

Introductory Remarks at the  
AUCC Research Colloquium

14<sup>th</sup> Floor, IDRC  
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It is my pleasure to welcome you all to IDRC today, at the start of what promises to be an exciting learning event. I see from the participants list that we have partners from across Canada and around the world here today. Welcome! Bienvenue au colloque !

As you know, IDRC has co-sponsored this event with AUCC and is pleased to host the colloquium on our premises. This event is part of IDRC's strategic partnership with AUCC around issues of internationalising research. The Centre is known for funding research designed and carried out by Southern researchers in their countries and regions. However, for at least the last 25 years, IDRC has encouraged Canadian collaboration on research projects in the South. Every year, approximately 18% of our funds go to what we call collaborative projects. IDRC usually expects the impetus for such collaboration to come from the South, but we have noted the steady increase of interest on the part of Canadians to work with Southern partners and vice versa. We have also noted our Prime Minister's statement last year that 5% of Canada's research and development capacity funds should be targeted towards development goals. Hence, our interest in learning more about how best to support partnerships or collaboration.

Nous avons récemment entrepris de nous pencher sur notre propre expérience en ce qui concerne le financement de projets de recherche exécutés en collaboration. Cette étude vient de démarrer, mais j'aimerais tout de même aujourd'hui vous faire part de quelques constatations préliminaires.

We have learned that North-South collaboration or partnership as supported by IDRC comes in different forms: quite often, collaboration has been set up between the partners before they approach IDRC. Other times, partnership is encouraged by an IDRC program officer when a southern organisation proposes a viable project but a gap is identified in its team structure – a gap that could be filled by a Canadian collaborator who would also gain from the partnership. The Centre always holds to the line that collaborations be driven by southern needs and linked with what Canadian partners can bring. IDRC acts as a facilitator to the partnerships, sharing knowledge and experiences from its network of organisations in the North and South.

*What are the benefits or outcomes of North-South collaborations?*

La collaboration enrichit les projets et leur donne encore plus de pertinence, car elle permet de tisser des liens et des réseaux, souvent durables, reposant sur un apprentissage bilatéral qui approfondit les connaissances et favorise l'acquisition de compétences. Il arrive que les organisations du Sud profitent de leur familiarisation avec les méthodes de recherche canadiennes et de la possibilité d'une plus grande diffusion des résultats grâce aux revues spécialisées. Canadian faculty and students greatly enrich their research experience and methodologies through interaction with their Southern partners. These Southern partners may also benefit from the ability of Canadian organisations to provide visibility and to assist in securing funding. Partnerships may improve the quality of research applicable in local contexts and sometimes the possibility of "scaling-up", making the results more attractive to policy makers at all levels

*And what about the challenges inherent in North-South collaborative projects?*

These are many, but I wish to focus on one issue today: the danger of "asymmetry", whereby partners do NOT meet on equal footing, be that for any number of reasons. I am not speaking here of leadership roles within a project, but of perceptions of Southerners as "consumers of Northern...research, policies and interventions, and that enlightened Northern professionals should make efforts to ensure that research and policy are more responsive to Southern perspectives and needs." IDRC has learned that "instead, Northern researchers and policy makers need to regard and involve Southern actors as generators of knowledge and analysis in research projects and policy- and decision-making."

*And how can this happen? What are the tools or mechanisms that IDRC, among others, can foster to build the necessary mutual trust that can lead a "demand-driven" – rather than "supply-side" model of collaborative research?*

Interestingly, one of the key lessons that has been brought home to us over and over again is the crucial value of face-to-face interaction: at least 3 to 6 months of time during which the partners work together, preferably at the beginning of a project. The support of these relationships over the long term is also a key to success. Il est essentiel qu'il y ait une communication transparente en tout temps et sur tous les sujets (y compris les budgets). L'échange d'information et la mise en commun des ressources sont vitaux. La formation collective peut être extrêmement utile. Tout cela exige une planification délibérée, et ce, dès le tout début d'un projet.

Academic institutions, North and South, are challenged to change incentive structures to accommodate this type of research. Granting councils are challenged to provide mechanisms to leverage the research funding available and to add an international development component to national grants. We know of some instances at SSHRC where rules have been changed to allow Canadian researchers to provide support to Southern partners. We see this as a crucial development in the recognition of the

importance of partnerships for international scientific cooperation, and that these include relationships with Southern researchers.

One of our senior program specialists, Pamela Scholey, writes about working together in an “ethos of solidarity”. Yes, there will be many constraints and obstacles, but these, she writes, can be the “mother of methodological invention”. The goal in all of this she writes is “Equitable North-South research relationships...[that] are the foundation of a shared North-South research agenda that can contribute to the production of more methodologically rigorous, policy-relevant, and theoretically sound research”.

The AUCC has organised yet another fascinating event. We at IDRC will be most attentive to see how what we have learned to date is confirmed, complemented, contradicted and challenged by what you have to say to each other. I look forward to meeting some of you this morning and at this evening’s reception and I wish you a most enjoyable learning experience! J’ai bien hâte de rencontrer certains d’entre vous ce matin et à la réception ce soir et je souhaite à tous une agréable expérience d’apprentissage ! Thank you. Merci.