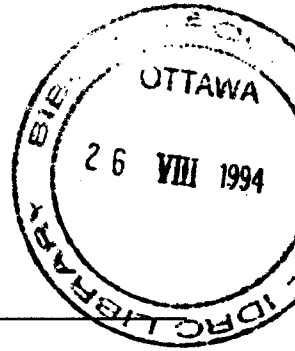


PRESENTATION TO  
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

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International Development Research Centre

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I am most grateful for the invitation to appear before you today. I will attempt to limit my opening remarks to the ten minutes suggested by the Clerk and hope that I will be able to convey to you a little of our enthusiasm, for these are exciting times at IDRC. I shall, of course, look forward to answering your questions.

Some of you may not be very familiar with IDRC. We were founded in 1970 by the Parliament of Canada as the first organization of its kind in the world, an organization whose exclusive purpose is to build research and knowledge systems to support international development. The basic idea behind IDRC is very simple: it is that development is something that people do for themselves, not something that is done to them, and that it occurs best when people solve their own problems, through their own skills, actions, and knowledge.

By funding the efforts of developing country scientists, IDRC strengthens their capacity to find solutions to their own development problems, but also to contribute to what are increasingly seen as **global** problems of sustainable development. Whenever appropriate, developing countries' efforts are linked to those of Canadian institutions and Canadian expertise, but always with the aim of strengthening developing countries' ability to act and take decisions independently, based on the best research and analysis available. IDRC's mission -- Empowerment through Knowledge -- makes explicit the relationship between knowledge and development, and the importance that we attach not only to capacity-building, but to ensuring that the results of successful research translate into benefits for people.

Over the years, the results of development research supported by IDRC have been featured in countless scientific publications as well as in such popular press as the New York Times, Life Magazine, Newsweek and Maclean's. In 1980, a major parliamentary task force pointed to the strengths of IDRC and recommended a significant increase in financial support. In 1988, the Office of the Auditor General initiated a study on Well-Performing Organizations and IDRC was one of the eight selected to participate in the study. And at least two countries have established research for development organizations modelled after IDRC.

Changing times and changed circumstances, however, require organizational change. We find ourselves today at a unique moment in human history on the planet. The combined factors of

rapid population growth (largely in the South) and unsustainable consumption patterns (largely in the North) are challenging the limits of our life-supporting environment. The intensity and the scope of change -- political, social, biophysical, economic and technological -- are outpacing the capacity of our institutions and systems, including our capacity for social innovations.

But, if this is a time of unprecedented problems, it is also a time of unprecedented opportunities. The worldwide growth of scientific and technological capacity is without parallel and, in many countries, the rate of growth in the number of scientists, engineers and other professionals is exceeding the rate of population growth. Humankind, as a whole, from an historical perspective, appears to be on the steepest part of the learning curve for basic understanding of the universe, our planet, and the biological systems of which we humans are an integral part. Harvey Brooks, distinguished Harvard University professor emeritus of science, describes our current contest as:

"...a transition leading either towards catastrophe and social disintegration or towards a sustainably growing world society (growing in per capita welfare though with constantly declining population growth)."

Brooks argues that the opportunities can be seized and that catastrophe can be avoided **IF** R&D is placed on an intensive world-wide footing. The OECD agrees with this assessment and has concluded that, with regard to developing countries, the:

"... central objective must be to help establish genuine indigenous science and technology capabilities..."

R&D, however, is very far from being approached on an intensive world-wide basis. Approximately 84% of the world's population live in the developing world where, in 1991, we estimate only \$20 billion was expended on R&D (this amounts to less than 5% of global spending on R&D for that year). A further perspective on this situation is apparent when we realize that, in 1991, General Motors Corporation alone spent \$5.9 billion on R&D, and the top ten US corporations spent more than \$22 billion.

Faced with new challenges and dramatic changes, starting in 1991, IDRC undertook a program of significant change designed to increase its effectiveness and its efficiency. This included a strategic adjustment, which modified several of our purposes and which directed us to a new range of activities; a "downsizing" of approximately 20% of staff; reduction of management levels and 50% reduction in management numbers. With our slimmer, more effective organizational structure, we were able to respond rapidly to the enlarged mandate the Government entrusted us with as part of Canada's response to the Rio UN Conference on Environment and Development. And, following on from this, we introduced a new three-year corporate program that was approved by IDRC's Board of Governors in March of 1993.

IDRC is now directing its support to six key areas of research that link Environment and Development, such as food systems that are threatened by environmental degradation; and to a larger number of areas essential to sustainable human development, such as research on macro-economic policies and health systems.

Let me give you a few examples of what IDRC is doing (we also have a ten-minute video on some cases of IDRC-supported research that we could make available to Committee members). First a few projects already underway:

- ◆ Collaboration between researchers in Canada, and colleagues in China and Egypt has led to higher quality canola in China and the development of effective, safe biological pest control agents. The exchange is also leading to more disease-resistant canola varieties in Canada, with an expected 15% increase in yields.
- ◆ Another project is also close to bearing fruit -- literally. You may have seen recent press reports of the Goldfinger banana -- produced by research in Honduras that IDRC has been funding since the mid-80s. This banana is the first hybrid that is resistant to Black sigatoka, a disease that threatens the currently dominant banana, the Cavendish, with extinction.
- ◆ Villagers in Chile are getting water from fog-catching technology, resulting from research by Chileans and Canadians. We are now promoting this in other areas that can benefit.
- ◆ In South Africa, policy research has had great influence in the transition -- this has included helping the ANC and COSATU develop a more broadly based industrial policy and credible macro-economic analysis, and black groups' capacity to work on urban renewal and in educational administration.

We have produced a booklet giving examples of 101 technologies funded by IDRC research; we would be pleased to provide members of the committee who wish to look into these technologies with copies of the booklet.

In the past year, we have started supporting many further promising initiatives. For example, we are supporting African states and African non-governmental organizations in bringing the best available research and knowledge to the negotiations on an International Convention on Desertification. Our program will continue beyond the convention to the implementation of efforts to combat desertification and drought. We have launched a global review of biodiversity and conservation at the community level and on farms. We are supporting a major eco-system development initiative for the Andes, and environmental health impact assessment for the

Amazon. The Canadian Federation of Municipalities will be working with the International Centre on Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), located in Toronto, to support a global network to develop local sustainable development action plans around the world. Canadian technology will be used to produce an electronic atlas to assist in planning sustainable development.

Most IDRC action is in funding and following up on research for development. But I should mention three other important features:

- ◆ By **working with others**, IDRC is acting as a catalyst for development efforts on a large scale that would otherwise be far beyond our financial means. To give but a few examples:
  - In late 1993, we hosted in Ottawa (in co-sponsorship with the World Health Organization and the World Bank), the first meeting ever held to ensure follow-up action to a World Development Report. This is leading to a major, Canadian-led public health experiment in East Africa.
  - Together with our Swedish counterpart organization (SAREC), we founded a new international organization on Essential National Health Research which is now being supported by many countries and independent foundations. The organization is helping to build capacity for basic health throughout the world.
  - IDRC houses a multi-donor secretariat on micronutrient deficiency which is funded by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, UNICEF, CIDA and the Rockefeller Foundation. This multi-donor effort is a global secretariat, established as an outcome of the Children's Summit to provide leadership and support in the elimination of micronutrient deficiency.
  - Indigenous economic research and economic management are pre-requisites to development. Following years of patient effort by IDRC, the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) was established in Africa to lead in building capacity in these areas. It has proved to be so successful that funding is now forthcoming from twelve public and foundation donors. As governance begins to improve in sub-Saharan Africa, "graduates" from this institution are well placed to contribute to public policy.
- ◆ IDRC also serves as a **knowledge broker**: its influence and credibility are based not only on its research-funding record, but also on its experience and its knowledge base that links a vast network of scientists and institutions in the Third World, Canada and other countries. The revolution in information and

communications is fast changing the nature of the world we live in. Those who are able to take advantage of the new technologies will profit; those who are unable to do so are likely to become further marginalized. IDRC is working to provide global R&D linkages that will benefit both the South and Canada.

- ◆ We are committed to achieving the maximum possible effect with the financial resources we receive annually from Parliament, and to use this grant to leverage other resources. We have assumed that with the right program, the best ideas and the strongest delivery capacity, IDRC can attract funds from other sources, both Canadian and non-Canadian, to the initiatives that it supports. We have been successful in attracting funds -- the amount has more than doubled since last year, we have for instance recently been entrusted with funds from the United States Agency for International Development, the Dutch government, the Carnegie Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Inter-American Development Bank, and others.

I believe that IDRC has made an excellent start in implementing its new three-year program, just as it continues to take advantage of judicious research investments made in earlier years. But we are first and foremost a learning organization and have many improvements to make. We are still learning what works and what does not in our business. Contributing to research capacity-building and development is anything but an exact science. For instance, we are still trying to find better ways to combine the various ingredients necessary for problem-solving. We have a lot to learn about getting many disciplines to work together, particularly in the different settings which we support. We are still striving to ensure that research is based on accurate assessment of the needs of potential users, be they farmers, communities, small-scale urban producers or policy makers. And that when the research pans out, it is used.

So, in IDRC we are building on the many strengths that we have established over our history, and developing new strengths to fit the dramatically changed circumstances in which we find ourselves. An important part of our new strength rests in the acceptance that nothing can ever again be constant and that change is a requirement of the world in which we now live.