

Social Policy and Governance in Africa: Emerging Issues

Opening Remarks

(1. Intro...)

- I would like to welcome you to IDRC. I would like to especially welcome our colleagues from Africa, many of whom overcame significant hurdles to be here and who will be presenting this afternoon.
- I would also like to give our thanks to the Canadian Association of African Studies (CAAS), and the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development (CASID) for co-sponsoring the event and for exploring these issues with us; and CAAS for co-organizing this Seminar on Social Policy and Governance in Africa.
- This session follows two sessions on the themes of governance and social policy reforms which took place

during this year's annual Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities in Sherbrooke /Lennoxville this past weekend. The first, a round table hosted by CAAS, CASID and IDRC, set out emerging issues in democratisation, state reform, and social change and social policy in Africa. The second, a panel at the CAAS conference, presented preliminary findings of research on social sector reforms. The aim of today's seminar is to share some of these discussions with you and to carry them further, and hopefully generate ideas about how research and development interventions can address some of the challenges and opportunities identified.

(2. research issues surrounding social policy and governance in Africa)

- Despite positive evidence of economic growth and democratization, the persistent poverty and the financial and political crises that continue to face many African states

present a challenge to find new ways of “doing politics.” In contrast to previous centralized systems of governance, the 1990s, are characterized by broad public policy reforms that have resulted in the decentralization of social policy processes and an increasing role of municipalities and non-state actors in the effective provision of social services.

- These regional trends include the devolution of education and health care to local governments and communities, the privatization of service-provision and the introduction of user-fees. NGOs and community-organizations now have increasing responsibilities in the absence or the withdrawal of government-funded programs.
- Many of the reforms implemented to date are not based on comprehensive strategies or research on what works. They

often represent quick responses to pressing global economic and political pressures. Consequently the quality, equity, efficiency and effectiveness of social services have not sufficiently improved.

- Social policy processes in Africa are indeed complex, taking place through multiple formal and informal channels.
- The shifting roles of governments, civil society organizations, and traditional leaders in the wake of decentralization, give rise to new questions for development research: How can the institutional, financial, and human capacities of new social actors be reinforced? Are decentralized government units or joint ventures with civil society and the private sector able to deliver services more equitably than central administrations? What lessons can be learned from

development research in the region to make social policy environments conducive to broader participation? How can the role of local organization be integrated into formal policy processes?

(3. Results of research and future directions)

- IDRC has been supporting research on many of these issues. Our Program Initiative on Assessment of Social Policy Reforms continues to support regional research programs and networks of local researchers and institutions. In Africa, their research has tended to focus on decentralization and the role of local governments and other actors in providing social services in health and education. Analyses of institutional frameworks for social service provision, including the role and capacity of civil society organizations are also being carried out.

- In response to concerns of equity and access to services, IDRC's Assessment of Social Policy Reforms Program Initiative is also funding the Regional Network on Equity in Health in Southern Africa, to determine the equity impacts of cost-recovery schemes and decentralized health care services.
- One of the challenges that continues to face policy researchers in the region is how to ensure that research results be utilized by decision-makers. The Social Policy Research Network, a project funded by IDRC, ensures that research findings and recommendations are integrated into policy-making processes by including policy-makers from member-countries in the research process from the outset.
- These and other regional research initiatives contribute to

our knowledge and awareness of policy reform processes and highlight the importance of understanding political systems and processes and how people's rights to education, health-care and other services are exercised and promoted.

(4. Conclusion:)

- IDRC continues to recognize the importance of coordinating and connecting international development research and researchers across national borders and regions. Integral to the Center's work is the promotion of networking and partnerships to broaden knowledge and resources.
- Your presence here and your participation at the CAAS conference represents a very important opportunity to achieve this goal by bringing together the research community from Africa and Canada. It also provides IDRC a

unique opportunity to hear from you in direct consultation,
assisting in refine and developing our future programming .

I would like once again to thank you.