

A South African retrospective: From apartheid to democracy

***An external report on the role of the International Development
Research Centre (IDRC) in SA during transition***

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31 March 2004

Forward

This report is based on a series of interviews conducted in both South Africa and Canada between January and March 2004 by Renee Grawitzky. The writer wishes to thank informants in both countries who gave of their time and support to assist in ensuring that this piece of history was finally written up.

1. Background and Objectives

Like many other countries around the world, Canada has development numerous instruments to build political networks around the world. There are organs that exist to promote official foreign policy through the ministry of foreign affairs, embassies and organisations such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). On another level, organisations such as the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) exist which they fund, but are seen to be independent of government. This independence, in theory, means some flexibility in terms of how the organisation operates in relation to office state organs.

From its inception in 1970, the IDRC sought to support and develop the capacity of researchers in developing countries in key areas such as science and technology. The IDRC was established on the premise that the gap between 'rich and poor countries in research and technological capacity was a major hindrance to development'. By the 1980's the organisation began to fund projects to assist African and South American countries wishing to restructure their economies which were hampered by rising debt. Interventions included the establishment of economic research communities such as the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC). Other initiatives to support social scientists existing under dictatorships in South America became an important initiative.

It is against this backdrop that the IDRC began to support the work of anti-apartheid researchers working for the democratic movement inside and outside South Africa (SA). Through such support it was able to assist the African National Congress (ANC) to prepare for political transition which got underway with the start of negotiations around a political settlement which led to the first democratic elections in April 1994. Similarities exist between the IDRC's support for researchers in South America and South Africa. However, in the case of SA, the IDRC went further and for the first time (it would appear) supported the work of a political party which sought to overthrow the apartheid government.

The decision to involve itself in SA appeared to be a bold move at that time. Until 1986, consistent with international sanctions (and the academic boycott), the IDRC had refused to get involved in funding research in SA which was still under the control of the apartheid state. This position was in line with the stance taken by the majority of international donor agencies. However, in a turn of events the IDRC's Board of Governors approved a new policy towards SA which supported the process of political transition by working with the democratic movement in its efforts to undermine apartheid. In effect the ANC (in exile) and its allies inside SA became the client of the IDRC. What were the events leading to this decision which went contrary to international trends at the time?

It would appear, according to various informants that Dr Ivan Head, IDRC president at the time was tuned into the political climate and political signals in

Canada at the time. A Canadian informant said Head's thinking around getting rid of the white government in SA dated back to the 1970's. In the intervening years, he tried to find a way of getting involved. Head's position was also consistent with that of the political leadership of the country who believed that the IDRC had the flexibility to get involved in SA as it was not an official government agency like CIDA. 'Prime Minister Brian Mulroney would be recognised for his consistent support for the movement against apartheid in SA whilst support for his domestic policies might however, be questionable', a Canadian informant said. Canada's position was viewed as a bold initiative which broke with the position of the conservative governments in place at the time in the UK and US.

Head recalled the debates which raged on during the Board meeting. He believed there was merit in the request to support the anti-apartheid movement and that the Board should consider it seriously. Head recounted a discussion with President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania who shared his conviction that change was taking place in Southern Africa. The only question was how rapid and what nature. 'There was no question in my mind that change was happening and the wisdom of it. That being the case, it was essential to prepare black South African's for the day that they took responsibility.' Head said 'when the opportunity emerged for the IDRC to support the ANC, I felt it was our obligation to do so.'

Aside from the prevailing political climate in Canada, it would appear that the ANC in exile made some sort of approach to the IDRC to assist it in research as it began to plan and prepare itself for the time that it took over power in SA. By the mid 1980's the apartheid government was facing the full might of the anti-apartheid movement both externally and internally, resulting in the imposition of a state of emergency. This development saw the introduction of laws to restrict the ability of the anti-apartheid movement to mobilise. During this period formations inside the country such as Congress of SA Trade Unions (Cosatu) and those organisations, academics and activists opposed to the apartheid state began to conduct research in order to develop policy options for a post apartheid SA. A similar process was taking place within the ANC in exile. Dr Michael Sutcliffe, a former ANC activist (who later assisted the IDRC extensively) said that various leading ANC intellectuals and economists began meeting to chart a way forward. This was confirmed by former ANC research department Frene Ginwala (now speaker of the SA Parliament). Sutcliffe said the ANC was already, by the mid 1980's, receiving pressure from foreign governments to find out what its vision was for a post-apartheid SA. Ginwala said from 1985 onwards the ANC set up teams around various policy initiatives.

An informant said that whilst the Scandinavian countries were more open to supporting the ANC in exile, little real funding was available to research and understand an alternative agenda. Marc Van Ameringen, the former IDRC regional director in SA, in an article published in 1998 on the role of international donors supporting SA's transition remarked on this. He said 'up to the late 1980's the direct involvement of the international donor community in SA was limited.'

The Boards' decision in 1986 provided the IDRC with its new mandate to formally contact the ANC in exile and its allies inside the country working within the broader liberation movement or as it was known then – the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). Formal contact with the ANC was established through a series of meetings in Lusaka, Zambia with various representatives of the IDRC which might have included Pierre Sane, Van Ameringen and others. (Unfortunately, the IDRC participants could not be confirmed)

This led to a period of intensive consultation between IDRC representatives and various formations both inside SA and within the region. Sutcliffe recalled how the initial contact between Van Ameringen (and other IDRC officials) and the ANC was made internally. Sutcliffe facilitated a series of countrywide workshops between Van Ameringen and representatives of the full spectrum of political tendencies both inside and outside the MDM. These workshops and meetings were held to introduce the IDRC to the main political formations and discuss a range of issues including the academic boycott. In view of the dynamics around the boycott, the IDRC indicated that it could not be seen to be directly funding activities in SA. Sutcliffe recalled some of the intrigue around the funding arrangements and how funds were channelled into the country.

Sutcliffe said this marked the start of IDRC funding of various research projects from about 1987 onwards and the co-sponsoring of workshops and conferences held inside and outside (mainly in Lusaka and Harare) SA which sought to assist the ANC and its allies in developing policies which would shape their vision of SA post apartheid. Some of these external meetings, which took place from 1988/89 onwards, were critical as they began to tackle and kick-start debates around key areas of policy such as local government, housing, economic policy etc. One of these co-sponsored IDRC meetings which took place in Luusanne, Switzerland brought together, for the first time, ANC economists (living in exile), 'progressive' economists based in SA and traditional white economists working in the old government, its related institutions and the private sector to discuss future economic policy.

The second phase of the IDRC's involvement in SA began with the decision to open an IDRC office in SA and the start of a series of important missions from 1991 onwards. During this time Van Ameringen periodically visit the country while Sutcliffe was seen as the IDRC's unofficial internal person until Van Ameringen moved to the country in 1991.

The decision to open an office in SA occurred some months following a visit to Canada by former President Nelson Mandela in 1990. By this time, the terrain in SA was changing dramatically and the ANC faced rising pressure to develop key policies and prepare itself for political negotiations. During his visit to Canada Mandela requested assistance from Mulroney in developing a post-apartheid economic policy. In the words of Nelson Mandela: 'we recognise that without a sound economy none of our social aspirations can be met or sustained. This is a fundamental fact and the basis of our responsibility to fiscal discipline, to our government accepting the limitations of what the

economy can deliver at any particular time, and to a need for creating an environment that encourages rather than attempts to compel business and industry to develop and grow...I asked then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney for assistance in helping the ANC to understand economic issues better and to develop its policymaking capacity in this regard.' The Canadian government tasked the IDRC with this responsibility.

Cementing its presence in SA came about with the formal opening of an office in Johannesburg in 1992. The decision to open the office was motivated by Dr Keith Bezanson who took over as IDRC president in 1991. Bezanson said it was clear - following Mandela's release and the tensions and threats to stability in SA - that the IDRC could not purport to be serious about the programmes it supported without having a formal presence in SA. 'The demand and complexity of issues was increasing. There was a genuine need for on the ground interchange, he believed.'

Whilst a decision was taken to open the office there did not appear to be a uniform opinion in the IDRC Ottawa on how it should be managed and its status, except that its title seems to imply that it had regional office status - IDRC-Regional Office for Southern Africa (ROSA). During Bezanson's presidency (which ended in 1997) Van Ameringen reported directly to him. A Canadian informant said there was division over whether the SA office should be a country specific operation or whether it should be a fully staffed regional office. 'SA represented a special case and was treated as such. Because it was treated differently it created tensions'.

During its time in SA, until the office closure in 2001, the IDRC worked with various universities, independent research institutes and think-tanks, NGO's and broader civil society formations. The organisation supported over 40 projects either aimed at research, technical assistance, training and capacity building to researchers, academics and broader communities in different fields. Whether it was a result of such support (rather difficult to determine), many of these people landed up in senior positions in government or over the years moved into senior government positions.

It was however, during the early years (from the late 1980's) that the IDRC began to build its profile and credibility both within the ANC in exile and the individuals and organisations linked to the MDM inside SA. Various informants stated that the IDRC was clear that its allegiance was to the ANC. Therefore, it was not necessary for discussion to take place on whether the organisation should be trusted or not. It funded initiatives and projects predominantly identified either by the ANC or its internal structures and it supported researchers and research aligned to the ANC and its allies. These interventions ensured that the IDRC was well-placed to assist the future political elite during transformation.

The IDRC's involvement during SA's transition to democracy has been viewed by many in the organisation as one of its 'success stories'. This belief is based on a perception that it had 'influence', was effective and build capacity to make 'make good policy'. This report will seek to examine these issues (and

others) to determine what kind of role the IDRC played in the transformation process. The report will seek to highlight:

- The nature of the contributions made by the IDRC through the programmes supported;
- The role played by the IDRC in supporting policy relevant research and policymaking processes;
- The attitudes and views of South Africans towards the role played by the IDRC during the transition period;
- Lessons learnt and whether the SA experience can be used as a model to replicate in other countries in transition.

2. Methodology

This report is based on information gathered through a document review and interviews with key informants.

Document review - The document review provided important background information to understand the main projects embarked upon by the IDRC. The bulk of the official documentation was obtained from the IDRC office in Ottawa while some documentation was also obtained from those personnel who had worked in the Johannesburg office prior to its closure in 2001. Some informants were also able to provide relevant documentation. (Annexure A for references)

Interviews - These were conducted in both Ottawa, Canada during January 2004 while a further series was conducted in South Africa between February and March 2004. In the main face-to-face interviews were conducted in both Canada and SA. However, there were instances when telephonic interviews were required in both instances.

The majority of the interviews conducted in Ottawa were organised by IDRC itself. Those interviewed had either worked in the SA office at some point or another or had been involved in the key projects initiated by the IDRC in SA. The majority of people interviewed in Canada still work for the organisation. (annexure B) In the case of those interviewed in SA, the author of the report identified them and organised the interviews. An inordinate amount of time was spent trying to organise the interviews. As per the original contract 30 informants were officially interviewed while there were also numerous informal interviews and interviews via email for those senior government ministers, provincial premiers and officials who were unable to make themselves available because of the upcoming elections. The majority of the interviews took place in and around Johannesburg/Pretoria but some required a trip to Cape Town. Those interviewed in SA ranged from the Speaker of the Parliament to cabinet ministers, senior government officials, former ministers, representatives from NGO's, economists and researchers (annexure C).

The interviews did not follow a particular formal structure. The majority were semi-structured which allowed for an easy flow of information and ensured a deeper analysis of the role played by the IDRC. The interviews proved to be very informative as the most appropriate people were targeted – those directly

involved and not those who had peripheral information. The interviews ranged between 1 to 2 hours with, in some instances, follow-up telephonic conversations or via e-mail.

It should be noted that it was rather unfortunate that Marc Van Ameringen, the former IDRC regional director, was unable to avail himself for an interview as it would have added immeasurably to the writers understanding and the final report. It was rather unfortunate that the IDRC was unable to facilitate such an interview.

3. IDRC and key interventions

From 1987 onwards the IDRC funded, co-funded and supported wide ranging initiatives which sought to either contribute to informed policy debates by either supporting research or building capacity to prepare the ANC for the time that it would ascend to power. The office did a lot research support projects in the late 1980's and early 1990's under the guise of developing projects but in reality Van Ameringen was supporting a number of critical people who were freed up from other work to focus on the research that needed to be done at that time. Whilst the report will briefly touch on some of the IDRC's earlier interventions in SA during the late 1980's, the main focus will only be on six key programmes which took place between 1991 and 1996/7. The focus on these programmes should not however, in any way be seen to downplay the contribution of the myriad of other programmes and projects supported and initiated such as peace building and reconstruction, agriculture and land reform, small, medium and micro-enterprise development and health. The focus on the six programmes is intended to provide a clear understanding of the IDRC's role in SA during the transition period. The following programmes were selected as they constituted some of the most important work done by the IDRC during its time in SA:

- Economic, trade and industrial policy
- Urban development and local government
- Science and technology
- Environment and natural resource management
- Supporting democracy: governance programme
- Information and Communications Policies and Technologies

The majority of these programmes were initiated prior to the first democratic elections in 1994. However, after 1994 the new government requested the IDRC to assist in the processes leading up to the development of a new telecommunications and environmental policy.

3.1 Economic, trade and industrial policy

Mandela formally approached the Canadian government for assistance in building capacity within the ANC and democratic movement to undertake economic research, analysis and policy formulation in 1990. However, the IDRC, as mentioned previously, was already funding various aspects of economic research from 1987 onwards. However, as stated in the first in the

four part series on 'Building a New SA', many of these initiatives were not sufficiently co-ordinated. A group of intellectuals within the ANC in exile began to do some policy work in 1984/5 whilst a similar process was going on in SA by economists and researchers sympathetic to the ANC. Some of these economists and academics operated within the Economic Trends Group (ETG). The ETG was set up with funding from Canada and sought to provide economic policy advice to Cosatu. It was however, only in and around 1988/89 that broader consultation began within the MDM with various meetings between four groups who had never interacted before:

- Economists aligned to the MDM such as ETG;
- Economists who formed part of the ANC's economics department in Lusaka;
- Economists linked to the London-based ANC group; and
- Traditional white economists aligned either with the old government and its institutions such as the SA Reserve Bank or private sector.

These groups came together in an important meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1989 to engage in discussions on economic policy. This constituted the first official meeting between elements of the old government and the ANC. A SA-based economist, who did work for Cosatu, said it was the first time 'we had met people (other economists) from government. We had no contact with them'. Another informant said that one might have expected vast differences between the old white established economists and the ANC for example. However, this was not so evident. The Lausanne meeting led to a series of research projects and closer working ties between the ANC in exile and progressive SA-based economists. A series of meetings, co-sponsored by the IDRC, was held in Harare in 1990 between these two groupings as part of an attempt to co-ordinate initiatives. While these meetings were underway a number of ANC people started coming back into the country and helped set up the ANC's economics department with the help of Max Sisulu and Tito Mboweni (now SA Reserve Bank governor). These meetings were aimed at emerging with an ANC position around economic policy.

In a separate development the idea of setting up the Industrial Strategy Project (ISP) was borne with assistance from the IDRC. An approach was made to the ETG to persuade them to become involved in the ISP. The IDRC was central to the funding of the initial conceptualisation of the project. The ISP was seen to be a critical intervention as it funded research which sought to address SA's future challenges such as future industrial and trade policies and position around the WTO.

Despite the various initiatives underway no overall economic framework had been developed by the time Mandela approached the Canadian government in 1990. The IDRC was appointed by the Canadian government to carry out Mandela's request and launched an economic mission in 1991 headed up by Canadian economist Gerry Helleiner.

The results of the mission are well documented. It sought not only to evaluate existing capacity amongst the 'anti-apartheid economics community' to

develop policy but also to identify areas of research around economic policy and suggest ways of responding to the required needs. The missions' recommendations included, amongst others, the following:

- Restructuring the ANC's economics department so that the organisation could prepare its economic capabilities for governing;
- The setting up of the Macro-Economic Research Group (Merg) to stimulate and coordinate policy research and training in a range of areas such as developing a macro-economic framework;
- Investigating the setting up of an institute for economic policy research and training. This led to the transformation of Merg into the National Institute of Economic Policy (Niep);
- Proposals to build capacity in unions and other service organisations as well as mechanisms to facilitate an exchange of information between business and government to assist the democratic movement in formulating economic policy;
- Various mechanisms to free up the capacity of researchers and economists to develop economic policy
- Build capacity amongst black economists and researchers

Reflections

It has generally been agreed that the economic mission was an important contribution to the policymaking process as it:

- facilitated closer working relations between those economists who had been in exile and those based in SA;
- motivated the ANC and its allies to start thinking about economic issues in more practical terms;
- led to a recognition that a proper assessment of the state of the economy and existing resources and capacity was necessary in order to develop policy;
- Identified areas for further research;
- Brought onto the table methodology of doing research and capacity building amongst black researchers and doing research
- Facilitated the building of linkages between South Africans and other IDRC institutions such as the AECR, a network of African economists which was viewed to be extremely useful and added an important dimension to the process. A number of informants stated this was a very important as these economists had the 'African experience', they knew what had and had not worked in Africa;
- Facilitated and supported a more open debate around policy as the IDRC brought in a range of people and organisations into the process;
- Endorsed the establishment of institutions such as Niep and facilitated the development of the Trade and Industrial Policy Secretariat (TIPS). The IDRC had good intentions of replicating the AECR in SA in the form of Niep but it has not had the desired effect. The situation is different in the case of Tips (elaborated on below);
- Facilitated a range of processes which together contributed towards the building of intellectual capital in the country. Alan Hirsch, now in the presidency, said the IDRC's significance lay in it assisting in the

building of an 'economic policy intelligentsia'. Other informants agreed that the IDRC (Van Ameringen) was very effective at being able to identify intellectuals who could deliver and had the 'right' credentials. Not only did the IDRC select the right people but also supported, what informants believed were 'right' projects and were sensitive to the dynamics at play. Numerous informants were clear that the IDRC did not try to impose or control the South African's. 'We had enough suspicions about people wanting to control us'; and

- The IDRC assisted the ANC in harnessing resources within the research community to expand its own policy capacities.

Despite the immediate success of the economic mission - as it galvanised people and especially the ANC and its allies to 'get moving' on economic policy - informants agreed it was questionable to what extent the new government took on board the missions report and recommendations. There is however, an acknowledgement that the various processes supported by the IDRC from the late 1980's to Merg and beyond all contributed to a deeper and more informed debate. The IDRC contribution, a key informant said, was more in accelerating a required process rather than any specific policy conclusion. The IDRC impacted on process, building capacity and allowing key people to act more quickly than they otherwise would have.

As Sisulu said final economic policy emerged from a range of processes not just those funded by the IDRC. The resultant macro-economic policy adopted by the new government post 1994 was not related to the direct work of the mission. In the end, the new government went its own way and found its own sources for advice. There might well be an argument that this occurred because Merg failed to deliver a macro-economic framework which was acceptable to the majority in the ANC.

3.1.1 Merg

One of the key recommendations of the economic mission was 'to stimulate and coordinate policy research and training in a range of areas such as developing a macro-economic framework.' The Merg process could well be the subject of a book. Unfortunately, for these purposes it will be briefly touched on as it did in a perverse way refine economic thinking.

An informant said it was unfortunate that the Merg process not only became highly personalised but led to major divisions, backstabbing and infighting that in the end the IDRC withdrew its support. In the SA media the Merg process was depicted as a battle between the left and the right within the ANC. As in most cases, events and developments are more nuanced. The one group claimed it wanted to develop a 'progressive' agenda whilst the other group pushed for a 'left' agenda. One observer said: 'there was a sense of being recolonized by old style leftists while the SA economists appeared to be closer to the ANC position'. The Merg process highlighted the different views around economic policy. The Canadians got tired of the infighting and backstabbing, an informant said. ANC initial support turned to disillusionment with the process. At the same time, however, the ANC began engaging with

other foreign groups. Merg failed to become credible left alternative which the new government could implement. Merg 'blew up', one informant said, because it had no direction. Others argued that Merg became embroiled in tensions 'around ownership of the policy' as some argued that it became dominated by foreigners. The question, which has not really been explored, is whether the 'foreigner' issue was raised because that grouping was supporting a left position which the ANC was not comfortable with. Moss Ngosheng, formerly in government, said the ANC London group exerted a big influence over the process. 'There was a view that they were stuck in a certain ideological position. If they had won the debate there would have been a more radically left document than the RDP which was driven more by ANC technocrats.' However, a lot of elements of Merg found their way into the RDP.

Whatever the problems around the Merg report, some would argue that it did help to build capacity amongst a group of black researchers (although the capacity building element did suffer and was not as large as initially anticipated). UK-based economist Professor Ben Fine felt there were problems around the commitment of some predominantly white academics to training and capacity building of black researchers. As part of the economic mission's recommendations, the IDRC and other funders assisted in transforming Merg into Niep. However, by that stage the power holders in the ANC no longer saw Merg as being credible and hence its so-called successor. Niep was supposed to be modelled on the AECR but, in the eyes of many, it has failed to fulfil its vision (unable to attract good economists) which included a more structured relationship between itself and government. Niep's change in status, some might argue, could partly reflect a shift in the dynamics within the ANC as to who now influences policy. There might well be an argument that Merg fell foul to a similar process. SA's finance minister Trevor Manuel was initially involved in the governance of Merg and when he became finance minister expectations were high that he would utilise it, as history has shown this did not occur.

Fine said 'the history of Merg is dominated by reports on the production of the final report. This is misleading as Merg was set up primarily as a funding organisation to undertake economic research and build capacity amongst black economists and focus on policy. Merg's focus shifted when a high level urgent request came in 1993 (from Mandela) to produce an alternative economic policy. I was opposed to doing this as it appeared to undermine Merg's original objective to build capacity.' He said by the time the report was released it was disowned by the ANC as positions had changed.

Aside from the many political and personal problems which besieged Merg, a number of informants complained of poor administration and coordination. There was also some talk of financial irregularities and the possibility of an IDRC forensic investigation.

3.1.2 Industrial policy and trade

Aside from Merg, the IDRC was involved in supporting a range of other initiatives which sought to facilitate and support the development of policies critical to the overall stability and growth of the SA economy. These related to support for the building capacity around formulating policy around industrial strategy and trade related matters. This saw support for the launching of the Industrial Strategy Project (ISP) and the establishment of TIPS. One Canadian informant said: 'the economic mission and subsequent projects have been viewed by some Canadians as a success partly because it led to the establishment of TIPS.'

The ISP occurred in the late 1980's and appeared to be more successful (than Merg) in terms of its influence on policy especially in the case of trade and industrial policy. Informants cautioned however, that the impact of ISP on policy could partly be attributed to the fact that the vast majority of those researchers and economists who were involved in the ISP either went into senior government positions or became consultants to government.

Various independent assessments have been conducted on the role of TIPS. The most recent evaluation for the IDRC was conducted in 2001 (at the time of the closure of the SA office) whilst it is understood that other key funders have also conducted their own evaluations. TIPS was established following a request from the dti (it is small letters as part of the departments branding) to the IDRC. It was set up the IDRC to produce research which would assist the dti in its policy making capacity. Over the years it has contributed extensively to the working of the dti and in building capacity amongst researchers engaged in work around trade and industrial policy. Hirsch said the rationale of TIPS was to build up the policy capacity outside of government as a vacuum was created when researchers and intellectuals went into government post 1994.

Former dti special advisor (and researcher in ISP) Zav Rastomjee concurred with Hirsch that TIPS, to some degree, filled the gap for those intellectuals who moved into government. TIPS was set up to be independent from government (eventhough initial thinking was that it should be housed in the dti) but at the same time ensure close ties with the dti. A number of informants stated that the relationship between TIPS and the dti is different from the early years. In recent years, it has become more critical of government policy whilst there is a perception that the dti is not as receptive to using intellectuals as it was in the past.

There is however, general acknowledgement that TIPS has been successful, not necessarily in developing policy but it has created the environment to influence government thinking. As former TIPS director Rashad Cassim said TIPS might not have influenced government in its decision to enter into trade negotiations with the EU. But once that was done, TIPS assisted in developing positions around key areas under discussion. Organisations such as TIPS remains effective, one informant said, where there is a supply of researchers (which did not occur in the case of Niep) and receptive policy makers exist.

3.2 Urban development and local government

A critical area of work which the ANC identified in the mid 1980's was research around the future of local governments, the delivery of basic services and the state of both the urban and rural areas. As the mission report on 'Cities in Transition: Towards an Urban Policy for a Democratic SA' stated: 'There is no question that a major challenge for the democratic movement in SA will be to reverse the trend towards poverty and political marginalisation for an increasingly urbanised population'. The start of the political negotiations quickly revealed that change 'is likely to be very difficult to achieve'. Within that context it was acknowledged that SA had entered into a period of 'urban crisis' as the ANC faced the task of trying to redress the effects of an 'apartheid-based pattern of urban development in order to achieve a system which is non-racial, democratic, efficient, integrated and sustainable.'

An approach was made by the ANC to the IDRC to assist in developing a framework for a national urban policy. Key to this was developing a process whereby the ANC (and its allies) could strengthen their capacity in developing and implementing an urban policy but at the same time assist in the constitutional negotiations. (Initially local government did not form part of the constitutional negotiations taking place at the World Trade Centre. A separate negotiating forum for local government was taking place. However, it became apparent that the state of local government was critical to what was taking place in the broader political negotiations as the point of implementation would be at local government level. Ultimately, implementation could only occur if stable local authorities existed. It was only then that local government was brought into the broader political negotiations).

The mission therefore, sought to identify key areas of research for the drafting of an urban policy and to develop a process to strengthen institutional capacity to achieve this. The mission conducted its initial work in April 1992 and released its final report in September of that year. It recommended the adoption of an urban development approach (which sought to expand opportunities to those previously excluded from the benefits of urbanisation). The mission stressed the need to reintegrate cities which were previously separated because of apartheid. This proposal had serious and far-reaching consequences for the future of municipalities and local authorities. The mission also believed there was a need to involve broader civil society in such initiatives. The missions' recommendations also highlighted the need for greater co-ordination between the ANC departments of local government and economic policy.

Various recommendations focused on the building of capacity both inside the ANC's department for local government and amongst its key allies and service organisations operating in the urban sector. The mission also noted the absence of proper training programmes in the area of local government administration and issues around appropriate research aimed to build a 'post-apartheid urban environment'. In order to address needs around broad capacity building the mission recommended the establishment of a National Urban Institute (NUI) to co-ordinate urban policy research and training. One of

This assistance resulted in the IDRC's research team eventually moving into the institutions (government) and facilitated the implementation of policy positions. Some might argue that the IDRC could have opted for a different strategy and instead assisted in developing internal capacity. Presumably the demands of the day prevented this option from being considered. At some point the IDRC should have begun to shift focus to capacity building. However, as mentioned, the pace of development meant that the IDRC's ability to focus on its traditional role of technical assistance, mentoring and long term capacity building was compromised to comply with the new governments demand to support policy reform. This raises some interesting questions about the long term implications of engaging directly with governments?

Despite these concerns, the mission and the IDRC achieved the following:

- Ensured a thorough and more inclusive process which promoted dialogue with the 'old guard' and allowed people to explore different positions;
- The process not only attempted to include various stakeholders but included a range of other donors;
- gave respectability to more radical thinking than would otherwise have been contemplated;
- for the first time the SA science community was measured not in terms of its military success but forced to engage in a process of self-introspection which led to a review of key institutions;
- the external review by consultants (as part of the mission) opened the channels of contact between SA's and international community;
- the mission also bridged the gap in conceptual terms between social sciences and physical science; and
- the mission did result in some funding for capacity building in certain universities and research institution.

3.4 Environment and natural resource management

It has generally been acknowledged that environmental concerns were an area neglected by the ANC during the 1980's. It was partly through the efforts of the IDRC that the issue was put on the table and then subsequently, debated during the constitutional negotiations. However, as mission member David Fig pointed out, the environment came up during the RDP discussions and 'various interests emerged around the greening of the RDP.' It was only at that stage that the ANC set up an environment desk headed by Tami Sokutu. Some questions still remain as to whether even then the ANC gave it sufficient priority given its first appointment. The new government's first environmental affairs and tourism minister Dawie de Villiers was a National Party member. After 1994 it was one of the few departments not under control of the ANC despite the fact that its deputy minister Bantu Holomisa was from the ANC (but later broke away and formed his own party – the United Democratic Movement).

Some informants claimed that the Minister wanted an arms length policymaking process around the drafting of new environmental policy. One

informant said he was not sure whether government was ready for such a reform process (as proposed by the IDRC) and questioned whether they would have initiated such a process on their own. Ultimately, it would appear that the ANC (and government in the form of Holomisa) apparently approached the IDRC for assistance in ensuring that the policy process went ahead. The environmental mission got going towards the end of 1993 when a number of research papers were commissioned. The actual mission (which went around the country as part of a fact-finding mission) took place during 1994.

The mission took place against a history of the environment being viewed as a white middle class issue and was often synonymous with game parks and conservation. Little thought had gone into the relationship between the environment and sustainable development. The mission was tasked 'to identify policy priorities and to give recommendations to the new SA government on environmental policy, paying special attention to integrating environmental sustainability into the RDP.' The mission report was the key background document for a national consultative conference on national environmental policy held in August 1995.

The key recommendations of the mission included:

- government's plans for reconstruction and development would not be economically sustainable unless the environmental 'bottom line' was clearly written into economic and social policy. In order to achieve this, structures and processes in government and civil society would have to be strengthened. Within government, it would require greater co-ordination between the environmental and economic clusters;
- Various initiatives to strengthen environmental management including the setting up of advisory bodies at all levels of government to provide input from civil society to government on environmental policy and sustainable development issues;
- Various recommendations on the management of various resources; and
- The setting up of the Consultative National Environment Policy Process to drive policy reform.

Reflections

It is undisputed that the mission acted as a catalyst for the subsequent reform process which led to the drafting of the National Environmental Management Act (Nema). Responses from informants clearly highlighted some of the IDRC's strengths (many have been highlighted in the other three missions) which include:

- A focus on a multi-stakeholder approach which ensured participation from a wide range of stakeholders in the formulation of environmental policy. This was critical for the environmental NGO's who were unable to autonomously organise these process. The IDRC played a role in

bringing them into the process which gave them some kind of leverage in the policymaking process.

- This process was important to ensure co-operation from the 'old guard' and business. All informants agreed that the multi-stakeholder approach was a critical intervention by the IDRC. In those early days of democracy the state welcomed such interventions. However, as the state has consolidated itself, one informant said, it has moved away from this approach and the 'window' is now shut and policy making is done behind closed doors.
- This all embracing consultative process was critical because of the dynamics which emerged around the fact that the department was viewed as 'National Party' territory. As such it came under enormous pressure and attacks from environmental activists. One informant said it appeared that the department was irritated by the mission, 'they were wary of it and always found themselves under attack and under siege.'
- This also appeared to be the first mission which included a representative from the SA Communist Party (SACP) which was contested by the IDRC as it was happy to work with the ANC and Cosatu but not the SACP.
- The environmental policy process created a profile for a lot of people in civil society, NGO's and activists – some of whom landed up in senior government positions. A number of these people acknowledged the extent to which this process built their own capacity and refined their views on environmental issues. 'The process provided space to nurture ideas and became a melting pot for ideas on participatory approaches to the environment.'
- The IDRC had environmental experience in other developing countries as result could make useful interventions and expose SA's to international expertise of the calibre of Anne Whyte. Therefore, it brought intellectual resources not just from the north but also the south;
- There was no attempt to push a Canadian agenda even though there was some opposition to the mission being headed up by a Canadian, in principle. One informant said the underlying tension around this related to the ownership of the programme and who controlled the process – was it an alliance programme with IDRC support or an IDRC programme. The informant said Van Ameringen wanted his stamp on everything in the name of promoting the IDRC.
- The mission 'armed people with insight and knowledge and mobilised a whole lot of different constituencies.' Saliem Fakir (NGO representative on the mission) said the mission went out consciously to look for stakeholders to include in the policy process.

As with numerous other interventions, the IDRC managed and facilitated the consultation process which led to the drafting of new environmental policy. However, what is difficult to assess is the extent to which it influenced policy. Differing views exist some claimed that a lot of ideas raised in the mission report were carried forward into policy. Others believed that the various process embarked upon, especially the consultative process, all contributed towards the reframing of new policy and legislation. It is clear that the mission report did influence debates at that time (especially after a number of those

involved in the process ended up in government) but it is questionable whether it is shaping government thinking today. Barbara Schreiner, a member of the mission, questioned the extent to which the mission report has been disseminated and whether it has even been reviewed by the current leadership in the department.

3.5 Supporting democracy: Governance programme

The governance programme got underway in SA in 1993 following a request in 1992 by Mandela for assistance in preparing the democratic movement to govern. According to documentation and interviews, CIDA responded to this request and sent a mission to SA led by Dr Al Johnson to determine the needs of the South Africans. The governance programme was subsequently described in IDRC documentation from a workshop held in April 1999 as 'an expression of the Canadian foreign policy goal of supporting democratic development'.

At the outset the programme sought to devise an 'effective practitioner-based strategy to assist SA's incoming government cadre to improve its capacity to govern once elected'. The IDRC, which by that stage had an office in the country, was chosen to administer the programme with CIDA funding which was expected to last until the end of 1999. Despite some pressure to continue with the programme in 2 000, the IDRC did not want while for CIDA it was an expensive project. CIDA had also taken a decision to shift focus to look at poverty reduction and therefore, decided not to fund the project to the same magnitude. Rosemary Proctor said it was unfortunate that CIDA did not see the connection between sustaining democracy and ability to governance with initiatives to reduce poverty. If they had, they would have seen the value in continuing the programme. Following pressure from the Canadian provinces for CIDA to continue with the programme, it agreed to continue to support a small twinning project administered by IPAC.

The governance programme, whilst having various elements to it, was extremely broad covering different periods from pre-1994 to 2000. Rosemary Proctor and Harvey Sims in an article 'The SA/Canada Program on Governance: an experiment in supporting democracy' argued why good governance was a necessary condition for sustained economic progress. They said: 'governance is about the core laws, institutions and processes through which people make their fundamental choices and it is about the state's capacity to execute decisions, endorse laws, raise revenues, spend money efficiently and effectively, promote social stability, encourage public participation in representative institutions and the like....It follows that a governance program should aim at assisting people to establish the core institutions, key processes and skills that in turn will enable them to put into place the policies of their own choosing, within the framework of democracy.' The various elements of the programme which evolved over time included many if not all, of the aspects mentioned by Proctor and Sims:

- o In the period leading up to the 1994 elections, the programme focused mainly on assisting the democratic movement in the constitutional process (political negotiations). According to

informants the programme assisted in providing critical advice around numerous complex issues related to the constitution. Assistance came in the form of study trips to Canada, workshops, seminars and 'think tanks' set up to assist in formulating positions, for example, around the transitional arrangements for the public service.

- Post 1994, the programme began to assist senior government officials (who had never worked in government) at both national and provincial level (with the focus more on the provinces) on their roles and responsibilities. The programme basically exposed largely black SA's into what it meant to function in the public service as public servants and not as politicians. During this period, the programme also began a twinning arrangement in 6 of the 9 provinces. The programme focused extensively on training, capacity building and mentoring at a senior level.
- The programme evolved and from about 1997 onwards its worked mainly on providing input to the Presidential Review Commission as well as assisting in refining systems around intergovernmental fiscal arrangements and other critical budgetary and financial administration elements.
- The programme also facilitated the setting up of the SA Management and Development Institute (modelled on its counterpart in Canada) which was supposed to continue the work of the IDRC. This institute has failed to live up to its Canadian counterpart.

Reflections

The majority of South Africans interviewed around this programme were all rather positive about what it was able to provide in terms of capacity building, mentorship, training and assistance in developing positions around the constitutional process. Where some concerns were raised were in relation to the fact that the programme ended way too early and the institution set up to take the process forward has not been that successful. This contrasts with the views of many within the IDRC who were uncomfortable with the programme from the start. It was never viewed as an 'IDRC project'; did not fit in with the traditional work of the organisation and therefore, it was not able to add value to its implementation. As a result, a general sense of unease remains. One informant argued that the only reason the IDRC took on the project was so that ROSA would receive the administration fees. Whilst operating out of ROSA the programme acted almost independently of the IDRC.

A key concern within some elements of the IDRC was the difficulty in accessing the impact of the programme as there was no establish baseline from which it could measure itself against. During a workshop on the governance programme in 1999, it became clear why people in the IDRC felt the initial evaluation of the programme was problematic. The impact of the programme had to be measured and what better way than its effect on democracy. Proctor and Sims argued that the success of the programme could not be measured by 'whether or not democracy flourishes or founders'

as the programme was far too small in terms of its impact on overall democracy in SA.

Whilst debate continues as to the best way for monitoring and evaluating programmes, a former CIDA representative involved in aspects of the programme questioned its contribution to transformation. He argued that the programme turned its beneficiaries into bureaucrats but 'did the programme ensure that public servants understood that they had a different role to play in transition, especially where a government has committed itself to a transformation agenda?' This view was supported by the fact that the governance programme team did not include a development specialist or someone who could integrate lessons learnt from countries in transition.

Interviews with various South Africans who benefited from the programme revealed the following:

- At a very critical point the IDRC provided cutting edge support that made a difference to the constitutional process. Ivor Jenkins of IDASA said he had been involved in various projects with Johnson. One of the most significant had been a trip to Canada with 28 constitutional negotiators and writers to look at their constitution and constitutional related matters and issues around provincialism and provincial government and fiscal matters in 1994. 'The impact of that trip on people's thinking was significant', he said.
- The IDRC was viewed in a positive light as it was seen to combine experience with knowledge. This was merely reinforced by the high profile people it had heading up the governance programme.
- An informant who worked closely with Proctor said her input was invaluable especially as a new director general coming into government who had never been in government before.
- Beneficiaries of the programme saw the IDRC as being 'responsive to our needs' and were extremely good at leveraging expertise and granting SA's access to many people in provincial and national government in Canada or any other expertise required.
- Those involved in the constitutional process said Johnson was invaluable in assisting in the drafting of the provisions in the constitution around the future of the public service and transitional measures around the public service for the constitution and political negotiations.
- One informant said 'everyone wanted to be a politician but after training people began to understand the differences between being a politician and a public servant.'
- Some concern around the programme was expressed in relation to co-ordination with other IDRC programmes underway.
- A further problem related to the fact that a number of different donors were involved with the governance and related programmes 'which ensured that everyone was pulling in different directions as all the donors had different interests and competing for different pieces of the action.'

In view of the upcoming elections in SA, it was rather difficult to access some ministers including Zola Skweyiya, the former minister for public service and administration who could have provided a sense of the impact of the programme at a national level. Various interviews did however, revealed how some provinces benefited. Outgoing Northern Cape premier Manne Dipico was extremely positive about the contributions of the programme towards stability in his province. He added that the IDRC through its funding initiatives contributed enormously to the development of democracy and the strengthening of the democratic structures found after the 1994-breakthrough.'

Dipico said in order to appreciate the effectiveness of the governance programmes, 'we have to cite the example of the early conceptualization of provinces and premiers as a direct outcome of that process. Many of the ANC premier-elects travelled to Canada to interact and learn lessons around the workings of provincial governments within the system of co-operative governance in a unitary country. Some very important features of our provincial system of governance were drawn from the Canadian-example of provinces, though there are many areas of difference also. The next level of governance strengthening was the areas of policy and coordination within the highest office of the province - premier's office. In the case of the Northern Cape, we further developed the experience of Canada by learning the integrated model of government service delivery. The concept of one-stop service delivery, was organized to suite the conditions of the province and proved a model of integrated service in a province with vast areas and large distances, complicated by low levels of infrastructure. We established site of integrated service delivery in some of the regions of the province, which bring together major government services such as national departments and provincial departments services at a point of service.'

As mentioned previously, it has been difficult to get a sense of the impact of the governance programme at a national government level. Proctor said one of the weaknesses of the intervention was that there was no champion for the overall programme at a national level (in terms of national government departments). To some degree that might have been the case initially when Skweyiya was involved but he did not stay connected with the programme as he became minister in another department. Proctor said there was also no champion for the programme in the president's office. As a result the focus was more on the provinces than at a national level because it did not have a sustained strong national champion.

3.6 Information and Communication Policies and Technologies

As Jay Naidoo (former general secretary of Cosatu and former post and telecommunications minister) said the importance of ICT's in development was acknowledged and recognised within the democratic movement way before the IDRC got involved in SA. 'We recognised the importance of technology from the late 1980's when Cosatu was engaged in a technology project.' This issue was included in the RDP which formed part of the ANC's first election manifesto. The previous government made some moves to

restructure the telecommunications industry but it failed to address certain fundamental principles which the new ANC government sought to achieve such as universal access. There was an acknowledgement of the need to develop a more coherent strategy to achieve these objectives' as well as develop an approach to incorporate the new government's privatisation plans for Telkom, the national operator.

The IDRC embarked on a number of missions to SA from 1993 onwards to determine the country's needs in terms of reforming the information and telecommunications sector. One of the key recommendations of a mission in 1994 was the decision to develop a National Information and Communication Programme (NICP). A key function of NICP was to advise and facilitate the formulation of an information and telecommunications policy framework which occurred through the National Telecommunications Forum. Support for this process then led to the IDRC being involved in assisting in developing the green and white papers for a national telecommunications policy.

The IDRC through funding provided by CIDA engaged in a number of initiatives around ICT's in SA. A full account of its activities and impact on policy was conducted in 2003. The IDRC assisted in a range of areas such as managing a national information and communications project, providing advice and technical support to government so as to use ICT as a tool for socio-economic development, community access projects, involvement in the development of a new telecommunications policy and the setting up of Acacia.

Reflections

As with the various other missions embarked upon, the IDRC ensured the following:

- A multi-stakeholder approach in the formulation of policy. The IDRC helped to facilitate rather than impose a pre-packaged solution. Willy Curry, involved in the telecommunications policy process, said the multi-stakeholder forum provided an important policy space for all the different competing interests.
- The IDRC provided a site under the control of the new minister from which to launch a new process around telecommunications reform.
- Whilst internal knowledge existed, the IDRC provided access to a range of policy experts in both developing and developed economies.
- All informants agreed that the IDRC's role or 'success' was its ability to facilitate processes rather than influencing positions. IDRC consultant Kate Wild said SA had good knowledgeable people driving the process who knew what they wanted and they did not need hard technical input from the IDRC. This view was reinforced by another Canadian who argued that the IDRC was probably important in terms of forming relations and networks 'but once things got going' it was questionable whether the organisation was important.
- Aside from playing a supportive role in the policy process, the IDRC was viewed as a broker and neutral in bringing competing parties together.

- It appeared that in the early days IDRC funded research did impact on government thinking, especially in relation to universal access.
- The telecommunications process clearly reflects the type of role the IDRC played. It influenced the quality of the policymaking process but final legislative decisions were government's prerogative and subject to political dynamics at the time.
- Some concern was expressed that if time had permitted initial research so pulling together the global dynamics and domestic situation would have been useful.
- The IDRC's biggest influence on the policy process, Curry said, was its efforts to empower a lot of people in communities to get involved in the ICT sector. Some of these initiatives were successful and others might have been overambitious
- The Acacia Initiative, approved in 1997, sought to develop programmes in Africa which captured the benefits of technology. Various tensions existed around Ottawa's commitment to Acacia, some informants claimed. Its effectiveness was not only hampered by a range of factors including those appointed to manage Acacia. Under the Acacia umbrella the Schoolnet SA project was endorsed and supported with the aim of promoting the use of ICT's in schools. This project like TIPS was initially housed in the IDRC offices but later was hived off as a separate organisation. In recent years Schoolnet SA has faced management and financial problems and has lost its focus.
- The IDRC provided advice on setting up of the Universal Service Agency (USA). In hindsight this model proved to be rather ambitious. The aim of USA was to provide community access through a universal service fund. Naidoo said whilst it was an overambitious initiative from all sides, its failure was largely a result of SA being unable to implement the model properly. The ICT process, he said, was an important learning experience with some aspects succeeding and others not. A SA informant felt that the process was fraught as it appeared to idealistic and did not bring the 'right' people into the process.
- As with other missions, a number of people who were involved landed up in senior positions either in the various regulators who other government linked structures.

4. IDRC's contribution to transformation

An analysis of the IDRC's main missions and interventions in SA during the transition period reveals that its key contributions have related to: (1) facilitating more transparent and democratic policymaking process; (2) strengthening the capacity of researchers to undertake research which would feed into policy processes; (3) harnessing research as an input to policy decisions; (4) laying the groundwork for transformation by getting involved in critical projects.

Facilitating more transparent and democratic policy processes

There is a general consensus amongst South Africans that one of the IDRC's most important role in the policy making process was its ability to facilitate 'good processes'. One informant said 'Van Ameringen's strength was his ability to network, build alliances and draw in a diverse group of people.' Another said: 'Van Ameringen played a critical role in bringing people together and provided a platform for different groupings of people to debate issues and distil ideas.' The IDRC, in the majority of interventions, stressed the need for multi-stakeholder involvement and through their efforts created such platforms.

The IDRC was able to fulfil this role partly due to the personality of Van Ameringen but also as a result of the fact that South Africans felt comfortable with Canadians. A number of informants said they did not feel that the Canadians were ideologically bound, did not appear to have an overt political agenda which they tried to impose or come with a prescriptive solution from the International Monetary Fund or World Bank. 'They were prepared to listen to what we wanted and recognised that people on the ground had expertise.'

Strengthening the capacity of researchers to undertake research which would feed into policy processes

An important part of the IDRC's traditional work has been to support and build capacity amongst researchers in developing economies. This was a key objective underlying all its interventions in SA. In some instances the IDRC's support did assist in building capacity amongst researchers whilst effort was made to develop black economists and researchers. Aside from personal comments from IDRC beneficiaries, clear signs exist today that, to some degree, the IDRC did facilitate the building of research capacity. This is evident by the fact that many involved in IDRC missions or research initiatives either landed up in senior positions in government, NGO's or became high-paying consultants.

Comments made by SA informants revealed that many IDRC beneficiaries (those researchers who received support) were 'relatively young and junior researchers who were thrust into spotlight as a result of their involvement in IDRC sponsored processes.' An informant who had been involved in the ISP said: 'some of us were novices and had never done things like this (ISP)' but their involvement turned out to be helpful. Beneficiaries claimed that IDRC support ensured that they were freed up just to do research without having to worry about fulfilling other obligations. 'By making resources available to do research the IDRC created space for people to think. It was a valuable input. If space and research capacity had not been created then it would have led to more shallow research and debate.'

A general weakness of all the missions was the failure to ensure the development of black economists and researchers, as anticipated. Whilst this did take place, it was not to the extent envisaged. There are numerous reasons why this occurred. Part of it could be a consequence of the fact that there was pressure to deliver on policy and capacity building became a secondary objective. A more cynical view, expressed by one informant, was

that some white economists/academics were not as committed to this agenda as opposed to forwarding their own agendas.

Harnessing research as an input to policy decisions

Naidoo said 'we must not overestimate the contribution of international agencies in policy formulation in SA. The IDRC understood our challenges, goals and helped facilitate these.' How then has the IDRC's intervention impacted on policy decisions? What effect has IDRC supported research had on policy and policymaking?

It is understood that within the IDRC the relationship between research and policy has become more of a priority than it used to be. In the SA case, it was clear that at times, identifying that linkage was difficult as influencing policy can be more nuanced than a direct relationship between research and policy. As one informant said: 'The early 1990's was an intense period of policy development. We had the time and high level of intellectual capacity to focus on policy. In some respects the IDRC facilitated thinking and work which translated into policy', one informant said.

As it is generally understood, research is a necessary input for any policymaking process. However, research on its own does not normally get transferred one to one into policy. Research can promote certain ideas and enrich debates but ultimately, it is that process between research and the adoption of a policy which determines a final position. That process is about politics. It is about making compromises either to accommodate differing vested interests or to comply with the politics of the day.

It is clear that in a number of interventions where the IDRC supported research and the policymaking process, that other factors played a role in the final policies adopted. In some instances, policies eventually adopted were the result of behind the scenes political deals. Does this then imply that policy relevance does not automatically mean that one is close to a policy process? Impacting on policy could occur indirectly. As Cassim had argued in a recent paper: 'The complexity of developing methodologies to provide indicators on the impact of research on policy is compounded by the all encompassing nature of the subject. For example, attempting to develop an approach that assesses the right political and institutional environment wherein policy relevant research could thrive is significantly different to assessing whether particular kinds of research have the potential to make an impact on policy, assuming that the environment is conducive to it.'

The IDRC, in a number of cases, funded both research and supported policymaking processes. Does this then mean that the organisation had 'influence' over policymaking? Influence is a rather loaded term and implies that the IDRC was able to sway the government one way or another or had the power to do so. Whilst the IDRC might not have been able to exert that type of 'influence' over the final policy option (as that would imply it has the final say), it has played an 'influential' role. That is by virtue of its support, funding and facilitation of policy relevant research and exposing policy makers,

researchers and academics to different international experts who promote different policy options.

Having said all this, there were instances, where key research recommendations did filter through into final policies adopted by the new government. Ultimately, the IDRC did not have the type of influence which could determine government's final position on the future of Telkom, for example. But what the IDRC was able to do was support, facilitate and assist the ANC (and once in power the new government) to think through various policy options and create a platform for broader debate. In that sense, it contributed towards a 'good' policymaking process. An informant said 'during policymaking processes there is an inevitable but gradual shifting of views as people face the reality of practical implementation. It forces people to be less ideological.'

Laying the groundwork for transformation by getting involved in critical projects

By responding to the needs and demands of the ANC, the IDRC got involved in important initiatives which helped shape the country's transition. By responding to the ANC's needs and demands, the IDRC in SA did not always land up operating within the parameters of the organisation's traditional work. In some instances this was overlooked but a number of comments made by Canadians revealed concerns around this. This raises some important issues for the IDRC in the event it does work in other countries in transition (see below).

In the majority of instances, the IDRC did not impose an agenda on those driving transformation. However, it did emphasise some areas which might have been neglected by the ANC such as issues around the environment and science and technology. A number of SA's said the IDRC 'helped us to figure it out and find our own solutions. The IDRC did not claim to know the solutions for people in developing countries.' Other comments revealed that the IDRC was more flexible than other donor agencies and was 'open to new ideas and experimentation'.

5. IDRC's positioning in SA

In an unusual move, the IDRC took a decision to fund research and other initiatives for and on behalf of a political party – the ANC (in exile) and its various allies inside SA during the height of apartheid government rule. This move laid the basis for an ongoing working relationship between the IDRC and those who formed part of the broader democratic movement. Building on that earlier relationship the IDRC, as one informant said, became the 'darling of the ANC'. The IDRC received the go ahead from the ANC in Lusaka to begin to fund anti-apartheid research. This eventually evolved into research aimed at providing input to policymaking processes as the ANC began to prepare itself to govern.

As a result the IDRC became involved in facilitating processes around the development of key policies for a post-apartheid SA. One informant said the IDRC came into the country at a time when there were not so many other donor organisations around. The informant said: 'they were one of the first "kids on the block" and as a result build up a track record.' IDRC representative Wardle Lipan said it was about being in SA during the bad times to help bring about the end of apartheid. Another informant said that whilst the IDRC might have been well-placed to become involved in these critical processes, ultimately, it was responding to a demand not only from the ANC but from Mandela which was endorsed by the Canadian government.

The ANC and the broader liberation movement were seeking assistance in developing a vision for the new SA and the pressure was on to develop clear policy positions as it became apparent that a negotiated settlement was imminent. The government in waiting and the new government post 1994 (for a short period of time) was receptive to new ideas/research and input from so-called intellectuals. 'The IDRC was in the right place at the right time', one informant said. As a result IDRC officials from Canada saw their colleagues in SA as enjoying unprecedented access to key decision makers in SA under the new government. Access to those in government came about partly as a result of the fact that a large number of people who were beneficiaries of the IDRC landed up in senior positions in government including ministerial level.

The IDRC assisted in harnessing the intellectual capital by accessing the 'right' intellectuals and researchers who themselves were aligned to 'people in right places' or those individuals who eventually became the change agents in the new SA. Once having positioned itself in the late 1980's and early 1990's, the IDRC was able to maintain its profile by:

- Having a physical presence in the country in the form of an office was important as it ensured that the organisation could establish and retain close personal contacts. It also reflects some sense of commitment to the country and the processes it was involved in at the time. Having an office and personnel in the country meant that the IDRC was able to respond quickly to requests especially in such a period when everything was urgent because of the political negotiations. The office could have its finger on the pulse of what was happening and the needs of the stakeholders.
- There was a general acknowledgment at the time that the IDRC was known for being prepared to act fast which was a change from some of the other more bureaucratic institutions and structures. This however, changed in the latter years.
- The IDRC in SA was headed up by a person who understood the politics of the day; knew what was required and was able to make things happen. One informant said some people believed it was not so much about IDRC in Ottawa but about the way Van Ameringen operated which ensured the organisations profile. 'He wanted to claim ownership of processes so as to ensure the IDRC stamp was on it.'

At the end of the day, the IDRC's position in the country was dependent on whether its services were in demand or not. In the early years, the focus was on policy relevant research. Hence the IDRC's main impact was in the early years leading up to about 1996/7. The IDRC's approach was viewed to be novel and strategic. Aside from that the organisation provided South Africans with instant access to a 'body of knowledge and practice' through the IDRC global network. Many informants said that the IDRC could not be compared to other traditional funders not only because it listened to the needs rather than try to push solutions but because it brought something other than financial resources.

By the time the new government introduced what was viewed as a rather controversial macro-economic strategy in the form of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (Gear), the environment had changed and government was no longer focused on developing policies but on implementation. The unique window of opportunity in which the IDRC could build its profile through funding research and other initiatives which sought to lay the foundation for debate on key policies was no longer available. The time had passed, as one informant said, when 'there was a young, new and inexperienced government who was open to new ideas and the input of intellectuals and academics.'

6. Can the SA case be replicated?

There are limits on the ability to replicate models (as opposed to concepts) as was evident even in some of the projects introduced by the IDRC in SA. An example, was the establishment of Niep which was supposed to have been modelled on the rather successful AECR or the SA Management and Development Institute. In both cases various environmental factors hampered their development and effectiveness.

A similar result could occur if an attempt is made to replicate what happened in SA in another transitional developing country unless the prevailing conditions were identical. As one informant said 'people were open to consultation and this created the environment for creative input. People felt they were starting over so they did not feel constricted or constrained to think out of the box. What better breeding ground for programme development.' It is generally accepted that a country in transition is usually more likely to be receptive to research in addressing policy solutions. Whilst that might be the case, one has to ensure that the right policy environment exists. The IDRC found fertile ground for its 'product' not only because the environment was ripe for an exchange of ideas (the new government open to new thinking and prepared to challenge existing thinking) but a range of other factors were in place such as:

- A supply of researchers and presence of local knowledge. This was certainly the case in SA where there was an established research community while there was also broad depth of knowledge. 'SA was in a unique position as it had strong intellectual basis and a strong civil society movement, it was not just a blank sheet.'

- A reasonably well established civil society. In SA (as compared to the rest of Africa) the various organs of civil society were extremely powerful during the 1980's and 1990's. This is important if multi-stakeholder processes are to take place as part of the overall policymaking process;
- The researchers and academics had strong ties with the emerging new power brokers and in some cases they became part of the new political elite. The relationship between intellectuals and governments is an important one. SA has a history of such alliances (intellectuals went into the government of the day in both 1904 and in 1948) but it is questionable to what extent this happens in other developing countries;
- Each situation is unique and in the SA case it was clear from the mid to late 1980's that there would be a decisive victory of one party winning which meant that the IDRC could focus its attention on the ANC. The situation might not always be as clear-cut in other transition processes.
- The space and time existed to explore various policy options and conduct policy relevant research in the lead up to the political negotiations. Other transition countries might not have the kind of time that SA had and even then time pressures became an issue in some processes.
- Aside from the prevailing conditions in the country, a lot also depends on personalities. In this case it relates to the role of the person (and type of person) heading up the IDRC on the ground. One informant said 'the role of an individual can defy all the rules.' Another said 'you can have all things right but you cannot underestimate the personal relationships in situations such as this.' The general view from the SA informants was that such a function cannot be left to a 'bureaucratic type'. A person operating in a country in transition needs to fully understand (and have a sense of) the political dynamics; be able to identify the potential power brokers or new political elite; network effectively; facilitate process and be perceived to be neutral.

Ultimately, SA became the flavour of the month and the IDRC decided to try something different. It is clear that the organisation feels comfortable with some of the interventions made and not with others. What is however, critical here is that if an organisation such as the IDRC wishes to involve itself in countries in transition they might be required to adopt 'a different way of working'. The question is to what extent this 'deviation' of IDRC approach has influenced other initiatives embarked upon since its involvement in SA? Depending on the response should we not then be talking about replicating a concept rather than a model?

7. Lessons from South Africa

IDRC's involvement in SA seems to have raised some rather interesting challenges for the organisation not only in terms of future plans to involve itself in other countries in transition but more broadly, in terms of how it currently operates.

The SA experience has revealed the following:

- The IDRC played a supportive role in critical processes which shaped transformation. They were able to participate in such processes because the IDRC was prepared to listen to what the SA's wanted and responded to demands where they were able to.
- If the overall objective is to have an impact on policy then it is critical to have a proper understanding of the full policy cycle as in research, design and implementation. There is a sense that in a number of IDRC supported processes insufficient attention was given to the challenges around implementation and the capacity to implement various policy options, some of which were rather sophisticated.
- The IDRC's traditional approach of strengthening capacity outside government so as to ensure there is engagement in critical independent analysis was at times compromised. What has not been explored is whether this would have the potential of weakening civil society. Some concerns were raised that the potential existed to weaken civil society if all the resources were focused on government and not elsewhere. This was largely due to the fact that as the ANC moved into government so to did the IDRC assistance. This however, only occurred for a short period after 1994.
- It is clear that part of the IDRC's success in SA was its ability to carefully identify who the emergent leaders were going to be and to work with them. Funders can spend an enormous amount of time and energy but 'if your product is not taken up by policy makers' then resources are wasted.
- Establishing legitimacy and building trust is critical otherwise access is limited or denied.
- Involvement in countries in transition, as was evident in SA, might require a more flexible approach to the way in which the IDRC operates. 'You have to fit your instruments to meet the needs and circumstances.' It became clear with ROSA that the very qualities which made it a successful operation in the early years then turned into liabilities as the tide turned in Ottawa. Some sort of balance needs to be explored between creating space for creativity and ensuring proper controls are in place.
- One of the IDRC's strengths was promoting more democratic and transparent policymaking processes. Some concern was raised however, as to whether the organisation got too involved in trying to determine final policy options. This is backed up by comments by some individuals who felt the IDRC was more concerned about the end product than about focusing on the process and ensuring capacity building and the building of a strong civil society to hold government accountable.

- The SA experienced showed the need to respect local knowledge and structures.

Finally, the decision to support the ANC in exile whilst the apartheid state was still in place reflected an organisation which was prepared to chart new territory and which has dared to make mistakes, as one informant said. By adopting, what might then have been viewed as 'taking a path no-one has gone before', the IDRC indicated its willingness to take risks, or is it?

8. Organisational issues

Whilst the closure of the Johannesburg did not form part of the overall terms of reference of this report, it was raised in the majority of interviews without any prompting from the writer. Hence, it would be unrealistic not to make some mention of it as it obviously still remains a sensitive issue. Before discussing this issue further, the report looks at how the IDRC's profile in SA assisted the Canadian government and perceptions of ROSA.

8.1 Did IDRC's profile in SA assist Canada?

There was a general acknowledgement from the majority of Canadians interviewed (especially those who had worked for CIDA) that the presence of IDRC in SA assisted the Canadian government in establishing good relationship with the new SA government post 1994. Prior to the first democratic elections in 1994 the Canadian government did not have official business with the SA government. As the Canadian government began to develop new relations with the government post 1994, it could do so based on the fact that it had a Canadian organisation already in the country which had established good relations with key people in government. A former CIDA representative Steve Hallihan said: 'it was made clear to me that the IDRC approach in SA had been really strategic'. They had been able to establish strong connections in the new government and amongst the key change agents. The IDRC, he said, provided the natural bridge and door into SA for the Canadian government. Hallihan said the SA office (and Van Ameringen) did not only do a good job for the IDRC but provided good advantages for the Canadian government in building relations with the new government.

8.2 Perceptions of the IDRC operation in SA

Whilst the IDRC office in Johannesburg (or otherwise known as ROSA) gained a high-profile both in SA and in Canada for the work it did in SA, there are clear indications from those interviewed in Ottawa that there was discomfort in the way in which the office operated. What will not be explored here is whether this discomfort was legitimate or based on what some would argue 'narrow and small minded vested interests' and 'petty jealousy'.

The types of views which did emerge, mainly from Ottawa, included:

- Perception that ROSA was operating outside the boundaries of the IDRC firstly, because a number of its programming were not mainstream IDRC programmes and secondly, the office was operating as an IDRC within the IDRC. One informant said the perception was that it had become its own NGO and was no longer under control of Ottawa. He cautioned to add that it was not so much a question of head-office control but being part of a larger institution ;
- There was a disproportionate focus on revenue generation which was actually in line with the overall focus of the IDRC as a whole at the time. As a result of an overemphasis on revenue generation, there was a view that projects were often chosen for that reason. The flip side of that was that through the co-funding of projects, the IDRC appeared to have a much larger impact with relative small investments;
- There was a lack of clarity as to how programmes were chosen and whether an overall strategy existed or were decisions based on opportunism;
- The office was viewed as an operation which did dynamic things and was not prepared to always operate within the rules of the game.
- A number of SA informants complained about the poor administration and seemingly lack of financial controls in the office
- The SA's were happy that in the early years they did not have to put up with much bureaucracy which slowed down responses to requests at a time when time was of the essence.
- People in Ottawa felt that Van Ameringen was given too much lee-way in how he operated whilst staff in SA felt that there was an attempt by Ottawa to micro-manage the SA operation.
- Differences of opinion existed over the type of research being conducted in SA. Some people in Ottawa argued that some of the research being embarked upon as part of the policymaking processes did not constitute proper research.

8.3 Office closure

For many of the Canadians who were either based at ROSA or had close relations with SA, the closure of ROSA still remains a sensitive issue. The majority interviewed were opposed to the closure; a minority believed the work of the IDRC had come to an end and hence the life of the office; others felt that the operation could have been trimmed down and restructured while those opposed to the closure believed SA remained a good base to if the intention was to focus on Africa. (This argument might be even more relevant if SA is chosen to house the parliament for the African Union. That is aside from the fact that NEPAD is being driven from SA) Various political sensitivities – whether naïve or not - prevented such a decision from being taken. One Canadian said the office had stayed open to long its closure was a 'storm in a tea-cup'.

The majority of South Africans were rather perplexed as to the underlying reasons for the closure. There was a sense amongst many, that there was more to the closure than the official version. A number of SA's felt that the

way in which the IDRC closed ROSA did a lot to undermine all that the organisation did over the years. Lael Bethlehem said 'funders try for decades to build up the sort of access and reputation that the IDRC developed. The organisation spent years building something valuable and overnight they closed it down.'

Despite opposition to the closure a number of SA's did however, feel that the work of the IDRC had been done and many of its beneficiaries had moved on. One SA informant said: 'many people had moved on by the time the office closed. One of the consequences of transition is that many of the people who benefited from the IDRC in the past had far less need for the organisation as they were no longer doing research anymore.'

From about 1997 onwards it appeared as if some projects began to lose momentum and there was a sense that the organisation was starting to lose its edge. By this time, the IDRC was no longer the only donor agency around and the terrain had changed even to the extent that the new government had become closer to other donor agencies. In addition, a number of ROSA staff were being poached by government and other organisations.

There could well be a case to argue that if the closure of ROSA had been more transparent and political tensions had not existed, the reaction might not have been what it was (and remains). This might be a rather naïve assessment but leaving it as is, the closure of the office has important implications for the IDRC in the event it decides to open up satellite offices in countries in which they plan to work aside from existing regional offices. Some important issues to consider in light of the ROSA experience:

- From the outset there needs to be clarity as to the status of the office, its lifespan and how it should function. Here however, caution should be exercised in trying to ensure accountability to Ottawa at the expense of being responsive and proactive;
- There also needs to be a proper exit strategy;
- In order to ensure high levels of flexibility different types of staffing arrangements can be embarked upon, for example, short duration contracts or employment contracts linked to specific projects.

What remains unanswered is whether the IDRC's credibility was affected by the manner in which the office was closed. Did it throw away its political capital, as a former IDRC representative claimed? For many of those South Africans who were involved with the IDRC from the 1980's onwards, they no longer think that the organisation has a presence in SA. Perhaps that is not an issue if the work the IDRC set out to do in country has been done.

Annexure A-C (to follow)