers interviewed by Lusthaus and Neilson (2005) argue that IDRC's "long-term mentality" and its hands-on approach with partners has become "the Centre's niche" and its "competitive advantage" – as one respondent claimed, "*our intense involvement is what makes us real partners, not just funders*" (Lusthaus and Nielson 2005, 34-35, emphasis in original). More specifically, Centre staff identify "face-to-face interactions" with their partners as a key factor of success in their efforts to strengthen the capacities of their partners (Lusthaus and Nielson 2005, 32). Through the cultivation of professional peer relationships with partners over time, Centre staff and managers are able to share a program initiative's range of experience and expertise with individual researchers and research teams through communication and partnership in a context of "mutual learning" that compliments, but also far exceeds, the benefits of isolated, "one-off training sessions" (ibid).

### *6.2.1 IDRC's regional presence*

The capacity of IDRC to collaborate with and mentor research partners is in part, made possible through its distinctive regional presence. Given the regional specificity of development challenges and the external environment in which partner organizations must conduct research, a number of case studies emphasized the critical importance of IDRC regional offices and staff. IDRC's regional approach enables POs to develop a more extensive and immediate working knowledge of both the regionality of development challenges and the environment in which partner organizations are situated. Partners emphasize that this translates into stronger and more productive peer relationships, characterized by "professionalism and friendship" (UCAD Study 2008, p.40) between IDRC and its partners. The UCAD study, for example, places great emphasis on the value of IDRC's regional office in Dakar (WARO), which allowed for the nurturing of close relationships between UCAD researchers and IDRC POs. IDRC's local presence in Senegal allowed it to develop a deeper understanding of the university and the country, and thus to provide projects with better support and guidance (UCAD Study 2008, p.39). For example, the study notes that many WARO managers have studied or taught at UCAD, providing them with a more nuanced understanding of the university, as an institution, than might otherwise be possible. This close relationship between WARO and UCAD means that WARO managers are better placed to understand UCAD's research and organizational needs and, therefore, to target support in ways that are timely, locally relevant, and effective.

The UCAD study found that WARO's proximity to UCAD "made it possible to go beyond the more distant exchanges typical of a long-distance relationship" with donors based on the North; it enabled UCAD researchers and IDRC POs to "put a face to a name" and to "humanize" their relationship through the kind of meaningful interpersonal contact that, the study notes, is particularly valued in Senegalese culture (UCAD Study 2008, 39). WARO's local presence created the possibility for genuine relationship building based on regular, informal peer exchange (often in the UCAD cafeteria!) which UCAD and IDRC both acknowledge as a critical factor in WARO's ability to guide and mentor UCAD researchers, to monitor project implementation (including timely troubleshooting), and to identify, in

collaboration with UCAD, on-going capacity development needs. The study notes that a critical area for continued capacity development is encouraging networking and dialogue between stakeholders in civil society, the private sector and government to better ensure that UCAD research is demand-driven, relevant, and useful in policymaking. WARO's emerging efforts in this area "are made vastly easier by WARO's presence in Senegal" (ibid, p.47). Overall, UCAD attributes many of its research achievements to the kind of informal peer-oriented working relationships and inter-personal exchanges throughout the life of a project, "exchanges that in themselves represent capacity building for the researcher."

The ICARDA study likewise notes the critical importance of peer-to-peer exchange between IDRC program staff and ICARDA researchers for capacity development, and stresses that these capacity development opportunities would not be possible but for the regional presence of IDRC-MERO. As will be discussed in more detail in the next section, the study found that IDRC's ability to cultivate long-term collegial relationships through on-going (and often face-to-face) professional / peer dialogue with ICARDA scientists enabled IDRC to slowly, over time, encourage ICARDA to expand their involvement in interdisciplinary and participatory research and to consider important social variables such as gender and livelihood issues in their work.

Interestingly, where a strong regional presence was absent in IDRC's relationship with partners, as was the case with CIES, opportunities for capacity development might have been missed. In the case of CIES, projects were managed from Ottawa with only very limited participation by IDRC's Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO), particularly in the Consortium's early phases. IDRC and CIES staff interviewed as part of the study agreed that a more prominent role on LACRO's part would have been welcomed. According to those interviewed, LACRO is better placed (than Ottawa) both to promote South-South and regional links with other organizations and to provide CIES with "strategic intelligence" related to thematic and organizational networks and experiences of other consortium-style organizations in the region. Connecting regional partners constitutes capacity development opportunities as reflected in IDRC's "good practices" for capacity development (CIES Study 2008, p.50).

These findings raise interesting questions about how best to identify and address organizational capacity development with partners. Should organizational capacity development be supported out of IDRC's regional offices? Does this imply a rethinking – or, at least, expansion – of the function of regional offices and the role of regional staff? And, how will IDRC address organizational capacity development with partners that are geographically distant from regional staff and resources?

#### *6.2.2 "Positive relationship work" and capacity development*

IDRC program managers and staff invest a great deal of their time, energy and professional expertise in nurturing that serve as a basis for more informal, longer-term efforts to strengthen capacities. In this respect, IDRC program staff see capacity development as something that is not always, or even ideally, defined at the outset, but rather "naturally unfolds" (Makerere Study 2008, 28) over the life of a project. Capacity development intentions are elaborated, and activities defined as projects take shape and partners' capacity needs are identified in an on-going, iterative manner. In this respect, IDRC's role far

exceeds that of mere “donor”; IDRC program officers serve as “friend”, “advisor” or “mentor”, supporting partners during all phases of a project cycle from initial proposal development, through the implementation of research, to the monitoring and evaluation of a project.

Peer exchange between IDRC and its partners is closely tied to IDRC’s proposal peer review process and is conducted through various forms of personal communication carried out by phone, email, and during in-person visits by IDRC staff. Peer exchange between IDRC program officers and partners were mostly described in remarkably positive terms. Overall, the case studies describe a profound sense of the appreciation for the genuine interest and commitment shown by IDRC program staff in its engagement with its partners. Specifically, the Makerere study notes the following:

Several of the consulted researchers at Makerere mentioned personal exchange and contact with IDRC officers as among the most helpful aspects of IDRC’s support. The value of personal support was described as being multifold, but mostly related to the experience that IDRC staff was knowledgeable about the respective research topic and questions, as well as connected within regional and international networks that were of interest to the respective researchers.

In addition, stakeholders shared that IDRC staff show genuine interest in wanting researchers to succeed in their work and they provide hands-on help to make that happen, e.g. through providing constructive feedback on draft proposals, thus helping researchers to improve their project outlines. IDRC staff are seen as being passionate as well as knowledgeable about the research they are involved in. They genuinely care about the projects they support because they are deeply interested in the respective research problématique at stake. This contributes to the impression that IDRC Officers treat researchers as colleagues who share core (thematic) interests, rather than as mere ‘grant recipients’.

.... Rather than having a control function, visits were aimed at identifying possible challenges researchers were facing and helping to address them. This hands-on and content focused approach was perceived as positively distinguishing IDRC’s work from that of most other donors. (Makerere Study 2008, 38 emphasis in original)

Precisely “how” IDRC program staff seek to build capacities through relationships with partners is not easy to capture or describe, given its largely qualitative nature. Many of the case studies make reference to the value of these relationships, and their contribution to capacity building, without elaborating what such “mentoring” and advisory relationships entail in practice. The ICARDA and Makerere case studies, however, offer some explicit insight into the kinds of peer-to-peer exchange and mentoring that form a significant part of IDRC’s informal, relational approach to capacity development. In its relationship with researchers at Makerere, the Makerere study argues that program officers function as “advisors” offering guidance on improving project concept papers and proposals, particularly in the conceptualization of the research problematique – a process which Makerere researchers have found deepens their knowledge and understanding of a particular research theme and “helps them grow” as researchers. Makerere researchers have also

benefited from opportunities for peer engagement with IDRC PO's that have shared reflections and ideas on methodological issues including, for example, the use of trans-disciplinary research approaches. Here, the role of POs as "advisor" and "mentor" is not to dictate, but rather to question and challenge established approaches to conducting research, thus helping researchers to think about alternatives ways of approaching research problems. As one Makerere researcher noted: "They [IDRC] challenge our thinking but leave you alone and don't force you to take on their view" (Makerere Study 2008, p.30).

The ICARDA study mentions a similar process in IDRC's support of ICARDA's participatory plant breeding (PPB) research. For reasons discussed above, IDRC's capacity development work with ICARDA has been almost wholly implicit and informal, relying on peer exchange at particular points in a project's evolution. Through an on-going iterative and interactive consultative process with ICARDA scientists, particularly at the concept note and proposal development stage, IDRC has sought to introduce new avenues of research and new perspectives to research in the area of PPB. Capacity development, in this sense, takes the form of "peer-to-peer exchange" through which "POs comment on the concept note submitted by scientists and ask questions that are intended to engage them in an exchange of ideas, the intention of which, from IDRC's perspective, is to broaden the context of the research to include social and institutional factors and have the project conform to the multidisciplinary requirements of the Program Initiative" (ICARDA Draft Study 2008, p.40). This kind of interactive, peer-to-peer exchange, from IDRC's perspective, constitutes an explicit capacity development process intended to strengthen the capacity of scientists at ICARDA to, following Bernard (2005), "(re)conceive, generate and sustain research" in the field of PPB.

Finally, IDRC's support for the APC's Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM) offers another interesting example of the kind of mentoring support for which IDRC has come to be known. In this project, IDRC's Evaluation Unit played a critical role in strengthening the capacities of the APC Women's Network in their development of a framework and methodology for evaluation of ICT initiatives. In addition to promoting linkages between the APC Women's Network and the global evaluation community, supporting testing and learning by doing, and encouraging dissemination and communication through its support for workshops, the Evaluation Unit served as a mentor to the network through the development of the GEM. The case study describes the Evaluation Unit's mentoring approach in this way:

They try to always be there to answer any question or request, put partners in touch with people, and offer mentoring and coaching on an ongoing basis. They try to act as a resource on evaluation and research methods for IDRC partners regardless of whether the Centre has a project with them or not.

They try to help support where partners are strong and challenge partners to be more rigorous, where they are weak. (APC Study 2008, p.44)

This kind of peer-to-peer exchange is characteristic of what the APC study refers to as "positive relationship work". Among other things, positive relationship work draws on "suggestive dialogue" as a basis for informal capacity development efforts over long periods

of time. Drawing on Mona Girgis' work, the APC study describes suggestive dialogue in this way:

Suggestive dialogue is a conscious attempt not to tell others what to do but instead to give strategic suggestions and ideas over a longer period of time. The purpose behind suggestive dialogue is to give the local counterpart an opportunity to consider the ideas and translate them to the local context. Suggestive dialogue occurs when the practitioner is aware of his or her limitations in a cross-cultural environment. That is, this instrument is used in order to combine the practitioner's imported experience and knowledge with the local knowledge of the counterpart. (APC Study 2008, 5)

The study notes that IDRC program officers and staff have invested considerable time, energy and expertise in nurturing professional peer relationships with APC that, over time, have proved fertile ground for building capacities at the research and institutional levels – “POs appear to have placed a high value on suggestive dialogue, giving strategic suggestions and ideas over a long period of time”. In its analysis, the APC case study draws considerably on the Girgis framework for analyzing organizational capacity development, as it is well suited to situations, like IDRC's, in which “individual relationship” work serves as the foundation for capacity development. In this kind of relationship work, practitioners use three main instruments: negotiation, suggestive dialogue, and helping (APC Study 2008, p.4-6). Building on insights from the Girgis framework, the APC study draws specific attention to the kinds of “ideal practitioner attributes” that make the capacity building relationship between IDRC and APC possible, these include: *sensitivity* to and respect for the differences between the two institutions, and a commitment to understanding how their comments have affected APC and whether or not there is mutual understanding between the two; *creativity* in creating a unique relationship for the purposes of capacity building that is adapted to APC's specific geographical and institutional contexts, rather than merely “picking up” general tools and implementing them; *shared understanding* and the forging of “common ground” between the two institutions, acknowledging that each comes to the relationship with their own institutional histories and are situated within specific geographical, cultural, and political contexts; and, *commitment* and dedication to, and willingness for, positive relationship work – “it is about passion, vocation, and the giving of self to the work” – even in the face of often-challenging circumstances (APC Study 2008, p.5).

Interestingly, the APC study notes the striking resemblance and compatibility between Girgis' ideal practitioner attributes and “IDRC Good Practices for Capacity Development” which emphasizes the value of persistence, flexibility and resilience in its relationships and which promotes, among other things, building on existing capacities and ensuring that capacity development agendas are locally-driven. The APC study found that “where these attributes have been present in IDRC's capacity development work, APC's capacities have flourished” (ibid, p.59). It also points, however, to the very real challenges of capacity building through this kind of informal, long-term relationship work.

Though IDRC is considered to have a good reputation for sensitivity in its relationships with partners, the APC study, and indeed other case studies, note concerns regarding the degree to which IDRC's research and capacity development support are being driven more by IDRC's strategic organizational goals, as they are laid out in PI prospectuses, than by the

goals and aspirations of its partners. While any “relationship” implies the need to negotiate common ground around issues of shared concern, the studies point to a possible danger that IDRC, in pursuit of its own institutional agenda, may not always be sufficiently sensitive to those of partner organizations, with obvious implications for local ownership of capacity building processes. This issue is addressed in greater detail in section 8 below.

Also, several case studies acknowledge the very real challenges that IDRC confronts in sustaining relationships with partners during periods of crisis and note the remarkable persistence and commitment of IDRC program staff in this respect. The UCAD notes that IDRC’s credibility and its reputation as a preferred partner has much to do with its commitment to “maintain its support through thick and thin, despite whatever crises, difficulties and failures may occur” (UCAD Study 2008, 42). The Cambodia and ICARDA studies note partners’ appreciation of IDRC’s long-term perspective and commitment – a characteristic that is uncommon among donors working in regions of instability and strife. In Cambodia, the case study highlights IDRC’s unwavering persistence and commitment in its intent to support research and capacity development in the Ministry of Environment despite the Ministry’s often-serious institutional weaknesses and the obvious challenges of working in Cambodia’s troubled political system. Of specific note is IDRC’s continued presence and support following the 1997 prime ministerial coup which led to the withdrawal of USAID, marking the end of coordinated IDRC-USAID support for the institutional capacity development of the Ministry (Cambodia Study 2008, 88). This case study not only demonstrates IDRC’s steadfast commitment to Cambodia’s Ministry of Environment during a period of serious political turmoil, it also points to IDRC’s creativity in its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. In view of the widespread concern amongst donors about the political situation in Cambodia, IDRC program officers responded by adjusting their programming strategy away from coordinated multi-donor initiatives to one that is less dependent on other donors and therefore more resilient and sustainable vis-à-vis Cambodia’s political climate (ibid p.25).

The CIES and APC studies laud IDRC’s perseverance and commitment particularly during periods of institutional transformation both among its partners and IDRC itself. During the transition from CIE to CIES – an organizational reform involving changes in institutional structure (increasing the number of partners, setting up the board of directors etc.), in operation (change to the awards competitions process), and in the Consortium’s strategy (including greater emphasis on capacity development and policy influence) – the CIES study found that IDRC showed consistency, perseverance, and firmness, closely following these changes and providing guidance and mentoring through the process (CIES Study 2008, 48).

The APC study emphasizes IDRC’s strong commitment over the last decade “as a consistent and continuous supporter of APC projects and activities” (APC Study 2008, p.60) despite periods of significant institutional transformation for both IDRC and APC which resulted in changes in each organization’s strategic directions, human resources and management systems. According to the APC study, “These systems underlay the ability of the two organizations to establish and maintain their relationship – particularly their openness to giving and receiving insights on organizational capacity” (ibid, p.12). Although IDRC’s internal restructuring and cutbacks has, at times, severely constrained its ability to engage in focused capacity building activities the APC study found that the relationship between the two organizations weathered these periods of change and continues to remain strong.

Having said this, as these organizations, and their individual strategic priorities, continue to evolve – as they have most recently when IDRC’s programming priorities shifted in 2005 – the study notes an early indication that some IDRC staff are beginning to reassess this strategic relationship with APC. This does not necessarily denote a weakening commitment on IDRC’s part, but rather reflects the reality that all relationships tend to have a life cycle. In these ways, both the Cambodia and APC cases demonstrate the real “work” involved in nurturing and sustaining peer relationships and to IDRC’s laudable persistence, commitment and creativity in this respect.

While all six case studies expressed an appreciation of IDRC’s commitment to its partners, supporting them over long periods of time, the Makerere study noted a concern expressed by some researchers at the university that IDRC “always works with the same people” (Makerere Study 2008, p.39). While long-term support for selected individuals and/or institutions will certainly have positive effects in terms of capacity development, the study argues that this approach also “invites criticism” and has the potential to create an “IDRC club” “excluding those who may not have the luck to be personally known by IDRC officers and tends to support the same few” (ibid, p.44). Although not addressed explicitly by the study, IDRC’s support for a selected few in a given institution might well create (or exacerbate existing) conflicts between research teams and/or departments over access to scarce financial resources and research support, and potentially inhibit capacity development in unforeseen ways. Moreover, as Baser and Morgan (2008, 72) note, organizational change may also shift authority and resources in ways that create or exacerbate conflicts in partner organizations.

### *6.2.3 “Partners in learning”*

Though IDRC’s nurturing of professional peer relationships with partners is intended to improve the research and organizational capacities of the latter, the ICARDA and APC case studies describe how partnerships between IDRC and the institutions they support are defined more by mutual learning than by one-way capacity building and draw attention to the strategic value of such partnerships for IDRC.

In addition to IDRC’s support of project-oriented work with APC, the APC study notes the important relationship between the two as “strategic partners”, each “providing insights into the evolution of the ICT4D field and the shifting priorities and stakeholders within it” (APC Study 2008, 21). In the context of the rapidly evolving field, IDRC and APC have each made valuable contributions to the strategic planning and program development of the other. For example, the study notes that IDRC’s support for an APC Africa Strategy Meeting as part of the Acacia Preparatory Phase in 1997, resulted not only in the creation of an APC Africa network but also provided targeted recommendations to IDRC on the implementation of Acacia’s strategic program priorities. In this respect, one IDRC staff member was noted as saying “IDRC and APC have a symbiotic relationship. We wouldn’t be where we are without them and vice versa”. The partnership has enabled the two organizations to challenge each other’s perspectives, to improve each other’s performance, and to advance the application of ICTs towards social justice and development ends (ibid, p.19). In a similar respect, the study notes the ways in which IDRC and APC have functioned as “strategic allies” in global ICT4D discussions and policy processes wherein,

“Given a similar pro-social orientation, they have been able to advocate for shared interests and approaches to development. While this has not usually been formally coordinated, these activities have provided the intellectual space for IDRC and APC to learn from each other and to reinforce their relationship” (ibid). Lastly, the case study emphasizes how IDRC’s support for the APC’s Gender Evaluation Methodology – a framework and methodology for the evaluation of ICT initiatives developed by the APC Women’s Network – not only strengthened the capacities of the APC, but also contributed to IDRC’s knowledge and practice. As the study remarks:

The GEM collaboration was frequently cited throughout the case study process as having also contributed to IDRC’s capacity, in that it is now applied in the development of many large ICT4D projects. Without GEM, it’s not likely that IDRC would have had such an active consideration of gender in all ICT4D areas. Through supporting GEM, IDRC found itself in the position of having to “walk the talk.” To assist it in it’s “walking,” the ICT4D team has hired some WNSP members to act as GEM consultants in Southeast Asia and Latin America. Earl also acknowledges that the GEM has challenged her to rethink her own assumptions about the gender neutrality of IDRC’s other flagship evaluation methodology—Outcome Mapping. Earl notes, “Outcome Mapping doesn’t explicitly bring [gender] out. The GEM team helped me realize that. Maybe we do need to make it more explicit”. (APC Study 2008, p.43)

Likewise, the ICARDA study notes that the collaboration between IDRC and ICARDA in participatory plant breeding research greatly benefited IDRC. Early on in the relationship between IDRC and ICARDA, the study notes, IDRC program staff “identified the innovative potential of ICARDA’s approach to PPB and saw in it a promising and valuable way of supporting IDRC’s [evolving] biodiversity program” (ICARDA Draft Study 2008, p.38). There had been no intentions or expectations to develop the capacities of ICARDA PPB scientists at the outset of their relationship, but rather, the expectation was the reverse: “ICARDA PPB science would be used in the development of IDRC’s Biodiversity Program” (ibid). From the perspective of both IDRC program officers and ICARDA scientists, IDRC’s support for ICARDA’s PPB research was not only intended to benefit the ICARDA scientists involved, but was also seen as a valuable contribution to IDRC’s capacities and programming by “providing IDRC with the opportunity to use scientific results to give scientific credibility to participatory research, one of IDRC’s research pillars” (ibid, p.39).

Because specialized fields of development research are always evolving as new ideas, approaches and actors emerge and reshape the research terrain, it is not surprising that professional peer relationships between IDRC and its partners are often two-way, characterized by mutual learning and shared benefits. Given this, it is interesting to note that of the six organizational case studies that form part of the strategic evaluation, only the ICARDA and APC studies explore this aspect of IDRC’s capacity development relationship with partners. It may be that IDRC’s relationship with UCAD, Makerere, CIES, and Cambodia’s Ministry of Environment is in fact characterized by mutual learning and shared benefits of this kind but was not elaborated in the reports themselves. Alternatively, it may be that the nature of IDRC’s capacity development relationship with partners is highly

specific -- that the amount of mutual learning and shared benefits between IDRC and partner organizations depends heavily on, for example, the existing capacities of individual partners, the length and history of the partnership, the extent of IDRC's regional presence, and/or the extent to which a spirit of trust and collegiality have been established between individual POs and researchers. Unfortunately, insights along these lines could not be gleaned from the case studies themselves.

What is interesting about relationships of this kind is that they have the effect of unsettling traditional top-down, hierarchical notions of "capacity development" as a unidirectional process in which a strong institution invests in, and even directs, the development of a weaker institution's capacities. In so doing, peer relationships of this kind also have the effect of challenging often-simplistic identities of donor and recipient – in many cases, the two are "partners in learning" (APC Study 2008, 19).

#### *6.2.4 Encouraging opportunities for program level and corporate learning*

Given that much of the capacity building undertaken by IDRC is done informally through the relationships between IDRC staff and partner organization staff, the APC study also recommends that the Centre encourage opportunities to reflect on organizational relationships and relationship management. Capacity development cultivated through positive relationship work, often over long periods of time, requires knowledge and skills in "relationship management" (APC Study 2008, 63). IDRC needs to ensure that all staff, often across multiple PIs, working with a partner organization have an opportunity to exchange observations periodically on the partner including discussion and analysis of "what is working and what is a challenge". The goal of such cross-PI exchange is, in the words of the APC study, to "help POs to come to a better shared understanding of the partner organization, including what may or may not be an emerging capacity issue". In preparation for these meetings, the study suggests that IDRC ensure that all staff have access to the current strategic plans and priorities of partners for review.

#### *6.2.5 Promoting peer-to-peer networking and mentorship*

In addition to the kinds of mentoring and peer exchange IDRC engages in with partners, POs also take on the role of "facilitator", seeking to strengthen capacities through support for peer-to-peer networking and through the provision of external advisors (as mentors) to support capacity development. Networking is a critical element of IDRC's informal people-centered approach to capacity development in part because POs acknowledge that partners can learn a great deal from each other, particularly among those working on similar research issues and themes or with similar methodologies and research approaches, either in similar or different regional contexts. Although each case study identified the critical value of IDRC's efforts to facilitate networking among researchers as a means to promote professional exchange and peer support, not all studies discuss this subject in detail. Here, the report draws on examples from IDRC's support of CIES and Cambodia's Ministry of Environment as they offer some interesting examples of the kinds of networking and mentorship promoted by IDRC.

In addition to IDRC's efforts to support networking and more coordinated "networked" research among member organizations of the CIES, IDRC and CIES have sought to

encourage linkages between CIES researchers and those from other countries and regions, particularly Canada. During the early phases of the CIES (then CIE), the case study notes that these relationships were more or less informal, and included participation of international experts in conferences and seminars; interactions between researchers and members of the CIE Advisory Committee which included researchers from Argentina, Chile, the United States and Canada; the recruitment of Latin American and Canadian specialists involved in the Economic Policy Seminar for Latin America (in which CIE participated); and informal contacts with members of Canada's economic community when they visited Peru (CIES Study 2008, p.31). More recently, the case study notes, these linkages have become more formal, including internships for Canadian researchers to conduct studies in Peru and to develop links with Peruvian investigators. The case study found that these strategies have been positive in so far as they have cultivated ties between individual researchers and given Peruvian researchers opportunities to participate in broader thematic networks. However, while "contact networks" have to some extent been maintained between individuals, the study notes that many of these linkages have not been sustained in the long-term or been shared or converted into more institutional ties with the Consortium. Though the study had difficulty determining the reason for this, it notes that it may be due to a lack of topics of common interest among researchers of the two countries (ibid, p.32).

The Cambodia case study highlights a number of networking and mentoring approaches IDRC employs to strengthen the capacities of individual CBNRM project teams and to peer encourage exchange and learning among them. To strengthen the capacities of individual projects teams working in CBNRM, external advisors (usually graduate or graduated students) were assigned to project teams in Cambodia to mentor researchers during the process of field research, to help teams identify capacity needs and to design capacity development activities, as well as to offer support in the analysis and preparation of research reports (Cambodia Study 2008, p.45). Among other things, the role of external advisors has been to stimulate thinking and innovation among project teams concerning how to design and implement CBNRM approaches. One project team described the role of the external advisor in this way: "he always asked questions, never gave answers. He started with big questions, and then he broke those down into smaller ones. This helped us along in the planning of activities, because then we could think of big questions as our objectives and the smaller questions as outputs, and then we could think of how to produce those outputs and then we had half of our plan already" (p.50).

IDRC's capacity development strategy in Cambodia also encouraged opportunities for peer-to-peer networking among groups of CBNRM researchers not only locally and provincially within Cambodia, but also regionally and internationally. The Cambodia study emphasizes that encouraging networking of this kind was intended to develop the capacities of project teams, but also to provide opportunities for IDRC-supported CBNRM researchers in Cambodia to contribute to the capacity development of partners in national, regional and international networks (ibid p.46). In collaboration with other donors, IDRC supported an initiative to bring together Cambodian practitioners working on community-based natural resource management with the aim of catalyzing a process of reflection, analysis and documentation of the various case study experiences and outcomes from different project teams. Support for this core group of CBNRM practitioners has evolved over time, involving different networking and collaborative activities focused on specific issues or resources (Cambodia Study 2008, p. 29-30). In 2005, the CBNRM Learning Institute was

formed with the intention of supporting activities to sustain and expand these networks and “communities of practice” in the region (ibid, p.30).

At the institutional level, IDRC’s support of capacity development in Cambodia’s Ministry of Environment has also involved a strong mentorship component. At the time of the Ministry’s formation, IDRC assigned an external environmental consultant to serve as Environmental Policy Advisor (EPA) with the mission of helping the Ministry to meet its critical organizational needs: “It was to assist in defining the new agency’s structure, in determining its overall mandate and responsibilities, and in devising its first organizational work plan” and to take the lead in coordinating with other donors and in developing IDRC’s environmental program in Cambodia (Cambodia Study 2008, p.21). Although the nature of this mentoring relationship between the EPA and Ministry staff is not made explicit in the case study report, it does note the critical value of this long-term mentoring relationship given the relatively weak existing capacity of the Ministry.

Of course, there are also challenges inherent in assigning external advisors to facilitate IDRC-supported research and capacity development work. Although not discussed at length, the APC study noted that the failure of the IDRC-supported GRACE project was rooted, at least in part, in the assigning of a facilitator for a GRACE workshop (APC Study, 2008, p.45). Although the facilitator’s contributions to the workshop were appreciated by APC participants, conflict emerged over the negotiation of her contract, eventually leading the project into a formal mediation process, leading to the eventual collapse of APC’s participation in GRACE. While such “arranged marriages” always have an element of risk, the example speaks to the critical importance of IDRC dedicating sufficient time and energy to ensuring a good fit between its partners and external advisors, facilitators etc. (ibid).

Interestingly, IDRC programs also draw on other parts of the Centre to support and mentor partners in important ways. As mentioned earlier, the APC study found that the GEM project benefited greatly from the support and mentorship of IDRC’s Evaluation Unit in the conceptual work, testing and promotion of the APC gender evaluation methodology (2008, 39). Although not mentioned explicitly in the other case studies, it is likely that IDRC programs draw extensively on the Evaluation Unit and other parts of the Centre as a means to link partners to resource persons with the kind experience and know-how that individual partners need or want.

Despite their challenges, the potential value of peer-to-peer networking and the assigning of external advisors to serve as mentors in capacity development cannot be underestimated. First, given the constraints of time and resources that IDRC programs confront, networking and mentorship of this kind has the potential to compliment and contribute to IDRC capacity development objectives (and the goals of partners) while reducing the dependency of researchers on individual POs. Second, and equally important, it widens the pool of experience and expertise from which partners can draw. Particularly where researchers are partnered with peers and/or advisors with experience and expertise from their region, or with individuals working on issues of shared concern in other regions, the potential for capacity development far exceeds that which can be achieved by individual POs. The clear emphasis on and support for networking in IDRC projects suggests that program officers understand well its potential value for capacity development.

## **7. RESULTS OF IDRC'S CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF PARTNERS**

The six organizational case studies illustrate a variety of highly positive outcomes of IDRC's support for capacity development with its partner organizations. Though by no means exhaustive, this section provides a discussion of some of the key areas where IDRC's support for capacity development has achieved notable results, and an analysis of issues and concerns regarding capacity development outcomes suggested by the case studies.

Overall, given IDRC's historical emphasis on developing capacities that target "research supply" – though this is changing as the Centre devotes greater energy and investment to ensuring that the research it supports influences policy – the six case studies reveal that while IDRC has achieved results in and across all five of the Research-into-Use categories of capacity development, IDRC has paid closer attention to, and to has therefore achieved more substantive results in, strengthening the capacities of organizations to conduct research, with comparatively fewer results in strengthening the capacities for dissemination and policy advocacy.

Having said this, readers are encouraged to judge the results discussed below with some caution as particular capacity development outcomes may have been insufficiently documented in the case study reports and therefore underestimated in this analysis. In a number of case studies, for example, it appears that organizational capacities to manage research (category 2) have been strengthened but have not been made explicit in the case study reports. It is hard to imagine, for example, that partner organizations have improved their capacity to conduct research or to conceive and sustain complex research initiatives without also strengthening their capacity to manage research activities. Yet, examples of positive outcomes in the capacity to manage research receive comparatively less attention in the case study reports. Similarly, given considerable conceptual overlap between categories 4 and 5 – the capacity to use research results and the capacity to create and/or mobilize research links with policy – examples of positive outcomes in these areas are often blurred in the case study reports. Specifically, while the case studies highlight efforts to use IDRC-supported research to influence policy, the results of efforts to improve the dissemination of research results and to promote dialogue between researchers, policymakers and other research users (both of which are critical to policy influence) are given far less attention (and so, are likely underrepresented in the discussion below).

### **7.1 Capacity to conduct research**

From the case studies, there is considerable agreement that, first and foremost, IDRC has achieved impressive results in its support for capacity development aimed at enabling researchers and organizations to conduct research. Given the often scarce financial resources available for research in many regions of the South, several studies argue that IDRC's support for research, itself, improves the capacities of researchers by providing organizations with the kinds of financial resources needed to undertake and sustain research projects and

programs. The CIES study, for example, found that IDRC's support for CIES's annual competition, used to award funding to individual investigators for research projects, has improved the opportunities and capacities of researchers to undertake research in Peru. Although the awards program is open to both experienced and junior researchers, the study notes the fundamental role of the awards program (and other forms of CIES research support) in strengthening the research capacities of young, junior researchers, particularly where financial support for research is coupled with mentoring and training opportunities. Research projects financed through CIES have, over time, enabled young (as well as more senior) researchers to study in depth, to publish, and to develop their own lines of research. The study reports that the distinctive emphasis CIES has placed on supporting and mentoring young researchers has had very positive effects in terms of developing a growing cadre of renowned researchers in Peru: "We were told several young researchers have been professionally shaped or have grown with CIES mentoring, going from research project assistants to principal researchers, acquiring experience and credibility along the way. This has given them standing and recognition in their area of expertise" (CIES Study 2008, p.33). In addition to improving the individual capacities of researchers, the CIES research award competitions, have also strengthened the capacities of CIES member organizations. In addition to helping to build and sustain a critical mass of high-quality researchers in Peru, the study found that winning CIES research grant competitions gives an organization credibility, which in turns allows it to have access to other sources of funding to carry out research. Thanks to new funding opportunities for research and a growing stock of qualified, well-trained researchers CIES member organizations are better resourced, enabling them to create and/or sustain research programs (ibid, p.35).

Along similar lines, the Makerere study highlights the positive effects of IDRC's research and capacity development support for students. Using the "Uganda Community Wireless Network" project as an example, the study argues that the project gave students an opportunity to put into practice what they had learned in the classroom:

For the first time, they had been able to apply theoretical knowledge in a concrete research environment, thus broadening their ability to connect theory to practice. They gained knowledge, skills and experiences related to research project planning, and management, and had enhanced their knowledge and practical experience in their particular area of study and work. ... The particular project meant that the students worked in different communities, and had to work closely with community members. These gained experiences led several of the students to develop new, related research questions which they are currently pursuing as part of their compulsory 4<sup>th</sup> year individual research projects. (Makerere Study 2008, p.36)

Not only did students gain knowledge, skills and practical experience related to the design and implementation of research, how they conceptualize their research was broadened to include new lines of questioning, and consideration of new kinds of stakeholders (e.g. community members) that they had not previously considered. Using the "Private Sector-led Aquaculture and Malaria" project as an example, the Makerere study more clearly illustrates how consideration of new stakeholders constitutes a strengthening of the capacity to conduct research. Specifically, the study found that efforts to integrate community stakeholders into a project resulted in changed attitudes, on the part of university researchers, concerning the potential contribution of local communities to research.

Members of the research team, once unable to see the value of stakeholder involvement in research, developed greater appreciation of the kinds of inputs community members could offer and the “value added by their inputs in view of the project’s aim to provide useful research findings that could really make a difference” (Makerere study 2008, 35).

The value of exposing students and young researchers to opportunities to conduct research, often for the first time, cannot be underestimated. As the CIES study emphasizes, IDRC’s contribution to capacity development of this kind goes far beyond the individual; strengthening the capacities of the next generation of researchers goes a long way towards strengthening and sustaining organizations and research systems. Specifically, it helps to build a critical mass of young, engaged researchers who see a future for themselves in their chosen field of development research. It also serves to stimulate new ideas and lines of questioning that can be incorporated into their own, future research endeavors.

Significantly, the case studies point to laudable gains in strengthening the capacities of researchers and research teams in new and innovative approaches to development research. The Cambodia case study illustrates this kind of result in greatest detail. In Cambodia, IDRC’s support for capacity development has strengthened the capacities of project teams in participatory research and community-based natural resource management approaches. The case study reports that formal training courses and study tours, held at many different levels (international, regional, national and local) intended to introduce project teams to PRA and CBNRM concepts and approaches. They also were intended to provide opportunities to learn from and share experiences with other researchers (and often other stakeholders), improving the capacities of IDRC-supported projects teams to understand and work effectively in the CBNRM research paradigm. Interestingly, however, the study found that formal training was most effective when coupled with sustained mentoring. In particular, the case study notes discernable differences in the capacity development outcomes between two different projects supported by IDRC - the Community Forestry Research Project (CFRP) and the Participatory Management of Coastal Resources (PMCR) project. Whereas PMCR had a full time advisor(s) (usually graduate or graduated students) that functioned as a co-researcher(s) on the project team, the CFRP had only a part-time external advisor with less intensive involvement with (and who did not see himself as a member of) the project team. As mentioned earlier, external advisors were intended to guide project teams throughout the fieldwork process as well as in identification and design of capacity development activities, and in the analysis and preparation of research reports (p.45). According to the case study findings, the PMCR team, which benefited from consistent mentoring from advisors, achieved better results from capacity development, evidenced by a greater depth of knowledge acquired in PRA and CBNRM concepts and approaches, and in the range and quality of outputs in the form of research reports, papers, and other publications (Cambodia Study 2008, p.43-46).

In a similar respect, IDRC’s support for the APC’s Women’s Networking Support Program (WNSP) has strengthened the capacities of APC to undertake gender-based ICT4D research. Specifically, support for APC’s Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM) projects helped APC evolve into a more externally-oriented project-based organization. As the study remarks, “GEM was one of the first big projects where APC started doing things that were beyond the scope of being a technical services provider” (APC Study 2008, p.42). As a former APC consultant observed, “It was a real fork in the road ... If you look at the

capacity trajectory, APC went from being an organization with strong technical capacities ... to being an organization with the ability to manage complex and abstract projects” (ibid). In terms of research capacity, the GEM projects introduced APC’s WNSP to more formal evaluation techniques and greatly expanded their appreciation of more rigorous academic research methodologies in pursuit of social change. As a result, the APC’s Gender Evaluation Methodology – a framework and methodology for evaluation of ICT initiatives – has been widely disseminated in both the evaluation community and the thematic ICT community. As noted earlier in this report, the GEM projects have also contributed to the IDRC Evaluation Unit’s own knowledge and practice in this area.

Overall, the case studies suggest that IDRC’s support has consistently strengthened the knowledge, skills and experience of individual researchers, project teams and organizations to undertake research. Although not made explicit in most case studies, it may be reasonable to infer that this has improved not only the “stock” of innovative research produced, but also the “quality” of that research and its outputs. As mentioned, IDRC’s support for the GEM projects greatly enhanced the capacity of the WNSP to undertake rigorous, high quality research in the design and testing of a gender evaluation methodology for ICT initiatives. Similarly, the UCAD study illustrates an example of how IDRC support served to strengthen the capacity of researchers to produce high quality ICT research and products. At UCAD, IDRC’s support for the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science’s ICT Resource Centre included improvements to curricula and equipment to provide better teaching conditions and an applications development laboratory to enable students to contribute to IDRC projects in the field. Also provided were travel bursaries for students to continue studies in France; these not only strengthened the knowledge and capabilities of individual researchers, but also enabled them to improve the quality of the software applications they produced for marginalized, and essentially illiterate, communities in Senegal. The study notes that the quality of these products has, in turn, accelerated their dissemination, helping communities across the country.

Overall, the findings suggest that IDRC’s support for capacity development to conduct research has achieved impressive capacity outcomes both for individual researchers and for organizations. At an organizational level, strengthening the capacity to conduct research helps to build and sustain a critical mass of experienced and well-trained researchers, although at least one study emphasized the on-going problem of “brain drain” (see section 8). Improving the capacity to undertake research, the studies find, translates into greater visibility and recognition, both for individual researchers and organizations, at national, regional and international levels. Greater visibility and recognition has, in turn, better enabled researchers to disseminate and publish their research, and to use research outputs to influence policy (see below). Importantly, these studies note improved visibility and recognition of individual researchers and organizations, something that also allowed research partners to obtain new funding from other sources and so, to reduce their reliance on individual donors.

## **7.2 Capacity to manage research**

Though not discussed in as much detail, the case studies do identify that the capacity to manage research had been improved at project, organizational and institutional levels. At the project level, for example, the Makerere and Cambodia studies found evidence of new or

enhanced capacities to manage research projects. In Cambodia, the study found that participating in IDRC-supported projects enhanced the knowledge and experience of researchers in the area of proposal writing, project planning and project management. As a result of both formal training and mentorship, the Cambodia study notes positive outcomes in the capacity of project teams to manage research, which included greater capacity to build research teams; to plan, implement, manage and document research activities; to develop ENRM management plans, to establish and strengthen partnerships and collaborative activities with like-minded initiatives, and to develop more systematic approaches to institutionalize the CBNRM approach in other initiatives and with partners (Cambodia study 2008, p. 48-49). In each of these areas, the study notes the critical importance of IDRC POs and external advisors in building capacities. Although less specific, the Makerere study remarks that training in project management encouraged one principal researcher in the Institute of Environment and Natural Resources “to approach his role as project leader differently” (Makerere Study 2008, p. 35-36). Although the case study does not elaborate *in what way* training in project management led this individual to rethink his role as project leader, it suggests that that training not only builds “hard” capacities in project management, but encourages team leaders and member to reflect on and, where necessary, (re)consider how best to manage both tasks and people.

Since research management occurs at multiple levels, IDRC has sought to develop management capacities at not only the level of individual research projects but also at organizational and institutional levels. At an organizational level, for example, the UCAD study illustrates examples of improved capacities to manage research. Specifically, the study found that IDRC’s capacity development support to CREA, which included training courses in project management and organizational evaluation (along with supervision and technical assistance by project managers) strengthened several aspects of its management including governance, administrative procedures, monitoring and evaluation tools, strategic planning, and the preparation of applications for research grants (UCAD Study 2008, p.38).

Within APC and CIES, more significant investment and outcomes in institutional capacity development have translated into improved capacity of these networks to manage research programs. The APC case study notes, for example, the impressive gains made in the network’s management capacity, due in large part to the IDRC-supported INSPRO project. Among other things, the study found dramatic improvements in the areas of human, financial and knowledge management all of which are enabling the network to survive with a small, largely part-time, and geographically dispersed staff. Improved capacities in these areas have strengthened the overall capacity of the network to better manage all aspects of the research it supports around the world.

Likewise, the CIES study notes laudable outcomes in the institutional development of the Consortium (particularly at the level of CIES’s Executive Council) that directly bear on its capacity to manage research. In the area of program and service management, for example, CIES’s research grant competitions have established an excellent reputation with public sector representatives, partner organizations and individual researchers, for whom winning a grant brings a certain prestige and credibility. In addition to this, the study found evidence of improved management capacity in various other programmatic activities including training sessions, internship coordination, and in influencing public policy. (CIES Study 2008, p.42). The case study also highlights positive results in the Consortium’s capacity to manage

research in the areas of administrative and financial management, resource and financial sustainability, human resources, and in the areas of strategic planning and governance. Although many of these examples, from the CIES and APC case studies, refer to higher-level management functions and capacities, they nevertheless directly influence the capacities of these institutions to manage the research of, and across, their member organizations.

### **7.3 Capacity to conceive, generate and sustain research**

The capacity to conceive, generate and sustain research is another area where IDRC-supported organizations have demonstrated positive outcomes. As was discussed in the methodology section of this report, working with the five Research-into-Use categories of capacity development in this cross-case analysis has revealed some ambiguity and overlap between the capacities to “conduct research” and those to “conceive, generate and sustain research”. For the purposes of this analysis, this section highlights examples from the case studies in which organizations have challenged existing paradigms and/or created or advanced new ones, or “reconceived” a research problem in a new and/or innovative way.

Certainly, the APC study suggests that APC’s work to advance the field gender and ICT4D research, discussed above, reveals improved capacities, on the part of the APC’s Women’s Network to conceive, generate and sustain research in this area. Through the development of the Gender Evaluation Methodology, the WNSP has broadened the field of ICT4D research, encouraging new lines of inquiry into women’s involvement in ICT projects as well as the impact of ICT policies and practices on women’s lives (APC Study 2008, 40). Moreover, the development and dissemination of the GEM through networking events such as the APC’s WNSP Global Gender and ICT Forum and through other workshops, is likely to advance this field further, providing additional insights into the perspectives and roles of women and ICTs in Africa and other regions. APC, itself, has demonstrated an interest in building upon the insights of its network of partners and members, agreeing, for example, to manage the Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment (GRACE) project as well as the second round of the GENDARIS program – a small grants fund to address gender issues in ICTs in Africa.

Despite institutional weaknesses in Cambodia’s Ministry of Environment, support from IDRC has achieved impressive outcomes in the capacity of project teams to conceive, generate and sustain ENRM research at provincial and national levels. The case study argues that evidence of improved capacity in this area includes, for example, the growing complexity of community-based ENRM research in the country. As a result of IDRC’s capacity development support, project teams demonstrate an understanding of, and capacity to integrate increasingly complex ENRM issues into their research and to work in diverse local social and economic contexts. More specifically, the study notes the expansion in scope of ENRM research from village to larger (physical and institutional) landscapes, and the incorporation of (and capacity to work with) an increasingly complex array of stakeholders and institutions at different levels, as evidence of ENRM teams in Cambodia to conceive, generate and sustain research (Cambodia Study 2008, p.51). Moreover, the expansion of comparative and collaborative research with partners in other research sites in Cambodia is seen to demonstrate not only the capacity of project teams to conceive and undertake complex research activities but also to promote CBNRM approaches in other national agencies and programs (ibid). Also impressive is that, as a result of IDRC’s support for

networking among ENRM/CBNRM researchers at various levels, the study found a growing number of professionals working in ENRM in Cambodia with an active interest and experience in CBNRM - “Many are interested in development and promotion of CBNRM in Cambodia and are keen to collaborate for that purpose” (ibid p. 46). To facilitate and support this collaboration, members and advisors from IDRC-supported projects have developed a variety of networking arrangements, ultimately leading to a ‘network support / capacity building institute (the CBNRM Learning Institute) since 2005, a collaborative research program since 2007, as well as exploratory discussions for a national development research forum since early 2008 (ibid). In this way, building the capacities of individual researchers and project teams to undertake CBNRM research has achieved results that extend beyond the individual level to the level of the research system in Cambodia. Interestingly, the formation and formalization of the CBNRM Learning Institute not only constitutes an effort to strengthen synergies between the CBNRM initiatives but has also become a mechanism through which Cambodian projects are taking greater responsibility for capacity development in CBNRM in the country.

Although the ICARDA study makes limited mention of capacity development “results” per se, IDRC’s support for PPB research at ICARDA might be seen to demonstrate improved capacity to reconceive and advance the scientific field of plant breeding from one that had been traditionally formal and top-down to one that is increasingly participatory in nature. The study highlights that ICARDA has not only made substantial gains in incorporating breeding science into broader development questions, but also, scientists are effectively “reconceptualizing the original PPB problem in ways that help them to incorporate and explain other important social variables – in this case gender – intrinsically related to development issues of broader import”. As the study goes on to explain, PPB scientists “perceive the gender issues – one that is little addressed in the region – in researchable terms and execute the research and report the results in ways that brings breeding science and social science together in the service of useful ends” (ICARDA draft study 2008, p.44).

What the case studies highlight is that the results of IDRC-supported capacity development extend beyond improved capacities of researchers and organizations to “conduct research” as individual researchers and project teams increasingly demonstrate the capacity to challenge existing research paradigms and to create and/or advance new ones. This includes, among other things, the capacity to understand and work with (and often advance) complex ideas and approaches; to generate and implement systematic data gathering, analysis and synthesis procedures; to scale research activities up and/or out; and to apply results towards the advancement of a research field, in policy or in some other way. Interestingly, while IDRC’s support for formal training has surely contributed to the development of such capacities, it is likely that the Centre’s commitment to sustained mentoring and peer exchange, and its consistent support for networking, have made these achievements possible.

#### **7.4 Capacity to use research results**

Given the time, energy and human and financial resources that IDRC invests in development research it is surprising that the case studies offer comparatively less by way of discussion and analysis of outcomes with respect to the capacity of organizations to use research results. At least in part, this reflects that fact that until very recently IDRC has

tended to invest more heavily in capacity development that targets “research supply” than “research demand”. As such, strengthening the capacities of researchers to tailor their research questioning, methodologies, analysis and communication of results in terms of specific application to specific users may, only recently, have become part of IDRC’s capacity development agenda. However, the limited discussion of capacity development results in this area may also reflect, again, some ambiguity and/or overlap between category 4 and 5 of the Research-into-Use framework. Specifically, it seems from the case studies that greater attention is given to the capacity to build links between research and policy, and the capacity to use research results may be considered part of (and therefore analytically folded into) this intention/outcome. While there does appear to be considerable overlap between the two, there is at least one critical distinction between the two, which is that the capacity to use research results is not only about using research to influence policy but extends to a much more diverse array of potential users and uses of research. It includes not only the capacity of researchers to produce research and outputs that are relevant, appropriate and accessible to policymaking/ers, but also addressing the capacity need of users to, for example, engage in and understand the “language of research”, to critique the research in terms of its relationship (and relevance) to “reality on the ground”, to test and adapt ideas and innovations, as well as to access and manage human and infrastructure resources for applying the innovation and sustaining it (Bernard 2005b, p.4).

Although modest in both number and depth of discussion, there are at least a few examples from the case studies of positive outcomes in terms of improved capacity to use research results. The UCAD study found, for example, that through its support for CREA, as part of the SISERA project, CREA researchers were strongly encouraged to start considering how to disseminate research from the very inception of each project; this led to the publication of CREA’s policy bulletins which disseminate and translate research results into layman’s language and “in a few pages convey the essentials without requiring the reader to go through the entire analysis leading up to the results” (UCAD Study 2008, p.46). The study highlights CREA’s increasing involvement in economic studies commissioned by the state and by multilateral financial partners as further evidence of this kind of capacity strengthening, wherein research users themselves have begun to demand research outputs intended to directly inform policymaking processes.

In Cambodia, the case study found that “the use of research results has been a predominant preoccupation” of all IDRC-supported research and capacity development efforts. In these projects, the intended users of research results are government researchers – middle management and technical staff from provincial and national government agencies. To that end, all projects sought to establish and maintain linkages with like-minded organizations by designing collaborative arrangements, organizing meetings and workshops, hosting and participating in field visits, and supporting and participating in networks, as well as joint training activities and other learning events. While the study found, a growing number of ENRM practitioners interested in CBNRM ideas and approaches, research results have, to date, not been used to inform policy within the Ministry of Environment due to larger governance issues in the Ministry (see next section).

While it is clear that IDRC seeks to support linkages and generate dialogue between research communities and policymakers, civil society, and the private sector – indeed several case studies make reference to IDRC-supported projects with this objective – precisely how

IDRC-supported capacity development can/has advanced these efforts as a means to improve the use of research results is not well understood. It would be interesting to consider, and explore in greater depth, the extent to which IDRC's support for capacity development has strengthened the capacities of the research community to produce research results that are relevant and accessible to (and welcomed by) different stakeholders. What kinds of capacity development work best in different situations? What kinds of capacities might be required to work with different stakeholder communities? Does making research results relevant to civil society, government, and the private sector require different approaches? What capacities do stakeholders themselves require in order to engage and work with research organizations in a meaningful and productive way? How, if at all, can/should IDRC work with these stakeholder communities for the purposes of capacity development? Does IDRC have sufficient in-house capacity to work along these lines?

### **7.5 Capacity to create or mobilize research links to systemic policy formation or change**

Though from a reading of the case studies it is clear that IDRC's support for capacity development has improved the capacities of some partner organizations to create and/or improve links between research and policy as means to influence policy formulation and/or change, it would seem that IDRC is still in the process of defining and working through this aspect of capacity development (and the previous), and so its support of partners along these lines has, understandably, not progressed as far as it has in other capacity areas. More specifically, it is not clear, for example, whether IDRC's current efforts – and outcomes – in this area reflect (or rise to the level of) the kinds of capacity development that Anne Bernard sets out in category five of her framework. According to Bernard (2005b, p.4-5 emphasis in original), to create or mobilize research links to policy formulation or change requires, among other things, professional and practical knowledge of policy systems and processes. It is also, she argues, the most “institution-intensive” of the capacity areas, “requiring people with capacities to think and act in terms *organizations as systems* and *individuals as part of coherent groups* and able to work collaboratively with common goals”. Specifically, it includes the capacities to: interpret and implement research results in policy and organizational systems terms; communicate research results / implications horizontally and vertically to policymakers and implementers; advocate and mobilize within and across policy bodies and interest groups; network with self-confidence as an active listener, interlocutor, catalyst; disseminate skills and results of research to other communities; and, think and act in institutional and systems change terms. While there are a few examples from the case studies where IDRC has supported, and achieved positive outcomes, in one or more of these capacity areas, Bernard's analysis would seem to suggest that, to be successful, IDRC may need to invest more heavily in aspects of institutional strengthening.

Although this comparative analysis draws on a very small sample of IDRC-supported capacity development, it is interesting that the most significant gains in developing the capacities of an organization to create or strengthen links between research and policy systems have been observed with CIES – a partner with a mandate to generate research for policy application and in whom IDRC has invested considerable energy and resources for institutional capacity development. Since the transition of CIE to CIES in the late 1990s, CIES has sought to organize and mobilize the Consortium of research centres in Peru to contribute more effectively and sustainably to public debate on policy issues of economic

and social importance to the country (CIES Study 2008, p.18). In terms of capacity development, this included the intention to strengthen and expand policy design and analysis capacities, to improve the quality and relevance of research for policy design and evaluation, to publish and disseminate study findings to encourage active public debate on public policies etc (ibid, p18). From the case study report, it is clear that CIES has achieved many of these intended outcomes. Among other things, CIES has participated in and/or generated different kinds of discussion forums with the academic community, government officials, international cooperation representatives and civil society organizations. Perhaps the most notable example of such efforts were made during the presidential and regional elections in Peru for which CIES developed policy documents, organized meetings with political parties and engaged the media on policy issues. Nationally, this work culminated in CIES taking a prominent role in organizing a debate among presidential candidates (CIES Study 2008, p.38). Other examples of CIES efforts to influence policy change include the cultivation of strategic alliances with public institutions. The CIES study highlights, for example, an agreement signed with the Congress of the Republic that deals with the provision of technical support and consulting services to the Parliamentary Research Centre on current policy issues. More recently, the study notes, CIES has organized workshops with Congressional committees on draft laws on the legislative agenda in which a researcher/analyst and a lawyer/analyst share their perspectives on a bill and answer any relevant questions. This initiative offers a good example of the fifth category of capacity development because, in the words of the study authors, “it ties in research with the legislative process and it was an important step in bringing together researchers and legislative lawyers” (ibid p.39). In order to influence policy, CIES has also sought out strategic partnerships with civil society organizations such as the Health Forum as a means to make it possible for civil society groups of this kind to make use of CIES research to develop strategies to mobilize and advocate for policy change. The study argues that this is an example of CIES’s engagement with research users who “demand” support in public policy analysis (ibid). Other examples of CIES’s achievements in influencing policy include CIES researchers taking a role in advising high-ranking government officials, as well as CIES researchers moving from academia into public service where they are in a position to apply the knowledge gained through CIES research projects in policymaking.

What the case study does not elaborate, however, is precisely how CIES achieved these results. It would be interesting to explore and understand, for example, what capacity development initiatives and outcomes contributed to the CIES’s ability to cultivate and sustain these kinds of research-policy links and, in turn, to influence policy in Peru. Reading between the lines of the case study report, CIES’s success in forging research-policy links suggests that the capacities of CIES researchers – for example, to produce high quality, policy relevant research and to disseminate findings to policymakers and civil society – have been strengthened to a point where CIES has been able to bolster the visibility and credibility of its research and to create a demand for CIES research outputs. Beyond this, did other aspects of IDRC-supported capacity development contribute to CIES’s achievements? Perhaps as part of IDRC’s on-going capacity development efforts, it would be interesting to make more explicit the connections between IDRC’s support for capacity development and the ability of partners’ organizations to successfully build research-policy links. Among other things, this would improve IDRC’s (and partners’) understanding of what kinds of capacity development are most critical to ensuring that organizations are able to influence policy.

As was identified earlier in this report, other case study findings suggest the need for greater attention to and investment in capacity development targeted to improving the mobilization of research links with policy formulation and/or policy change. With respect to both UCAD and APC, although the institutions appear to have made some gains in linking research and policy there is little evidence to suggest that this has been part of a deliberate capacity development strategy by IDRC. The UCAD study, for example, found that improvements in the quality of ICT software applications, and in the overall capacity of UCAD's ICT Resource Centre, have "contributed to creating a new political environment favourable to the effervescence of ICTs. Prior to that point, this rather new problem had not been seen as a potential to the problems of development" (UCAD Study 2008, p. 37). While impressive, the study insists that capacity development at UCAD ought to be expanded to include a more explicit strategy to strengthen the links between UCAD research and policymaking in Senegal. Likewise, while IDRC's partnership with APC has included support for ICT policy research projects, it does not appear from the case study report that this has included support for capacity development in the area of policy advocacy – which is a key component of APC's mission and mandate. Given IDRC's growing interest in supporting research to influence policy, these studies suggest the need for more explicit planning and capacity development investments in this area to ensure that IDRC-supported research is optimally utilized.

Finally, the Cambodia case study demonstrates that even the most explicit efforts to strengthen the capacity of IDRC-supported research(ers) to influence policy can be undermined by external factors, such as systemic weaknesses in governance. In Cambodia, the case study found that IDRC made substantial contributions to the organizational capacity of Ministry of the Environment by generating needed financial resources through donor coordination, in developing an organizational structure and legal framework, and in establishing a research culture in the Ministry (Cambodia Study 2008, p.57). IDRC's support also effectively strengthened the capacities of Ministry project teams to undertake ENRM research intended to inform Ministry policymaking. However, although project teams utilized a range of strategies to forge links between ENRM research and policymaking in Cambodia's Ministry of Environment – including study tours and other learning events to share the lessons and experiences of research projects with provincial and national leaders – the case study found that while Ministry officials indicated that field visits and briefings by project personnel were an effective means of strengthening their understanding of NREM policy issues, there was little evidence that these efforts had achieved the intended outcome of influencing NREM policymaking in the Ministry. Similarly, the study found that efforts made by the Community Forestry Research Project to take a more leading role in formal policy were more or less unsuccessful. Specifically, their efforts to organize and participate in a consultative process intended to provide recommendations to inform the drafting of the Ministry's community forestry sub-decree failed; as the study notes, "Participants and organizers in the consultative process felt that the final draft prepared by the [inter-ministerial] committee not only failed to recognize their recommendations, but had contradicted those in a number of critical aspects" (Cambodia Study 2008, p.55). Moreover, the study found that similar consultative processes had been pursued in the drafting of the community fisheries sub-decree, with remarkably similar outcomes (ibid). The study attributes this failure to influence Ministry policymaking to weaknesses in Cambodia's system of governance in which the drafting of legislation is decoupled from policy. Historically, the reason for this has been the overall paucity of relevant policy information to

inform legislation. Presently, the study finds that despite the growing stock of knowledge that can be linked to and inform policy and the drafting of legislation, there continues to be a gap between the two – “in Cambodia policy is more about the personal convictions of government leaders, which cannot always be expressed (or much less implemented) depending on what powerful people think or feel forced to do” (ibid, p.53). This suggests that, at least in Cambodia, the capacity of ENRM research to influence policy requires capacity development at higher levels, including perhaps support for larger governance reforms.

## **8 FACTORS THAT AFFECT IDRC’S CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT RESULTS**

### **8.1 Geography matters: Working in different regional contexts**

IDRC works with and supports partners in different regional environments, each with their own political economy, historical legacies, cultures, norms and practices that shape partner organizations in important ways, including the extent to which research is valued, what research themes and issues are privileged, how research is conceptualized and implemented, and the extent and ways in which research is used (for example, to inform policy). Though not discussed in detail in the case studies, there are at least a couple of examples related to the regional character of research systems and their implication for how IDRC conceives and supports capacity development with its partners.

First, the UCAD study describes the African continent broadly as a region that, until recently, has not been inclined to support research. Senegalese researchers identified this difficult environment for research – characterized by “the gradual withdrawal of the state from higher education, the uncritical adoption of theories and methodologies developed abroad, the absence or inadequacy of exchanges with academics in other countries, financial insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and financial and legal obstacles” - as a critical factor that underlies and ultimately constrains the university’s capacity for research (UCAD Study 2008, p.9). Among other things, this lack of support for research at the system level has led to a critical problem of “brain drain” in Senegal in which high caliber researchers – often the very researchers supported by IDRC’s investments in research and capacity development at UCAD – are leaving the country to pursue their research in universities and research centers in the North. The study also points to the weak links between the research and policy system as a factor that severely constrains the capacity of UCAD research to influence policy and societal change at large.

The ICARDA study also points to the challenges IDRC and ICARDA confront working in a difficult regional context. The Middle East and North Africa are fraught with tensions and conflict given the kinds of religious and cultural difference, language, gender, and ownership issues that characterize the region (ICARDA Study 2008, 14). Overall, the study explains that the region is culturally and politically conservative making particular research themes and approaches potentially difficult to introduce. For example, the study notes the challenges of integrating gender issues and participatory research methodologies in a cultural context not predisposed to such approaches. None of these factors are easy to address and require both patience (i.e. potentially longer time horizons for expected outcomes) and capacity development approaches that are sensitive to, and tailored for, the social and cultural

specificities of the region that. Unfortunately, the ICARDA study does not elaborate how IDRC negotiated these challenges in its efforts to strengthen the capacities of ICARDA researchers in gender and participatory research. It may be inferred however, that the nurturing of close peer-to-peer relationships between MERO POs and ICARDA scientists (described earlier), and the confidence and trust built up between them, have made it possible for IDRC's to encourage ICARDA in these areas, despite the challenges posed by this particular regional environment.

## **8.2 A diversity of partners with different institutional forms**

The six cases studies reflect something of the diversity of IDRC's partners, distinguished not only by their different regional contexts but by their unique institutional forms. IDRC supports research and organizational capacity development among national and international research centers, government agencies and research and advocacy networks (each with their own diverse set of member organizations) to name only a few. Although not explored in detail in the case studies, each implies a (somewhat) different kind of change process and the need for a tailored approach to capacity development that is sensitive to these differences. This section examines what the case studies do reveal on the subject.

### *8.2.1 The unique challenges of universities*

Universities, as an institutional form, are quite different from other kinds of partner organizations supported by IDRC. Unlike other partner organizations, universities are institutions that involve both teaching and research. This has potentially significant implications for IDRC's support of research and capacity development in universities. UCAD, for example, is "an organization essentially oriented towards teaching" (UCAD Study 2008, p.11). This situation has been made worse in recent years as high registration rates and large class sizes translates into correspondingly large teaching workloads for instructors of the university. As a result, the study explains, "it is difficult to find time to dedicate to research" (ibid). The privileging of teaching over research has translated into a situation in which UCAD faculties and departments confront a "systematic dearth" of resources for research and research-related infrastructure (including laboratories and other equipment).

This lack of regard for research and the paucity of suitable research infrastructure have, in turn, made it difficult for UCAD to retain high-caliber researchers. As mentioned, the UCAD study notes the critical challenge of "brain drain" to sustaining IDRC's support for capacity development in the university. Although, over the last several decades, Senegal has developed a respectable number of highly capable researchers, many trained in Northern universities though many also in Senegal, UCAD notes that it is experiencing enormous difficulty retaining qualified researchers. Many of the very researchers benefiting from IDRC research and capacity development support are leaving Senegal given "the absence of suitable tools, the lack of laboratories, the lack of regard for research nationally and for the role of the researcher socially" to pursue careers in universities in the North where infrastructure for research is more advanced and salaries are better.

As a result, despite positive outcomes from IDRC's support of capacity development at UCAD – including the "acquisition and advancement of knowledge, skills and know-how",

“the rich production of research, theses and publications”, and with this, greater visibility and recognition of UCAD researchers internationally enabling them to disseminate their research (UCAD Study p. 34-35) – the UCAD study found that “Results [of capacity development] at the individual level, , are of limited duration” (ibid, p.35).

Universities also differ from other kinds of partner organizations supported by IDRC in that they are “loosely coupled systems”. To recall, the Makerere study defines loosely coupling as “a situation in which system elements (e.g. parts of an organization) are responsive to each other, but at the same time retain evidence of separateness and identity” (Makerere Study 2008, p.10). In a strikingly similar vein, the UCAD study describes universities as characterized by a “professional bureaucracy”, “one that while being structured around a central axis, is surprisingly independent in its departmental structures, and is characterized by authority relationships based not only on hierarchy but also on expertise” (UCAD Study 2008, p.6). According to the Makerere study, certain aspects of organizational functioning are tightly coupled in universities – these might include how staff are paid, how students are admitted, and how the academic year is structured. At the same time, various other aspects of a university’s organizational functioning are usually loosely coupled – these include, for example, the content and style of lectures, if and how instructors engage in research, and whether and to what degree they engage in professional networks both inside and outside the university (Makerere study, 2008, p.10).

This is significant in relation to IDRC’s support for capacity development and for the potential for IDRC’s support of capacity development of individual researchers to “trickle up” to other organizational scales. Although most of IDRC’s support for capacity development at Makerere has been targeted at the level of individual researchers and/or research teams, in their discussions with the case study authors, IDRC staff working with Makerere expressed a intention, or “hope”, that “projects might, in the mid to long term, trickle up and have positive impacts on the research capacities of the respective department or the university as a whole” (Makerere study 2008, 26). However, in loosely coupled systems like universities, the study notes that the expectation that changes at the individual level will automatically “trickle up” to affect change at higher organizational levels is unrealistic:

Loose coupling affects how change processes occur in an organization such as a university, and to what extent they can be planned or predicted. The concept of tight/loose coupling suggests that the assumption of **‘trickle down’** or **‘trickle up’** changes resulting from interventions may fully apply only to some (i.e. tightly coupled) aspects of organizational functioning and change. While in a loosely coupled environment, the effects of interventions at one level on another are unpredictable, and – if they occur – tend to do so in a not linear manner.

This implies that while change processes in tightly coupled parts of an organization may be planned for systematically (based on interventions at one level of the organizations and its predictable effects on other parts), this is not or at least less the case for loosely coupled aspects. For the latter, tailored initiatives aiming at micro changes that use individuals or small groups as the entry point for change appear to be more realistic and appropriate. (Makerere Study 2008, p.13)

This argument is supported by the study's finding that among the research projects reviewed, only limited or somewhat "accidental" effects on broader organizational levels have been achieved (ibid, p.37).

Interestingly, the Makerere study explains that IDRC's own loosely coupled structure and programming approach, organized along thematic lines, "mirrors these existing structures of how research takes place at the University", and in this way, is well-positioned to address the specific needs of individual researchers and projects, including IDRC's support to researchers to engage in professional networks. In the context of capacity development of specialized researchers, the Makerere study argues that "the concept of loose coupling underlines the relevance of external professional networks as thematically, rather than institutionally defined points of reference" (Makerere Study p.13).

Although only the Makerere University and UCAD studies discuss this aspect of institutional structure (tightly versus loosely coupled systems) and how it might affect IDRC's approach to capacity development, this discussion raises some interesting issues and questions. Not unlike universities, networks, in whole or in part, might also be characterized as loosely-coupled systems (although, unlike universities, networks tend to be organized around a theme or issue of shared concern). On the other side of the spectrum, highly specialized research centres like ICARDA would likely be considered more tightly coupled. Perhaps government agencies such as Cambodia's Ministry of Environment might fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. Given this, it would be interesting to explore more thoroughly the different kinds of institutions that IDRC supports and how IDRC's capacity development intentions, strategies, and outcomes differ between more tightly coupled and loosely coupled systems and what learning has emerged from these experiences. This kind of analysis might provide valuable insights and help to guide and refine IDRC's future organizational capacity development interventions.

### *8.2.2 Support for capacity development in networks*

Though not discussed in any explicit way in the case studies, IDRC's support for capacity development in networks involves a complex set of relationships and activities that present unique challenges. Support for both the CIES and APC networks included institutional capacity development support at the network level and research capacity building at the sub-network level with different groups of network partners. The extent to which IDRC can cultivate a strong working relationship with individuals at these various levels is not altogether clear. However, the CIES study notes, for example, that most of its institutional capacity strengthening has been achieved through its relationship with a relatively small team of individuals in the Consortium's Executive Office (CIES Study 2008, p.51). While this is probably not uncommon in the way IDRC works with networks, for pragmatic reasons, the study notes that when networks undergo changes in leadership and management structure, there is a potential risk in not having a wider array of relationships in different parts of the network through which to gauge, understand and influence these change processes.

### *8.2.3 Support for capacity development in government agencies*

IDRC supports capacity development in government agencies as a means to influence the scope and directions of government-supported research, to improve the quality of the

research undertaken, and in so doing to strengthen the capacity of government agencies to formulate and implement programs and policies in a particular thematic area. However, as will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of the report, individual government bodies in the South are often situated in larger governance systems that are weak and unreceptive to change, which can seriously inhibit the reach and sustainability of IDRC's investments in research and capacity development.

### **8.3 Governance structures and their impact on IDRC's support for capacity development**

The potential to invest in and build research capacity among IDRC's partners is shaped not only by the nature, organization, and priorities of individual institutions but also by larger governance structures in the regions where IDRC supports research. In both the UCAD and ICARDA case studies, the capacity of researchers to undertake particular types of research or to explore new thematic areas and methodological approaches has been, and continues to be, governed by external coordinating bodies that set the parameters and priorities of the research system.

In Senegal, the case study highlights that research at UCAD is governed to a significant extent by the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES), the coordinating body for higher education in Francophone countries in Africa, which dates from the first years of independence of these countries. Intended to create interregional harmonization of research, professionals at UCAD argue that CAMES functions as a sort of intellectual "straightjacket" that "stifles innovation in development research" (UCAD Study 2008, p.10) due to its overarching emphasis on basic research to the detriment of applied research needed for development. Because professional advancement in academia depends entirely on the CAMES requirements, the directions and imperatives of CAMES have a profound influence on the research themes chosen by young researchers (*ibid*).

In Cambodia, issues of governance also play a significant part in delimiting the extent and reach of IDRC's capacity development interventions. IDRC has invested considerable time, resources and expertise in nurturing the organizational capacities of the Ministry of Environment itself and research capacities of two Ministry departments - one office of the Forestry Administration and of the Forestry Faculty of the Royal University of Agriculture - largely through capacity development of key personnel. However, the Cambodia study notes that there is, at present, little indication of enhanced organizational capacity and performance beyond that of key individuals in these departments (Cambodia Study 2008, p.89). In particular, as discussed earlier, the study found that efforts of ENRM project teams to influence policymaking in the Ministry have not been successful. The study attributes this, at least in part, to weaknesses in the wider governance systems as they relate to environment and natural resources issues in the country. The study found that while IDRC's support for capacity development in community-based research intended to inform an evolving policy framework – by linking the policymaking process to lessons learned from field level – is a critical component in building the organizational capacity of the Ministry of Environment, effective and sustainable capacity development in ENRM needs to be linked with

governance reform initiatives, “supported by national political will and power, and by international resources” (ibid, p.16). This includes not only support for governance reform but also improved coordination and collaboration between the many agencies and organizations involved in ENRM in the country.

While these larger governance systems have the potential to hinder IDRC’s efforts to build research and organizational capacities among its partners, this risk might be seen as a potential opportunity for the Centre. In the three case studies mentioned, much of IDRC’s current support for capacity development is at the level of the individual scientist and/or research team. While this approach will certainly improve the knowledge and skills of these individuals and the quality of their research (at least from IDRC’s perspective), if the Centre wishes to influence the larger research systems of which these scientists are part, the case studies speak to the potential benefit of IDRC cultivating stronger relationships with, and targeting some of its capacity development efforts towards, these very governance systems that currently exercise considerable influence over how IDRC’s partners (scientists and their institutions) conceptualize and operationalize their research. It suggests the critical importance of IDRC targeting, and perhaps expanding, its capacity development approach at multiple scales to ensure that its investments – of time, energy, expertise and financial resources – are effective and sustainable.

#### **8.4 “Ownership is key”: Capacity development, IDRC programming, and the question of local ownership**

IDRC’s approach to supporting development research derives from a core value and concern that it focus on local development problems and support research that produces locally relevant solutions to those problems. Likewise, the Centre’s preferred approach to capacity development, detailed in its “IDRC Good Practices for Capacity Development”, emphasizes the need for capacity development to be part of, and contribute to, locally-driven research agendas. However, the case studies suggest that in its support for research and capacity development, there is a discernible tension between ensuring that IDRC’s support reflects the funding priorities of the Centre and individual PIs and encouraging research and capacity development interventions that are locally driven and owned.

Overall, there is considerable agreement among partners participating in the case studies that IDRC stands out, vis-à-vis other donors, as an organization committed to ensuring that its support for research and capacity development is driven by the expressed needs and interests of its partners. The UCAD study notes, for example, that researchers are appreciative of IDRC’s locally-driven approach, noting the difference with other donors, “whose financial support often depends on choosing a topic from their own list of priorities” (UCAD Study 2008, p. 16). Although UCAD researchers note the need to align their research projects with the program guidelines of IDRC PIs, they “in no way find it a hindrance to relevant local research, since it is itself aligned with Senegalese priorities”. Importantly, the UCAD study finds that while funding requires a certain amount of “fit” with IDRC’s programming priorities, these serve as a “guide” not as a straightjacket for researchers (ibid). In a strikingly similar vein, the Makerere study comments as follows:

IDRC officers are generally seen as being open to and respectful of the ideas of the researchers they support. They do not enforce a specific approach or methodology

for a project, but leave the ‘how’ of a project up to the respective research teams. They discuss and sometimes disagree with researchers; however, they accept their opinion, and will not force them to change their minds. The only areas the Centre was seen to be ‘strict’ about were a) Ensuring the relevance of research for actual development problems; b) Pursuing inter-disciplinary and/or participatory approaches – where applicable; and, c) Involving students in the research process as feasible. For all three issues, researchers viewed IDRC’s strong position as helpful and appropriate. (Makerere Study 2008, 41)

Although the study echoes UCAD’s finding that researchers typically find themselves responding to IDRC priorities and research niches, none of the researchers interviewed as part of the study noted this as a negative aspect of their relationship with IDRC – partly because they generally expected to be required to adapt their own interests to donor priorities (ibid). Overall, the perspective of Makerere researchers was that:

...the Centre was merely providing broadly defined topic orientations without prescribing specific research questions or project designs. This allowed research teams to develop projects that while contributing to a broader topic, also addressed specific development problems in the Ugandan context. Also, as numerous IDRC supported projects were/are part of regional initiatives involving a number of different partners, stakeholders saw the need for a common reference point as the ‘glue’ to keep the initiative together. (ibid)

There was, however, a question raised by some IDRC program officers concerning the extent to which the IDRC/Makerere collaboration had, to date, sufficiently taken the University’s research and development agendas into account. The case study found, for example, that Makerere’s existing strategic plans do not play a strong (if any) role in determining areas for research funded by IDRC (ibid). Although Makerere University has explicitly committed to supporting research that relates to and addresses current and pressing development problems affecting Uganda, the study notes that while IDRC supports this goal by prioritizing the applicability and relevance of research for local development problems, “this alignment remains largely implicit” (ibid).

Overall, relative to other donors, the cases studies suggest that IDRC’s support for research and capacity development reflects and compliments the perspectives, research priorities and capacity needs of its partners. However, the APC and ICARDA case studies raise a concern regarding the extent to which IDRC’s capacity development interventions are being shaped more by IDRC’s mandate, strategic goals, and programming (particularly PI prospectuses) than by the aspirations and capacity needs of partners. The ICARDA study raises a concern that IDRC’s capacity development interventions risk being driven to a significant extent by IDRC program prospectuses and not by the strategic research interests of ICARDA and the larger CG system of which it is part. The study notes that IDRC’s research views and interests sometimes diverge from those of ICARDA. Occasionally this divergence has meant that IDRC has been unable to support certain ICARDA research projects or ICARDA has been unable to accommodate IDRC’s requirements. This tension points to the critical importance of striking a balance between IDRC’s own strategic research and capacity development priorities with those of its partners.

The APC study argues and further elaborates this concern. The study found that while IDRC's ICT4D agenda is largely defined and driven by its networked regional programs, has not necessarily meant that this agenda is locally driven or has the full support of all regional partners (APC Study 2008, 58-59). The case study notes that while the IDRC-APC partnership centers on issues of shared interest and concern, their perspectives have begun to diverge over time as a result of strategic shifts in the ICT4D program area. The case study found that "APC differentiates between its own efforts grounded in social justice and rights movements and IDRC's post-2000 embracing of more economics-motivated ICT4D agenda. This type of divergence has implications for the types of projects – and capacities – of greatest interest to each organization" (ibid, p.59). Although the APC is aware of the complexity of working with highly networked regional programs, made up of an extensive and diverse number of partner organizations, they express concern that IDRC's ICT4D program has not made a concerted effort to understand where the APC is coming from, what its goals and aspirations are, and what capacities the APC hopes to strengthen:

In the post-prospectus era, the IDRC ICT4D team has been required to unify its programming in pursuit of a focused range of research questions. IDRC seeks partners who are willing and able to help it achieve its own goals. While this shift is understandable in the context of the Canadian political reality of results-based management and accountability, it has nevertheless shifted the emphasis of the relationship from what APC hopes to achieve to what IDRC hopes to achieve. As noted by a senior APC staff member, "I've never experienced with IDRC any interest in what we want to do and our strategic plan. I've never been asked about that. [One senior IDRC staff member] thought we didn't have one; I don't know if they looked at it when we sent it... But, if they DO want to build capacity, they have to build it in terms of what the organization wants to do. They need to look at our goals and strategic plan or at least to show recognition of that. It's hard for them though since they work on regional programs... it's hard for them to get the whole picture. Project Officers tend to look at only little slices." (APC Case Study 2008, p.61)

This finding points to a critical need on the part of IDRC to engage in strategic discussions with partners as equals and to cultivate and maintain a spirit of openness and transparency about IDRC's organizational restructuring and shifts in its strategic directions and programming and how these are likely to affect partners. Throughout IDRC's partnership with APC, both institutions underwent significant organizational changes, yet the APC study found little evidence that either organization was fully aware of the profound organizational challenges and changes facing either partner. Specifically, the study notes: "With most interactions between the organizations focused on either projects or trends in ICT4D, important conversations regarding organizational management were not seen as a priority" (ibid, p.18). Though APC invited IDRC to their bi-annual members / donors meetings, and provided IDRC with copies of its annual reports and strategic plans, the study found that IDRC did not regularly provide APC with the types of strategic and operational information available in the DPA Reports to the Board of Governors (ibid).

To ensure that partners are made of aware of shifts in IDRC's strategic directions and programming, the APC study argues the importance of IDRC improving its own

organizational memory and transparency. More specifically it suggests that IDRC staff need to understand how the organization has changed, as well as how their own corporate culture and organizational history has shaped, and affected, its relationship with partners. IDRC needs to be willing to share its own “institutional journey” with its partners not only as a means for shared organizational learning and capacity development, but in order to ensure that they understand how IDRC’s strategic directions shapes its relationship with its partners presently and how it may impact it in the future (ibid, p.65). However, it also speaks to the need for IDRC to strike a balance between its need to support research and capacity development in line with its on strategic funding priorities and the need to ensure that its capacity development efforts are retain a strong element of local ownership.

### **8.5 IDRC’s limited “in-house capacity” for supporting organizational capacity development: A case for greater coordination with like-minded donors?**

While IDRC has and continues to support a broad spectrum of capacity development interventions, targeting an array of capacities – both research and organizational – among a diverse set of partners across the regions of the South, it understandably lacks the resources, expertise, and intention to “do it all”. Given IDRC’s modest budget, compared to many other donors, and its preference and clear comparative advantage in supporting the research capacities of partners, particularly at the individual level, it makes sense that IDRC focus its efforts at what it does best, while also seeking to expand and strengthen its capacity development support in selected areas – for example, in supporting the application and use of research to inform policy and societal change.

As mentioned earlier in this report, if it wishes to expand its support for partners in the area of organizational capacity development, the case studies suggest that it may need to build greater in-house expertise in this area. To recall, the APC study found that IDRC’s own in-house capacities are not sufficiently developed to enable PIs to develop and implement coherent and comprehensive organizational capacity development strategies with its partners – a finding supported by IDRC staff themselves. At the same time, the Makerere study demonstrates that in some regional and institutional contexts, IDRC is not ideally positioned or best suited to undertake support for organizational capacity development. If IDRC wishes to continue, and perhaps expand, its support for organizational capacity development, the APC study recommends that the Centre strengthen its understanding of what constitutes “organizational capacities”, including staff’s knowledge and understanding of research and organizational capacity frameworks, their relative strengths and weaknesses, and how to apply them in an appropriate way according to the needs of partner organizations (APC Study 2008, p.64).

Alternatively, if IDRC wishes to concentrate its efforts in the area of research capacities, which seems by all accounts to be IDRC’s niche and comparative advantage, UCAD and Makerere studies find potential in IDRC seeking to coordinate its capacity development efforts with other donors investing in capacity development – for example, at the institutional level – that might complement IDRC’s own capacity development agenda while also taking advantage of the kinds of synergies that often come from greater coordination of efforts. The UCAD study describes an interesting initiative by its Cooperation Office to create “a forum of donors” intended to encourage collaboration and “the harmonization of projects undertaken with [UCAD]”. IDRC’s West Africa Regional Office believes the forum

could provide a place for UCAD and donors “to exchange ideas on harmonizing practices for organizational capacity building at [UCAD]”. A collaborative donor forum of this kind might, more specifically, enable donors to coordinate their efforts and investments and develop a capacity development strategy – or set of strategies – that are more comprehensive and long-term while allowing individual donors to support those aspects of capacity development that contribute to their mandate and for which they have the optimal in-house capacity, experience and know-how.

## **9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS DERIVED FROM THE CASE STUDIES**

Although the case studies do not, nor were they intended to, capture and convey the full spectrum of IDRC’s efforts and experiences in supporting capacity development among its Southern partners, there are a number of possible conclusions and recommendations that can be drawn from a comparative analysis of these studies:

**Capacity development is fundamental to all IDRC work but is often not made explicit.** Whereas formal capacity development activities, such as training, awards programs, seminars and conferences and the like constitute the more visible, tangible and explicit side of IDRC’s support of capacity development, much of IDRC’s capacity development remains largely implicit in the sense that it has not been captured in IDRC documentation. The findings suggest a few reasons for this: 1) IDRC staff have an often-limited understanding of what constitutes capacity development and how to operationalize it, particularly at the organizational level; 2) IDRC’s approach to capacity development is often informal, characterized by on-going peer exchange and mentorship between IDRC POs and researchers that is not easily documented, or otherwise captured in project documentation; and, 3) IDRC program staff are aware of the sensitive nature of capacity development work and the kind of top-down, hierarchical relationship often implied by the language of “capacity development” and as such are often careful to avoid this language. While partners praise IDRC’s less formal, hands-on approach to capacity development, there is some agreement that the Centre ought to be more explicit and transparent about its capacity development intentions and expectations both to ensure that IDRC and its partners have a shared vision when it comes to capacity development and that all capacity development retains a measure of local ownership.

**While IDRC’s support for capacity development targets the full spectrum of research capacity, it focuses more on “research supply” than “research demand”.** Given IDRC’s historical emphasis on developing capacities that target “research supply”, findings from the case studies reveal that while IDRC has achieved results in and across all five categories of capacity development laid out in the Research-into-Use Framework, IDRC has paid closer attention to, and to has therefore achieved more substantive results in, strengthening the capacities of organizations to conduct and manage research, with comparatively fewer results in strengthening partners’ capacities to use research results and to create or mobilize research links to systemic policy formation or change. While it is clear that IDRC is increasingly committed to ensuring that Centre-supported research influences policy, the case studies suggest that IDRC is still in the process of defining and working through these aspects of capacity development and so it’s support of partners along these

lines has, understandably, not progressed as far as it has in other capacity areas. However, there is a strong demand by partners for IDRC to invest more intensively and systematically support capacity development in these areas to ensure that research is, or becomes, more relevant, appropriate and accessible to a diversity of potential research users (including policymakers, the private sector, civil society, local communities etc.).

**In practice, IDRC's capacity development support focuses more on individuals than institutions.** Although, in some cases IDRC has explicitly targeted its support for capacity development at the institutional level, the case studies suggest that IDRC, first and foremost, seeks to develop the capacities of individual researchers and their research teams. One possible reason for IDRC's preferred focus on individuals, rather than institutions, may be IDRC's relatively modest budget compared to that of other development donors. Focusing on the "people side" of capacity development might be seen to achieve "good value for money". There is also considerable agreement among the case studies, however, that IDRC's approach to capacity development – working along problem or thematic lines, at the level of individual research projects, with individual researchers and their research teams – is what IDRC does best, and is what distinguishes the Centre from other donors. IDRC has a long established history of, and considerable experience and expertise in, nurturing close working relationships with individual researchers and/or research teams with the intent of building research capacities as a means to strengthen the quality, relevance and use of research to solve local and regional development problems.

**IDRC's informal approach to capacity development is the Centre's "niche".** While "hard" capacities are perhaps more commonly addressed through concrete investments in specific capacity development interventions, IDRC's support for capacity development also includes, and is perhaps defined by, developing and nurturing professional peer relationships between IDRC and its partners that are of a more informal, implicit nature. Both IDRC staff and its partners share the perspective that IDRC's greatest strength, and what sets it apart from other international development donors, is its commitment to establishing and maintaining professional peer relationships with their partners. Through peer-to-peer exchange and mentoring, Centre staff and managers are able to share a program initiative's range of experience and expertise with individual researchers and research teams through communication and partnership in a context of "mutual learning" that compliments, but also far exceeds, the benefits of isolated, "one-off training sessions". Throughout the project cycle, IDRC program officers function as "advisors" or "mentors" during the conceptual and methodological development of project concept papers and proposals, during project implementation (including data analysis and interpretation), and/or in the writing and dissemination of research results. Interestingly, peer exchange between IDRC program staff and partners is not only "one way" but, rather, is characterized by mutual learning in the sense that the capacities of IDRC programs are also strengthened through its work with partners. Having said this, the study also makes clear that IDRC POs cannot "be all things to all people". Understanding that programs do not always have sufficient time and human resources to address the capacity needs of partners, IDRC POs also function as "facilitators", encouraging peer-to-peer networking between researchers/teams working in similar thematic areas and/or experimenting with common research approaches (such as participatory research).

**The strategic value of regional offices and staff.** Given IDRC's preferred approach to capacity development, characterized not only by formal training but also peer-to-peer exchange and mentorship between IDRC program staff and researchers, and given the regional specificity of development problems and the external environment in which partner organizations must operate and conduct research, the case studies highlight the critical importance and value of IDRC regional offices and staff for capacity development. IDRC's regional approach enables POs to develop a more extensive and immediate working knowledge of both the regionality of development challenges and the environment (political, cultural etc.) in which partner organizations are situated and, in-so-doing, often facilitates stronger and more productive peer relationships between POs and researchers than is possible through electronic communication and field visits from POs based in Ottawa. Further, the findings suggest that there may be aspects of capacity development for which regional offices and program staff are particularly well suited to facilitate. For example, given the "local knowledge" of regional POs, they may be ideally placed (and have the necessary local and regional contacts) to support capacity development aimed at encouraging dialogue between researchers and stakeholders in government, the private sector, and civil society as a means to ensure that IDRC-supported research addresses the needs and interests of research end users.

**IDRC's support for organizational capacity development has been strategic and selective.** Building on the previous point, findings from the case studies suggest that IDRC does not support organizational capacity development equally with all partners. Since organizational capacity development involves the development and implementation of new systems and procedures, and usually requires the dedication of considerable human and financial resources to be successful, it is understandable that the Centre's support for organizational capacity development is strategic and selective. From the case studies, it appears that whether, and the extent to which, IDRC supports organizational development depends considerably on the institutional structure of partner organizations and partner's organizational capacities needs. Where institutions are "loosely coupled", as with universities (with different departments working in very different research areas), IDRC targets its support at the level of individual research teams (and their departments) since support for capacity development at the institutional level would not likely produce outcomes that would "trickle-down" to individual departments and/or research teams. However, IDRC does support organizational capacity development in networks that, while "loosely coupled" in some respects, share a thematic research focus and are often characterized by joint, coordinated projects. In the case of networks, IDRC targets its OCD support to strengthening the administrative and coordinating functions of networks as a means to improve the coordination and effectiveness of network and the quality of the research it produces. At the same time, it appears that IDRC strategically invests in OCD with newly emerging institutions (where IDRC is in a position to influence the direction and mandate of the institution), as was the case with Cambodia's Ministry of Environment, or (by inference) with organizations whose capacities are sufficiently limited to undermine capacities to conduct research.

Importantly, these insights have only been inferred from the case studies as IDRC is less than explicit about how it makes these strategic decisions concerning when, and to whom, it gives OCD support. To ensure that IDRC's limited resources are optimized, as well as to ensure transparency and fairness, it is important that IDRC make explicit (and perhaps

formalize) the criteria, factors and considerations that drive its decision-making to support organizational capacity development with particular partner organizations (and not others).

**Capacity development – particularly at the organizational level – requires a more explicit, clearly-defined capacity development framework or set of policies.** While a partially implicit approach to capacity development may be well suited to particular partners and the development of particular capacities, organizational capacity development requires a coherent and explicit capacity development framework. The case study findings support Bernard’s call for a set of institutional-wide frameworks or policies to guide the Centre’s approach to, and investments in, capacity development. Such a framework, or set of policies, will provide a useful starting point for enhancing the capacity of Centre staff to understand and apply organizational capacity frameworks in an appropriate way according to the needs of individual partner organizations. Moreover, a set of institution-wide capacity development policies would help to ensure that there is consistency, across programs, in support for capacity development and provide a framework for PIs to monitor and evaluate capacity development progress and outcomes. Importantly, this need not function as a straightjacket, but rather as a comprehensive framework building on “IDRC Good Practices for Capacity Development”, which serves to guide and inspire, rather than dictate.

**Organizational capacity development requires rigorous organizational assessment.** As part of a more explicit organizational capacity development strategy, the case study findings suggest that the Centre requires a more formal and systematic approach to organizational assessment. Tools for organizational assessment enable IDRC program staff, in collaboration with partners, to identify (and perhaps prioritize) capacity needs and wants during the planning stages of a project. Organizational capacity assessment makes it possible to more effectively target capacity development support and to monitor and assess an organization’s performance. Ideally, since new capacity needs emerge over time, this kind of assessment would not be a one-time, stand-alone exercise but rather an iterative and on-going process with partners.

**IDRC can’t do it all.** Whether IDRC wishes to concentrate its capacity development efforts to research capacity building at the level of individual researchers and project teams (which is considered by all to be IDRC’s niche and comparative advantage) or to develop a more explicit (and perhaps expanded) organizational capacity development framework and strategy with partners, no donor can address all the capacity development needs of an organization. Given that IDRC has a history and reputation for working well, in collaboration with other donors, IDRC might consider coordinating more intensively with other donors in ways that support the development of “complete capacity” of individual organizations. One study suggested the potential benefit of a “forum of donors” to encourage the kinds collaboration, harmonization and synergy that come with a more coordinated approach to organization capacity development (UCAD Study 2008). Ideally, such an approach would not only improve the outcomes of capacity development interventions, but would do so in a way that complemented and furthered IDRC’s capacity development goals beyond what it could achieve on its own.

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## Appendix 1

### Strategic Evaluation of Capacity Development: Terms of Reference for Cross Case Content Analysis (CCCA)

#### Background

Over the past several decades, IDRC in line with many development agencies, organizations and donors, has grappled with the issue of how to assess capacity building initiatives. Many of these agencies have struggled with how to articulate and document the complex array of results of their capacity building activities. Part of this difficulty lies in the fact that there are few systematic reviews of how development agencies construct the concept of capacity building in order that they may systematically look at how this construction leads to results. While there is a great deal of information regarding development projects that have attempted to build capacity, there is a dearth of information regarding how development agencies approach the concept of capacity building.

In response to the above considerations, IDRC's Evaluation Unit (EU) is conducting a strategic evaluation to investigate the Centre's contributions to the development of capacities of those with whom the Centre works. The evaluation aims to provide IDRC's own staff and managers with an intellectual framework and a useful common language to help harness the concept and document the experiences and results that the Centre has accumulated in this domain. Specifically, the strategic evaluation focuses on the processes and results of IDRC support for the development of capacities<sup>1</sup> of its southern partners – what capacities have been enhanced, whose, how, and how effectively.

The strategic evaluation is composed of five phases. The first phase defined what the Centre means by 'building' or 'developing' capacities and sharpened our understanding of how and with whom we support capacity development. The second phase developed a set of typologies to assist IDRC staff and partners in conceptualizing, planning, monitoring, and evaluating capacity development at the individual researcher, organizational, and network level. The third phase elaborated a list of 'good practices' that capture some of the key elements of IDRC's support that staff and partners view as being critical to building research capacities. Phase 3 also produced the working definition of capacity development at IDRC (yet to be validated by IDRC staff):

“For IDRC, Capacity Development is the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions and societies increase their ability to identify and analyse

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<sup>1</sup> The international development community tends to use the term “capacity development” rather than “capacity-building”. The latter is often seen to mean that capacities are assumed to be absent, or that the process is one of moving from one level of capacity to the next, whereas “capacity development” acknowledges existing capacities, and the political dynamics of change. In this document, both terms are used somewhat interchangeably as “capacity-building” is the term most frequently used in IDRC parlance.

development challenges, and to conceive, conduct, manage and communicate research that addresses these challenges over time and in a sustainable manner.”<sup>2</sup>

The fourth phase—provides the Centre evidence of how IDRC develops ‘complete capacity’ to carry out research related activities within organizations. Phase 4 of the strategic evaluation is focusing on the development of (6) organizational case studies and a series of papers focusing on. Four of these have been finalized; it is expected that the final two cases will be completed by July 2008.<sup>3</sup>

The decision to focus on organizations is deliberate. Findings from the earlier phases of the capacity building study (phases 1 and 2) indicated that IDRC’s main entry point for capacity development is the individual partner (researcher or group of researchers). However, IDRC understands that researchers are always connected to others within the research *problématique* or system. This led to the decision to focus the strategic evaluation on how capacity support to individuals or groups – IDRC’s *forté* - contributes to capacity development at the organizational level.

#### *General findings, Phases 1 - 3*

Initial conceptual work developed in the first phases of the strategic evaluation indicates that “for IDRC staff, capacity building is an essential variable in their approach to development. With a focus on process and on learning-by-doing, and especially on sustaining long-term personal relationships, IDRC is fixed on the value of the individual partner (the researcher or group of researchers) as the key component in capacity building.”

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. As mentioned, 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.

It is clear that it is only through examining the dynamics and evolution of how all the involved parties and communities work together to solve the development challenge that we will better understand how IDRC supports *the capacity to do research-related activities*. In light of these findings, IDRC has a growing interest in understanding how its capacity support (through projects or other activities) at the individual level – individuals and/or

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from “IDRC-Supported Capacity Building: Developing a Framework for Capturing Capacity Changes” by Stephanie Neilson and Charles Lusthaus, February 2007

<sup>3</sup> Pending final confirmation with authors

teams/groups is able (or not able) to influence change within their organization or network. IDRC would also like to have a deeper understanding of how individuals have the capacity to build or establish relationships and partnerships to influence change through research, and how these partnerships and relationships interact within the various settings (organizations, networks).

### **Cross Case Content Analysis (CCCA): Scope of work and methodology**

The cross case content analysis is one of the final papers of the strategic evaluation. The data set and analysis contained in the CCCA will be source of information that will be fed into the larger analysis of results at the organizational level – the focus of the final paper of the strategic evaluation.

- a) The consultant will review the studies and outputs produced under phases 1 – 3 of the strategic evaluation (see Annex 2) and the six organizational case studies. The phase 1 to 3 documents will serve as theoretical and practical information in order to ground the reading of the case studies. The locus of this review exercise should, however, be on the case studies themselves.

The CCCA will flush out patterns of findings and discernable trends between the documents. The starting point for the cross case analysis will be the questions that constituted the core of the TORs of the organizational case studies.

- b) The consultant will design a workplan/methodology for approval by the Evaluation Unit including an initial categorization of the CCCA findings.
- c) Prepare a report based on section (a) which synthesizes the resulting information across phase 1- 3 papers and case studies and provides qualitative information with reference to the relevant sources. The report should also have a methodology section and an executive summary.

The entire report, excluding annexes and executive summary should be a maximum of 50 pages.