

IDRC: Pioneering a new style of international aid agency

By David Spurgeon

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Next November, the Commission of the Andean Common Market will consider proposals for a regional science and technology policy for the Market area, which includes Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. The aim is to decide on a regional strategy for technology imports and to link this strategy to national science policies in such a way as to promote domestic industrial development. Science policy experts believe it is the first such regional approach to be undertaken anywhere.

In order to make possible the necessary research to formulate these policies, Canada's new International Development Research Centre last June approved funds of \$146,500. It was a swift response to a pressing need, because it was only in 1969 that the Andean Common Market was formed, and it was 1970 when the Commission made known its intention to stimulate indigenous scientific and technological capacity related to development goals. The November 1972 deadline for policy decisions was set without regard to IDRC participation. Without the project, then, decisions would have had to be made on the basis of far less knowledge than will now be available, and in what would necessarily have been a less systematic way.

The project is typical of the kind IDRC was set up to support: it is a research project; it is aimed at promoting growth and well-being of less-developed nations; it is regional in scope and international in its implications; it is a response to a priority set by a less-developed nation; and it is being carried out by personnel from the developing countries involved.

The Andean Pact project also is oriented toward science policy in a way IDRC sees as essential for developing countries. Mrs. Ruth K. Zagorin, director of the Centre's Division of Social Sciences and Human Resources, says:

"To be looking at science policy as simply policy for science doesn't make any sense for a developing country at this point. We must ask, science policy for what? We must look at it in relation, not to creation

of a scientific establishment — which is often already there — but instead in relation to technology policy and economic growth."

The member countries of the Andean Common Market are not attempting to close out foreign technology; on the contrary, they recognize that the region will long be dependent for much of its technology on foreigners. "They may find it to their advantage to import a particular kind of technology rather than to create it," Mrs. Zagorin says.

Geared to need

At the same time, they do want to build up a regional science and technology system geared to their own needs. Thus the IDRC-sponsored study is expected to identify the types of technology most appropriate to the needs of the region (with particular attention to creation of employment, an issue of great concern to the Andean countries) and the ways in which the region can bargain for importation of appropriate technologies at least cost. It is also aimed at identifying the institutional framework most suitable for the formulation of national and regional science policies, for conducting research and for feeding research results into technological production.

In order to meet the Commission's November 1972 deadline, much of the research will have to be completed by July of this year. From then until November, efforts will be devoted to interpreting the data and preparing policy proposals.

The project is based at the headquar-

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ters of the Junta in Lima, but also involves field work by national teams in each of the Andean countries, the teams consisting mainly of Latin Americans from the countries of the region. International experts will be brought in to review the work and help in preparation of policy proposals. When the project is finished, a series of studies will be financed by the national governments, so as to make continuing use of training received during the project.

The Andean Pact project is one of 30 approved by the IDRC by December 31, 1971. Ten of these are in the Social Sciences and Human Resources Division. Established in May 1970 with the passage of an Act of Parliament, the IDRC is a Crown corporation that reports to Parliament through External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp. Its funds come from Parliament, but it is unusual — and perhaps unique — among nationally-funded international development organizations in having an international Board of Governors. The Board's chairman is Lester Pearson. Ten others are Canadians, but another ten are from other countries, including six from less-developed regions.

The Centre's purpose, as set out in the Act creating it, is "to initiate, encourage, support and conduct research into the problems of the developing regions of the world and into the means for applying and adapting scientific, technical and other knowledge to the economic and social advancement of those regions . . .".

Four program areas

The Centre's operations are divided into four program areas: agriculture, food and nutrition sciences; population and health sciences; information sciences; and social sciences and human resources.

Special attention is given to the problems of rural peoples, who often are the last to benefit from technology and who, in developing countries, make up the mass of the population. Emphasis is given to projects that embody the priorities of the

developing countries rather than those of the donor, and to those that employ scientists from the developing countries.

An example of this approach is found in the Population and Health Sciences Division's pilot program for family-planning research in Mali. This is the first such activity to be undertaken in black *francophone* Africa — an area that includes 20 countries with a combined population of some 80 millions, where governmental family-planning programs have simply never existed.

"There has been particular sensitivity to family planning in black *francophone* Africa," says Dr. George Brown, director of the Population and Health Sciences Division. "We have been looking to this area as one where we might have a particular input in future because of its bilingual traditions and because not much has been done there in this field."

The project arose through the Malians' own interest. The Centre de Planning familial, a private organization in Montreal, held two summer workshops for interested African nations, which led to contacts with IDRC. "They approached us," Dr. Brown said. "This is their project."

The program will be administered by the Government of Mali through the Malian Association for the Protection and the Promotion of the Family. All the clinic and research staff are Malian, except for one IDRC research adviser, André Laplante. Their pioneering experience will provide a base on which to build future policy and action through sub-Saharan *francophone* Africa. Regular contact is being made with professionals in other countries of the region through seminars, conferences and travel.

Under the project, one central and four satellite family-planning clinics are to be established and equipped and personnel trained. A research unit will provide continuous evaluation and operational research.

The objectives are to determine the best

*Special attention
given to problems
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practical approaches to establishing a national family-planning program and to provide the Government with the information necessary to organize such a program in the future. Improvement of the health and well-being of Malian families is also an objective.

Response of population

The response of the population to the program will be studied as part of the research and future policy implications of this reaction will be examined. Mali's Ministry of Social Affairs has become interested in family planning because of the difficulties of providing adequate social and health services in the face of the continuing high rates of maternal and infant mortality and the problems posed by inadequate spacing of children. Mali's population is approximately 4.8 million, and is estimated, on the basis of incomplete demographic data, to be growing at the rate of approximately 2.5 per cent a year.

The Malian program has, of course, important regional implications. Although a few other countries, including Senegal and Dahomey, have limited non-governmental activities in family planning, and there has been some official interest in the field, cultural, religious and legal factors supporting high birth rates have made governments reluctant to initiate or support family-planning activities. And mortality rates in the region — although declining — are higher than in any other part of the world.

Yet it is now clear that the question of population growth rates — not just in Africa but throughout the developing world — is vital to the future of these countries. Without a stabilization of the growth rate, progress in standards of living will be impossible. The developing nations' populations are growing at a rate of 2.2 per cent a year, which means a doubling of population in 32 years. And, as death rates continue to decline as a result of better medical care and other factors, this growth rate will increase,

unless fertility also declines.

Equally important is the relation of family planning to health. It has been clearly demonstrated that, with adequate spacing of children, both maternal and infant mortality can be reduced. This is of particular interest to African states, where these mortality rates are high.

Urban squatters

One of the problems many developing countries face in common is the migration to urban centres of large numbers of rural people who become squatters and slum-dwellers, making up as much as one-quarter to one-third of the total population of a city. A study undertaken by the International Association for Metropolitan Research and Development (INTERMET), in Toronto, has been sponsored by IDRC to examine this problem in eight metropolitan areas: Bandung, Indonesia; Lima, Peru; Caracas, Venezuela; Seoul, Korea; Istanbul, Turkey; Ibadan, Nigeria; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and Manila, the Philippines. Individuals and institutions in the countries involved are taking part in the study.

This project, which falls under the Social Sciences and Human Resources Division, is to formulate policy proposals and programs to cope with the migrant problem in each of these countries and to conduct a comparative study generalizing from their collective experience. Factors such as the paths, rates and tempos of migration will be studied; the economic and social factors that influence the migrants either to stay or to move; the governmental and other activities that affect life in both rural and urban areas; and the personal and group motivations of those involved.

This project demonstrates another principle espoused by IDRC. "It is generally believed the developing countries have a lot to learn from each other, and the foreign aid process generally has not encouraged this," Dr. Zagorin says. "It is this the Centre is trying to encourage."

*Triumph mirrored
by new strains
of rice, wheat*

Dr. Zagorin refers to this as the "network principle", which simply means establishing networks through which developing countries can communicate with each other about their mutual problems, and providing studies with a common design that allows comparison of results that will permit development of general principles.

A major turning-point in the orientation of foreign aid programs was the development in the Philippines and Mexico of new strains of rice and wheat that greatly eased the threat of famine in Asia by increasing crop production. This triumph of applied science showed how developing countries could benefit from the application of science and technology. Yet the so-called Green Revolution has also had side effects, and a social and economic impact that has not yet been fully measured.

Assessment of that impact is the aim of another study in the Social Sciences and Human Resources Division of IDRC. One of the agencies responsible for the new crop-strains — the International Rice Research Institute in Los Banos, the Philippines — together with universities and other agencies in India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and South Vietnam, is carrying out the study, called "Impact of Rice Farming Changes (Asia)", which will provide information on the changes taking place on farms as a result of the new rice technology.

The project is expected to shed some light on such questions as: Who benefits from the new technology? How have improved rice yields affected landlord-tenant relationships, the employment structure in rural areas, land costs and the capital structure in villages? What has been the extent of acceptance of the high-yielding rice varieties? And what changes have occurred in farm practices as a result of the new technology?

The Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Sciences Division has 11 projects under way, ranging from a study of rural development in Caqueza, Colombia, which is

designed to help small farmers to improve their productivity and incomes, to a multiple cropping project in the Philippines, to support research in the growing of crops other than the staple, rice.

The Information Sciences Division is attempting to promote development of world-wide information systems on international development. One way it has done this is by providing support to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in preparation of a multilingual thesaurus.

Puzzled reaction

The stress laid by the IDRC on the need for projects that conform to priorities of the developing countries sometimes produces a certain puzzlement among its potential clients. Their natural reaction is to wonder, if only to themselves: "What's in it for you?" Recently, the first meeting between an IDRC representative and Kenyans who had a proposal to discuss was cool and formal, and faintly suspicious. The second meeting, by which time it was clear that nobody was trying to impose anything on them, was totally different — open and friendly.

The Centre's President, David Hopper, contends that this hands-off attitude is essential once the decision has been made to finance a project. "I hold that it must be founded on a confidence that they, not we, are the best judge of what is relevant to their circumstances," he says. "Until this confidence is proven misplaced, I will be content to leave the direct management of our support in the hands of our partners, reserving to ourselves only the rights of audit and periodic substantive review."

He says he expects collaborators in a particular project to meet frequently to review their work, and to work out their own techniques for self-monitoring, so that a minimum of overall supervision will be required from IDRC.

This is an approach that has been adopted only infrequently among donor

countries and agencies, Dr. Hopper says. He speaks from a background of long experience in the field of foreign aid.

"If this is successful," he says, "we will

have pioneered a new style of international operation that can remove the stigma of charity and donor control from the support of research in development."

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

The International Development Research Centre is a public corporation established by Act of the Canadian Parliament "to initiate, encourage, support and conduct research into the problems of the developing regions of the world and into the means for applying and adapting scientific, technical and other knowledge to the economic and social advancement of those regions, and, in carrying out those objects

- (a) to enlist the talents of natural and social scientists and technologists of Canada and other countries;
- (b) to assist the developing regions to build up the research capabilities, the innovative skills and the institutions required to solve their problems;
- (c) to encourage generally the co-ordination of international development research; and
- (d) to foster co-operation in research on development problems between the developed and developing regions for their mutual benefit."