

# A Multipronged Approach to Ensuring Food Security



IDRC Photo: Jason Taylor

2006-10

In 1996, 180 nations—including Canada—met in Rome for the World Food Summit (WFS) to discuss ways to end hunger. Nations pledged to eradicate hunger and committed themselves to a basic target: reducing the number of undernourished people by half by 2015. Five years later, they reaffirmed their commitment to meeting the goals set out in the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action.

In the Rome Declaration, nations committed themselves to ensuring an enabling environment and implementing policies to eradicate poverty and guarantee access to sufficient, safe food to all. They also agreed to promote a fair world trade system, and to work to prevent natural disasters and other emergencies that threaten food security. They further agreed to promote the use of public and private investments in ways that foster human resources and sustainable development.

IDRC's programs and the research it funds contribute to meeting these commitments. IDRC believes that poverty alleviation, food security, and environmental sustainability go hand in hand. It also believes that effectively addressing these interlinked challenges requires working actively with the main actors, from farmers to researchers to government officials. While this is the thrust of all of IDRC's programs, two contribute most directly to increasing food supplies—[Rural Poverty and Environment](#) (RPE) and [Urban Poverty and Environment](#) (UPE).

## A multidisciplinary approach

In rural areas, IDRC supports research that focuses on the needs of the poor who live in fragile or degraded ecosystems. This can take many forms, from promoting participatory plant breeding of staple crops as a means to conserve biodiversity and recognize farmers' knowledge (read more: [Seeds that give](#)), to supporting collaborative management of natural resources such as watersheds and community forests. Research also seeks to support



land tenure reforms and improve access to natural resources and focuses on how the poor can improve their livelihoods while better managing natural resources in a context of market liberalization and integration.

Efforts to ensure that research is relevant to the need of farmers have met with success in many areas. For example:

- In Viet Nam, IDRC-supported research has demonstrated that community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) concepts and processes, such as "farmer to farmer" methods, can be successful in reducing poverty at the commune level. The overall goal has been to develop and support processes that will reach and build sustainable livelihoods for a greater number of the poorest in upland communities (read more: [Improving Natural Resource Management in Viet Nam's Hong Ha Commune](#)).
- In the harsh conditions of Jordan and Syria, farmer-selected lines of barley have fared as well or better than those emanating from research centres. What's more, these varieties yield better forage and are more palatable to sheep and goats, the main sources of meat and milk products in the region (read more: [CASE STUDY: North Africa and Middle East Breeding Better Barley — Together](#)).
- In China, bridging the gap between scientists and farmers has led to the adaptation of varieties of maize to local conditions and the improvement of a number of others, contributing to both food supplies and livelihoods (read more: [Bridging the Gap Between Scientists and Farmers in China](#)).

## Growing food in the cities

In the booming urban areas of developing countries, access to land, food, and basic environmental services such as water, sanitation, and waste collection is limited, leading to increased poverty and environmental burdens. One of the goals of IDRC's UPE program is to support research on urban agriculture (UA) as a means to increase household food security and to generate income (read more: [Feeding the Sustainable City](#))

Thanks largely to the pioneering work of IDRC-supported researchers over the past two decades, some municipalities have now recognized the value of urban agriculture in boosting food security and reducing unemployment among the urban poor. For example:

- City councillors in Kampala, Uganda have created ordinances to better integrate farming activities into urban planning and management ([read more](#))



- In Rosario, Argentina municipal authorities, working farmers' groups, shantytown dwellers, and civil society organizations devised a scheme for granting tenure to unused municipal lands. As a result, more than 700 community market gardens were established, a vegetable processing agroindustry was created, and plant and craft fairs were held. This has led to sustainable food supplies and livelihoods for poor residents ([read more](#)).

Given the challenges, IDRC and its partners are encouraging governments to team up with stakeholders to develop strategies to meet the MDGs. In answering the need

for more secure land tenure for city farmers, governments at all levels could reduce poverty and help improve the lives of slum dwellers. By actively supporting urban agriculture activities, they can reduce hunger and malnutrition while promoting employment among disadvantaged groups such as women.

## Innovative approaches

Because hunger and poverty are intimately linked to economic and social policies at the macro and sectoral levels, IDRC also supports research to understand these links and target policies effectively. A first step is mapping poverty and its components. Another is to link changes in these to various combinations of policies. IDRC has been doing this in over 20 developing countries since 1990 (read more: [Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic and Adjustment Policies](#) [MIMAP]). An essential component of IDRC's work in this area is the community-based poverty monitoring system developed in 1996. First implemented in the Philippines, the Department of the Interior and Local Government has since directed all local government units to adopt the system's 13 core indicators for measuring poverty (read more: [Development Takes on a Face and an Address in the Philippines](#)). The CBMS is now being tested, with IDRC support, in 12 countries in Asia and Africa (read more: [Poverty and Economic Policy \(PEP\) Research Network](#)).

IDRC also tackles poverty issues through such innovative means as the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Many Centre-supported projects demonstrate that communities with greater access to ICTs are able to generate and sustain economic growth (read more: [An overview of ICTs at IDRC](#)). For example:

- In Kenya, a project is experimenting with ways of using the Internet to provide financial, marketing, and information services to small farmers so that they can better market their produce and boost their incomes (read more: [Kenyan Farmers Discover the Internet](#)).
- In Senegal, farmers in remote areas can obtain up-to-the-minute market prices for their crops through portable telephones provided through an IDRC-supported project. This has directly increased participating farmers' incomes by 30% and generated new employment for women (read more: [Acacia Partner Farmers Garner Two Major ICT Prizes](#)).
- In India, rural knowledge centres in seven villages provide information on the price of agricultural inputs, market prices, government programs, and much more. The positive impact on villagers' livelihoods has led to a movement to bring the benefits of ICTs to 600 000 villages by mid-2007 (read more: [Making Waves](#); [Mission 2007—National Alliance Every Village a Knowledge Centre](#)).

To learn more

- [Monitoring Progress Since the World Food Summit](#) (FAO)
- [Seeds that Give: Participatory Plant Breeding](#)
- [Growing Better Cities: Urban Agriculture for Sustainable Development](#)
- [Rural Poverty and Environment](#) Program, IDRC
- [Urban Poverty and Environment](#) Program, IDRC

