

Executive Summary

Capacity Development for Research: Strategic Evaluation

Strengthening the Core and the Periphery:

Organizational Case Study of the Peru Economic and Social Research Consortium (CIES)

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Background

IDRC's Evaluation Unit (EU) is conducting a multi-phase strategic evaluation to investigate the Centre's contributions to the development of capacities of those with whom the Centre works. The evaluation aims to provide IDRC's own staff and managers with an intellectual framework and a useful common language to help harness the concept of capacity development and document the experiences and results the Centre has accumulated in this domain. Specifically, it focuses on the processes and results of IDRC support for the development of capacities of its southern partners: what capacities have been enhanced? Whose? How? How effectively?

Phase 4 of the strategic evaluation focuses on the elaboration of six organizational case studies intended to help the Centre better understand how it can best plan for, implement, and evaluate support for its partners' capacity development.

Research for Development Context

Peru's Economic Research Consortium (CIE - predecessor to today's Economic and Social Research Consortium- CIES), was created in 1989, in the midst of the political and economic instability that characterized the late 1980s and early 1990s. During this time, Peru endured not only a serious recession with hyperinflation, but also the most violent guerilla insurgency in the region. Fluctuating government responses



*Inca woman and son,
Isla Taquile, Peru*

to Peru's economic challenges worsened the country's poverty. In this context, IDRC and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) agreed to finance a consortium of five research centres both

as a means of generating useful economic research and of halting an ongoing exodus of social scientists from Peru.

While subsequent years of economic stability laid the foundations for the country's current, impressive economic growth, it did not prevent the gap between rich and poor from widening. The realization that growth and increased government revenues were not leading to enhanced social investment, prompted CIE to broaden its focus and become the Economic and Social Research Consortium.

The change in name also brought with it other new objectives and new methods of working such as: a greater emphasis on disseminating research results and attempting to influence policy; a shift to a competitive process for allocation of research grants; the creation of an executive office and board of directors; and a major increase in membership, with greater representation from the regions outside Lima. This more national scope enabled CIES to better examine emerging issues such as the economic impact of the introduction (in 2002) of a new form of regional government. (This change in government structure—and the accompanying decentralization of economic policymaking—were significant since they corresponded with greater increases in growth rates in the regions and provinces than in the capital, Lima.)

There have historically been major obstacles to conducting policy-relevant social science research in Peru. Limited government funding means that researchers rely disproportionately on external support. A lack of resources for tertiary education—particularly for institutions outside Lima—has limited the research capacity of both private and public universities. Collaborations must also be forged in the face of engrained ideological differences that have driven wedges between members of the research community. Finally, the traditionally limited role of evidence in the policy-making process requires that researchers must struggle to be heard in the legislative arena.

IDRC's support for CIES is linked to its broader support for research networks and its focus on transdisciplinary program initiatives rather than country-focused strategies. Its involvement with CIES was initially motivated by the idea that it might produce results similar to those demonstrated by the African Economic Research Consortium, another IDRC-supported network which has had some success in encouraging governments to pursue systemic change and to adopt longer-term approaches to policy-making.

Expectations and capacity development strategies

IDRC's *capacity development intentions* are usually determined by its identification of a particular research *problematique*. When the Consortium was established, the central issue was the potential deterioration of economic research capacity in Peru given the country's unstable conditions. Once the context stabilized, the *problematique* changed, with the primary concern becoming the potential for research to influence the creation of public policies for socio-economic development (based more on evidence and developed through public debate.)

The Centre has maintained an explicit capacity development intent in each phase of its support for CIES. At the outset, the goal was to strengthen the research system by interacting with the people, organizations, and institutions doing and using social science research. In more recent phases, the objectives of IDRC support have been to strengthen the Consortium as a distinct entity and contribute to its sustainability.

The case study reveals that the five original member organizations of CIE valued the access to resources, exchange, and other elements that contributed to expanding their capacity. The expectations of each of the Consortium members have changed over the years as it evolved into CIES. Today, the more-established member organizations see the most important component of CIES as its research grant competition. Other organizations, with more limited capacity,

value the training, exchange, and related opportunities to improve their ability to do research.

CIES developed an array of *capacity development strategies*. Specific activities have included:

- **Organizing research grant competitions.** CIES has introduced a number of measures (such as closed categories and organizational quotas) to improve access to funds by younger researchers and member organizations with less relative research capacity. Competition winners are identified through a peer review process.
- **Mentoring younger researchers and researchers in the provinces before and during the research process.** CIES assigns advisors and holds a workshop at the beginning of a research project to review the methodology, objectives, and expected impact on public policies. It holds a later workshop to review preliminary findings.
- **Training researchers.** CIES has offered training opportunities to its researchers on research methods, developing research proposals, and project design.
- **Providing internships/research awards.** CIES provides awards enabling researchers to carry out research at another CIES research center. It also offers awards to Canadian academics to conduct research in Peru.

- **Promoting collaboration among research centres.** “Networked” research projects require centres of greater and lesser research capacity to work together.
- **Implementing projects.** CIES has implemented specific initiatives with funding from other donors that involve its members. A key example of this is the project on Regional Elections.
- **Providing Executive Office services.** The office conducts bibliographic research, distributes publications, negotiates access to data bases, and provides other services for Consortium members.

Rather than imposing an over-arching strategy or master plan, IDRC’s approach has been one largely of “learning by doing,” wherein the centre responds to specific needs as they become apparent. The

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one exception has been IDRC’s proactive involvement during key inflection points, such as the transition from CIE to CIES. Consortium members value the flexibility and autonomy that has been afforded by this approach.

IDRC’s capacity development support has included providing core funding, serving as a “sounding board for ideas, funding staff training, and supporting CIES’ annual visit to Ottawa. The Centre’s role in the Consortium’s development can be described as that of a friend, advisor, donor, change agent, fiscal agent, and member of its board of directors. CIES was initially managed as a Corporate Project under IDRC’s Social and Economic Policy (SEP) program area. More recently, CIES’s affiliation with IDRC has been through the Globalization, Growth and Poverty program initiative (PI). Financial support for CIES has also been provided by IDRC’s Partnership and Business Development Division (PBDD). IDRC’s support for CIES has come in collaboration with CIDA.

Both IDRC and CIES have promoted improved links to researchers outside of Peru and, particularly, to research and policy networks in Canada. These strategies appear to have strengthened individual relationships, but have had less evident effects on organizational linkages.

Major findings

Building individual, organizational and systemic research capacities

CIES has provided crucial opportunities for young researchers to develop professionally, largely through the provision of research grants that have enabled them to build a body of research and publish their work. CIES has also improved *individual researchers'* capacity by providing access to national household survey data from the National Statistics Institute and by providing instruction on research methodology and project design.

CIES' long-term support for grant competitions has also had an impact at the organizational level, by enabling recipient organizations to plan their research agenda, to establish and build a track record for their research programs, and to recruit young researchers or analysts. Winning a CIES competition gives credibility to an organization and this, in some cases, has led to new sources of funding.

At the systems level, CIES has helped maintain a critical mass of researchers active in Peru over a 20-year period, and has contributed to a more enabling research environment.

CIES' presence has also been felt in the public sphere. With its focus on applied, policy-oriented research of potential use to government and development programs, CIES has increased its influence over public policy by developing a successful communications/ external relations program and by becoming more visible in the media and other public fora. Notable efforts in this area include campaigns to promote public dialogue during Presidential and regional elections in 2006. Despite various challenges (such as fluctuating demand by policymakers for research, and the need to manage divisions within its own ranks), CIES has successfully entered into partnerships with public sector actors (such as Congress) and civil society groups in order to promote the use of research in public-policy formation.

The development of CIES as an organization

Although it is still a young organization that faces several new organizational challenges, CIES has shown significant organizational development over a short period of time.

CIES is widely recognized as operating a transparent and prestigious research grant competition. It has also expanded its capacity to offer different kinds of programming and services to its members. In financial management, the CIES Executive Office has developed increasingly sophisticated systems enabling it to manage and report on projects supported by multiple donors (for example, there were 10 different funding sources in 2006, each with different financial reporting requirements).

The Consortium's increased capacity to mobilize financial resources is illustrated by its diversification of funding. While IDRC/CIDA contributed 76% of CIES's financial resources in 2000, this had fallen to 51% by 2006. However, while this diversification is evident in project-based funding, CIES continues to face challenges in generating core institutional support from donors other than IDRC and CIDA. CIES is currently pursuing a strategy that aims to create an endowment to fund the annual research grant competition, in order to bring stability to a program which has also been difficult to finance on a project basis.

Today, CIES is legally incorporated as an NGO (governed by a Board of Directors, General Assembly and Executive Director) and is made up of 38 member organizations from across Peru. Its heterogeneous membership includes: private and public universities, private consulting firms,

non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and government institutions. The Consortium engages in a wide range of activities in addition to its research grant competition, including training, seminars, publication of books, journals, and others.

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As an umbrella organization, CIES provides individual members with access to resources and opportunities that they would not have on their own. Many services CIES provides to its members have been enhanced by its ability to enter into strategic partnerships. For example, CIES entered into agreements with the Central Bank to sponsor special thematic research competitions. CIES is currently facing calls for strengthening the value added services it offers to its members, in effect strengthening its role as an umbrella organization or network.

Looking ahead

CIES represents a unique model for strengthening research capacity at a national and systems level. Because of the amount of resources invested over 20 years (over \$3 million from IDRC and over \$15 million from CIDA), it may be a difficult one to replicate. In general, the CIES experience suggests that a variety of strategies for developing research capacity have helped lead to a more enabling environment for development research in Peru.

IDRC's approach to supporting CIES reflects several "IDRC good practices" that contribute to capacity development, as adapted from the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD (2003) and IDRC's Corporate Assessment Framework (2006).

One of these positive characteristics is persistence. The continuity in the relationship and the financing over 20 years has been a key element of strengthening capacity. Secondly, IDRC's flexibility in providing core support has also allowed CIES to negotiate the use of funds and timeframes for implementation. This has facilitated a degree of autonomy for CIES that has translated into a locally defined research and organizational agenda. The construction of relationships between IDRC and the Executive Office, Board members, and associated researchers has been fundamental. Other strengths of IDRC's approach include generally well-coordinated efforts among IDRC's different divisions (Programs, the Evaluation Unit, Partnership and Business Development Division -PBDD- and Grant Administration Division -GAD-) as well as its work in partnership with CIDA.

However, challenges inherent in IDRC's approach to capacity development include IDRC's structure (which is organized by PIs), variable budget allocations, and pressures to approve new projects—all of which may limit capacity development efforts that require a long-term perspective and sustained engagement. While IDRC's strategy of supporting CIES through "learning by doing" appears to have aided capacity development, the question remains as to whether a more integrated or systematic approach might have achieved more.

IDRC may wish to enter into a discussion on how the Centre could scale up its support for CIES through linkages, strategic intelligence, or other means. Improving governance structures, processes and systems in CIES in order to respond to current needs, is a key issue that merits consideration. IDRC could also support CIES in its effort to develop a collective vision or strategic direction for the Consortium, including an assessment of its mandate and role as an umbrella organization and the relationship between its mandate and regional work. IDRC could also contribute to the Consortium's deliberations on creating an endowment fund, particularly in light of IDRC's experience with other partners that have adopted similar strategies.

CIES's potential for financial sustainability, without Canadian funding, is a critical issue at this time. CIES and IDRC may also want to reflect on which strategies, intended to strengthen research capacity among CIES members, have been most effective.

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In general, the case study indicates that CIES associates greatly appreciate the characteristics of IDRC's support and the roles that IDRC staff have played in the relationship. However, it also identified areas of potential improvement such as: the possibility of generating more dialogue/analysis on PI funding for individual members of the Consortium; possible facilitation of greater linkages between CIES and IDRC-supported global and regional networks; the potential for exploring alternative means of enhancing relationships

between Peruvian and Canadian researchers; and the possibility of increasing strategic intelligence on issues in the research for development context in Latin America.

Methodology

Katrina Rojas and Mariane Arsenault from Universal Management Group carried out the case study. The study's objective was to describe how IDRC's support over time contributed to the development of capacities within Peru's Economic and Social Research Consortium (CIES)—including those of individuals, of member organizations, and of the Consortium itself (as a network or umbrella organization). The methodology involved a review of four projects at CIES funded by IDRC between 1999 and 2006. Two of these projects provided core institutional support. The data collection phase of the case study included document analysis, group and individual interviews in Peru (Lima and Arequipa) and in Canada, as well as a self-administered questionnaire for the members of CIES. One methodological limitation was that the majority of responses to the 30 surveys sent to CIES's partner organizations came from Lima. The poor response from outside the capital was attributed to poor communications with remote areas.