

# Working Together to Strengthen Skills

## IDRC's Strategic Evaluation of Capacity Development, Phase 3: Developing the Framework

March 2007

A central pillar of the International Development Research Centre's (IDRC) mission is developing local capacity in developing countries to undertake research and innovate. With this in mind, IDRC is undertaking a strategic evaluation to gain a deeper understanding of how it operationalizes its capacity support and the results that are achieved. This work draws on [previous phases](http://www.idrc.ca/evaluation/ev-70623-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)<sup>1</sup> of the strategic evaluation, summarized in [Evaluation Highlight 10 -Capacity Building Strategic Evaluation](http://www.idrc.ca/evaluation/ev-96679-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)<sup>2</sup>.

Based on Phase 3 of the strategic evaluation, this Highlight offers a framework to capture how IDRC's support contributes to capacity development at the individual/group, organizational and network levels in the field. The goal is to help Centre staff conceptualize, plan, monitor and evaluate capacity development interventions in their work.

### Background to the Study

The capacity development framework builds on the previous phases carried out in 2005 and 2006, where observations and analysis of IDRC's capacity development were obtained by assessing 43 projects, including in-depth interviews with relevant staff and partners.

One of the key findings in the previous phases of this strategic evaluation is that the beneficiaries of the Centre's efforts in capacity support are often IDRC's secondary and even tertiary partners – our boundary partners' boundary partners. This means that in order to determine the results achieved, it will be necessary to look further down the results chain to capture not only the changes that are occurring for our direct partners, but also those indirect beneficiaries who may have a partnership or association with the original partner. Therefore the framework attempts to not only capture if and how IDRC is developing the capacities of researchers, but how their partners are *also* developing the capacity of researchers.

The next step in this strategic evaluation is a series of case studies in the field. Drawing on what has been learned to date about IDRC and capacity development and applying the typologies that are the basis of this framework and a set of questions developed specifically for the case studies, it is anticipated that the real-life cases will validate and enrich the work to date on this vital topic.

### Developing the Framework: Building on What We Know

Developing capacity at the local level is at the heart of the Centre's work. The definition of capacity development is provided in Box 1:

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.idrc.ca/evaluation/ev-70623-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/evaluation/ev-70623-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.idrc.ca/evaluation/ev-96679-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/evaluation/ev-96679-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)

### Box 1: Definition of Capacity Development<sup>3</sup> at IDRC

*For IDRC, Capacity Development is the process by which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and societies increase their ability to identify and analyse development challenges, and to have the ability to conduct, manage and communicate research that addresses these challenges over time and in a sustainable manner.*

*- Adapted from "IDRC-Supported Capacity Building: Developing a Framework for Capturing Capacity Changes" by Stephanie Neilson and Charles Lusthaus, February 2007.*

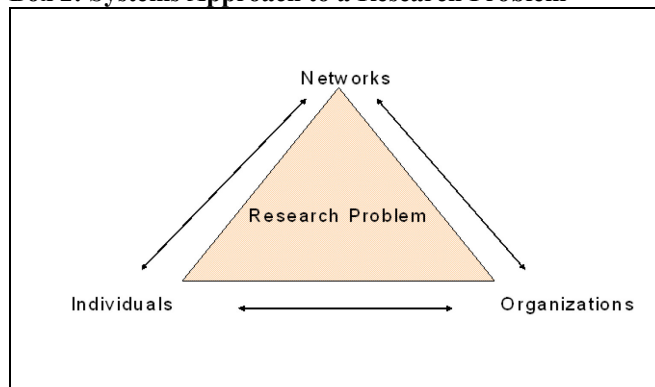
Findings to date note that IDRC-supported capacity interventions generally focus at the individual level – individuals and/or teams/groups. Even where the intervention is at the organizational/network level, the focus of change is predominantly about the individual, and how that individual is able (or not able) to influence change within their organization or network. As previously noted, it is also about how individuals have the capacity to build or establish relationships and partnerships to influence change, and how these partnerships and relationships interact within the various settings (organizations, networks).

### A Systems Approach to Capacity Development

IDRC partners are connected to others within the research problematique or system. It is for this reason that assessing capacity also requires looking at how these individuals are connected to others. At IDRC, capacity development often take a *systems approach*. In other words, it not only addresses the individual(s) directly involved in the project, but also looks at how these individuals are connected to others: other individuals, organizations, and/or networks (see Box 2).

It is clear that it is only through examining the dynamics and evolution of how all the involved parties and communities work together to solve the development challenge that we will better understand how IDRC supports *the capacity to do research-related activities*.

### Box 2: Systems Approach to a Research Problem



Additionally, in IDRC's view of *complete capacity*, there is a need to pay attention to and fund multiple functions to enhance the capacity to do research-related activities, including how to conduct, manage, and communicate research. IDRC areas that provide capacity development include:

- Programs Branch
- Evaluation Unit
- Partnership and Business Development Division
- Research Information Management Services
- Grants Administration Division

<sup>3</sup> This concept has been called *capacity building*, *capacity development*, or even *collaborative learning* by various donors and development organizations. For the IDRC Capacity Development Strategic Evaluation, the term *capacity development* was chosen because it refers to an iterative process of strengthening pre-existing skills.

A set of key questions can be used to systematically design or evaluate capacity development initiatives (see Box 3).

### Box 3: Key Questions on Capacity Development

*Which entry point is used for the research problem?*

- individual
- organizational
- networks

*How does IDRC /provide support to its partners?*

- using which abilities?
- to provide what solutions?
- at which level?

Other key questions to address include:

- What are the dynamics among the entry points?
- What are the relationships that are created to help develop capacities?
- How do these relationships and capacities change over time?

## Good Practices for Capacity Outcomes

Through each phase of this work, Centre staff and partners identified or discussed a number of factors that contribute to the success of building research capacities (see Table 1). This early list of “good practices” begins to capture some of the elements of IDRC’s support that staff and partners view as being critical to building sustainable research organizations and systems.

TABLE 1: GOOD PRACTICES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO IDRC’S CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT (ADAPTED FROM DAC, 2003 AND IDRC’S CORPORATE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK, 2006).	
GOOD PRACTICES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT	MANIFESTED IN IDRC THROUGH:
<b>IDRC characteristics</b>	
Persistence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustained mentoring</li> <li>• Continuity, prolonged engagement</li> <li>• Iterative learning process</li> <li>• Aim to build legitimacy, credibility and trust</li> </ul>
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding arrangements</li> <li>• Location within Canadian government system</li> <li>• Agility to respond to developing country needs</li> </ul>
Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stay engaged under difficult circumstances</li> <li>• Provide legitimacy, credibility and trust</li> </ul>
<b>Building Partnerships</b>	
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Networks of individuals and organizations/institutions</li> <li>• Inter-organizational linkages</li> <li>• Face-to-face interactions between/among IDRC staff and researchers</li> <li>• Providing legitimacy and credibility to partners and beneficiaries</li> </ul>

<b>TABLE 1: GOOD PRACTICES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO IDRC’S CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT (ADAPTED FROM DAC, 2003 AND IDRC’S CORPORATE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK, 2006).</b>	
<b>GOOD PRACTICES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>MANIFESTED IN IDRC THROUGH:</b>
<b>Harnessing Existing Capacities</b>	
Strategic Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scan locally and globally, reinvent locally – regional presence to determine existing capacities</li> <li>• Staff knowledge of regions</li> </ul>
Build on existing capacities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustained mentoring – provide long-term support beyond “one-off training” sessions</li> <li>• Regional presence – to determine existing capacities</li> <li>• Use local, existing capacities rather than creating parallel systems</li> </ul>
<b>Relevance of the Problem</b>	
Locally-driven agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local ownership</li> <li>• Local and global participation in determining the agenda</li> <li>• Programs continually evolving to meet developing country demands</li> <li>• Bring southern perspectives and voices to the analysis of development challenges</li> <li>• Support devolvement of major research initiatives when appropriate</li> </ul>