

Theories of Change:
Exploring of IDRC Understandings about Capacity Development

First Draft Report

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Intended Uses

This study represents one part of the background work being undertaken in preparation for the IDRC Evaluation Unit strategic evaluation on capacity development. The purpose of this study is to report on some of the different understandings that IDRC holds about the development of southern research capacity, and to relate those understandings to white and grey literature on capacity development. Data for the study was gathered through interviews with seventeen staff (from both Programs and Resources Branches) and corporate documents selected by the IDRC Evaluation Unit.

The primary use of this study is to inform next stages of the strategic evaluation. It provides ideas drawn from the literature about what capacity development is, and describes approaches for assessing it. Drawing from selected documents and interviews with staff, the report presents a broad overview of the character of IDRC capacity development from an internal perspective. Drawing from descriptions of their work in interviews, the study also identifies eight broad approaches that are used, and describes staff “theories” about why they are effective. Annex 1 of the report provides the Evaluation Unit with a ‘map’ to broader literature that touch on themes emergent in IDRC understandings of capacity development.

1.2 Organisation of the Report

[will be included once report is finalised]

2. Methods

The study proceeded in two stages. The first stage involved conducting and analysing interviews of staff as well as analysing Centre documents to construct a framework to guide a review of a broad range literature that had bearing on IDRC understandings of capacity development. The Evaluation Unit selected the Centre documents included in the review. Interviews were conducted both by telephone and in person (a list of interviews is provided in Annex I). The second stage involved a review of literature in relation to the ideas gathered through interviews and documents.

2.1 Selection of Staff and Documents

It was anticipated that staff from different areas of the Centre would have different views about the kinds of capacities that need to be developed. As a result staff were selected so that they, as much as possible, provided a range of perspectives from across Program and Resource Branches. Since we wanted descriptive accounts of their work in capacity development, interviews were semi-structured: guided with open-ended questions that encouraged staff to reflect on their experience and provide examples. Digital recordings were made of all interviews, and each lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. Transcriptions were made from recordings, which provided the basis for analysis¹. Both the transcriptions and recordings were sent to the Evaluation Unit. As part of the protocol in conducting interviews, respondents were asked for their permission to record the interview and for their consent to be quoted. No quotes of staff are presented in [the final report] without their consent².

2.2 Analytical framework

Ideas from the *theory of change* approach to evaluation, part of the theory-based evaluation area, informed this study in two ways. First, it provided a perspective through which it was possible to pose questions of staff and gather information from documents. Second, it provided a method for constructing an overarching framework - a *theory of*

¹ Due to time restrictions, two interviews were not fully transcribed. For analysis, handwritten notes taken during the interview aided in analysis, and when more specific information was required, recordings were listened to.

² Sentence to be added once permission is granted

change - for situating different ideas that IDRC staff hold about capacity development, helping to relate ideas from separate sources to one another.

“Theory of Change”

Although the theory of change approach was not used in its entirety in this study, it is helpful to provide some background about the approach to understand its utility.

Theory-based evaluation is founded on the idea that programs have an underlying program theory, or a set of ideas and assumptions about the critical forces that shape current situations. For ‘theory-based evaluators’, making program theory explicit is helpful for understanding how program activities relate to and support program goals. A *theory of change* - sometimes called a “theory of action” (Patton 1997) – is an explicit expression of program theory, often presented in a graphic format such as a flowchart. It is useful for staff because the theory of change can be used to periodically check to see if things are unfolding as anticipated. The value of the exercise is that through a process of “surfacing the underlying assumptions about why a program will work” (Weiss 2001: 103), program staff are able to bring a collective critical eye to their plans and make necessary course corrections.

The core idea is that programs are iterative sequences of theories: ‘if we implement A this should achieve our initial intervention goal B, and when B is in place we will be in a position to attempt C, which will then enable the next output D, and so on’... Key stakeholders are consulted on minute working assumptions of the initiative. Its intended ‘stepping stones’ are surfaced and articulated... Evaluation consists of putting a microscope to each stage, making process observations to see if the theories conform to actuality (Pawson 2003: 473).

A theory of change does not have to be ‘right’ to be useful (Birckmayer and Weiss 2000). The benefits of the approach relate primarily to its ‘process use’ of providing staff with a means for engaging in periodic reality testing (Patton 1997). For instance, in a review of six theory-based evaluations, Birkmayer and Weiss (2000) report that although none the original theories were right the process was useful in identifying unnecessary program components, locating intermediary changes, raising new questions, contributing to paradigm shifts within the program, highlighting difficulties of taking successful pilot programs to scale, and providing clarity and focus for the evaluation.

The approach is also seen as being useful in the way that it attempts to focus evaluation, but at the same time respects the complexity of causation in open social systems (Van Der Knaap 2004). It has been held up as useful for a variety of different purposes ranging from evidence-based policy analysis (Pawson 2003) to utilization-focused evaluation (Patton 1997). Elements of the approach are evident in the work of evaluators working in international development, particularly those concerned about the limitations of the logical framework approach (LFA) for planning, monitoring and evaluation³. Davies (2004) argues that the theory of change approach provides much more flexibility than the prescribed four or five stages or levels of standardised logical framework approaches (i.e., inputs, outputs, outcomes, impacts, etc.) that many donors require. One benefit that Davies sees in theory of change approaches is that since theories of change are more likely than conventional logic models to specify changes that are observable, they provide theories that are falsifiable. Another benefit is that since the theory of change approach leads towards a consideration of change processes across the program as a whole, they avoid the tendency of conventional logic models of leading users to becoming overly preoccupied with the validity of only one or a few indicators.

Adapting the approach for use in this study

The approach informed the questions included in the interview guide and also shaped the analysis of transcripts and IDRC documents. In interviews, staff were asked a sequence of open-ended questions, leading them to describe the kinds of capacities they saw as important, the ways in which they approached building those capacities, and how they believed those capacities developed (see Annex 4 for the interview guide). Looking across interview transcripts, and following an interpretive process of argumentation analysis similar to that described by Leeuw (2003), these were formulated into if-then propositions to tease out implicit cause-effect relationships. The relationships were then used to create an overarching *theory of change* (see Appendix 1) that helped situate ideas gathered from documents and interviews in relation to one another, and provided a means of relating those ideas to broader literature.

³ see for instance (Gasper 2000), (Dale 2003) and (Davies 2004)

Where the study diverted from the theory of change literature is in its intent. The *theory of change* approach is presented in the literature as an approach to program evaluation. In this study, the approach is not used for the purposes of evaluation, but more for the purposes of description. In the first instance, theory of change was used as a way to frame questions to get at staff understandings of capacity development. In the second instance, it used the method of creating an overarching framework, so that ideas from IDRC documents and interviews could be related ideas from grey and white literature.

2.3 Strengths and limitations of the approach

One benefit of the theory of change approach was that it provided a method of gathering diverse understandings of capacity development at IDRC and seeing them in relation to each other. Another is that through identifying themes, it also provided a framework for developing a map to literature that is relevant to IDRC's work in capacity development. Finally, the inductive approach allowed for the development of grounded theory (Patton 1997) about how capacity development is pursued at IDRC, which could be useful when framing questions for the strategic evaluation.

Some limitations are important to bear in mind. The overarching theory of change developed in this study provides a broad sketch, but does not claim to represent everything about what capacity development means to everyone at IDRC. A relatively small number of staff were interviewed in this study (17), and given the diversity of activities that 'capacity development' raises, topics covered in interviews were wide-ranging. Each interview lasted between 40 and 90 minutes; not long enough to explore every topic in depth. Both factors (small sample size and broad scope) significantly reduce the likelihood that this report covers everything about what capacity development means to everyone at IDRC.

What the theory of change approach did provide was a "holistic perspective" (Patton 2002), or an overarching story line by which it was possible to orient different understandings that IDRC holds about capacity development to be seen in relation to one another. For this study, it allowed for the identification of seven broad processes that IDRC staff support to build capacity. It also facilitated the observation of issues and

tensions that appear in IDRC's approach, which are presented in the final chapter as questions that might be pursued in subsequent stages of the evaluation.

3. What is ‘Capacity Development’?

Capacity is a relatively simple idea that is difficult to operationalise. Generally speaking, ‘capacity’ refers to the ability of individuals or groups to do what they want. But as a study by ECDPM describes “it is generally accepted that capacity refers to the ability of people, organisations and systems to perform functions, it is much less clear what capacity consists of, and which elements are critical” (ECDPM 2004:8). In order to introduce some of the dimensions of capacity development this chapter presents a brief overview of the ideas that capacity development embodies drawn from development literature, and some views from other organisations on capacity development.

A point on terminology: the terms *capacity building* and *capacity development* are used in literature, with *capacity development* appearing more frequently in more recent work. For most intents and purposes, different authors use the different terms to mean the same thing. In this study, the term *capacity development* is adopted for two reasons. One is to go with the more current terminology. The second follows Horton's (2002) reasoning, that the word ‘development’ seems to better fit the intended meaning, suggesting a more organic emergence of capability than does ‘building’, which connotes an externally planned or engineered approach.

3.1 Origins and ethos

Those that write about ‘capacity development’ present it as a mindset or approach to development, and not just a set of activities. Deborah Eade (1997) describes that the spirit of capacity development finds its origins in emancipatory movements of the 1970’s, such as Paulo Freire’s in his work with Brazilian adult literacy programs, and in Liberation Theology movements in Latin America. She charts how these radical ideas with emancipatory aims gradually entered various other intellectual tributaries, which eventually brought them into the development mainstream. These included Adult Education theorists and practitioners based in the North, thinkers like Amartya Sen whose capabilities approach marked a significant re-conceptualisation of development economics, and through researcher-practitioners like Robert Chambers – all of whom were thinking about ways of addressing the causes of poverty and underdevelopment.

‘Capacity development’ has since emerged in international development discourse as an umbrella term referring to many approaches that used to be considered separately - such as “organisational development”, “community development”, “integrated rural development” and “sustainable development”. The emergence of ‘capacity development’ as a catch-all phrase in donor discourse has accompanied a growing consensus that aspects of all of these must be better integrated with a long-term vision for sustainable change (Morgan 1998; Lusthaus, Adrien et al. 1999; Laverne and Saxby 2001).

Within donor discourse is a recognition that despite the vast amounts of support supplied to developing countries over a long period of time, assistance itself has introduced its own kinds of challenges. Commonly cited problems are the creation of administrative demands on already weak organisations, the creation of new institutions and systems that undermine host countries’ ownership of problems and their solutions, and issues about how aid creates perverse incentives within developing countries (Kaplan 2000; Fukuda-Parr, Lopes et al. 2002; Erixon 2003; Lopes and Theisohn 2003). Supporters of a capacity development approach envision a departure from the way development has traditionally been done. These authors emphasise the need to work within existing systems and with existing capabilities. They describe traditional technical assistance as “social re-engineering” that amounts to “unhelpful help” (Ellerman 2002). For instance, a common critique concerns the donor practice of creating parallel institutions to backstop the provision public services, or to handle administrative functions. While such institutions do provide additional functionality, they tend to undermine capacity of indigenous institutions. New institutions compete for highly skilled individuals. Instead of strengthening existing institutions, introduced institutions encourage dependency on themselves by governments and donors.

For those that support it, a turn towards capacity development embodies a recognition that societies and institutions of developing countries are densely interwoven and have co-evolved over time. In order for external support to be effective, it needs be incorporated into existing ways of doing things. Donors appear to be increasingly aware that capacity is not something that can delivered from the outside, but is instead something that must be “wilfully acquired” over time (Laverne and Saxby 2001).

3.3 Shifting approaches of International Development Donors

Many International Donor Agencies (IDA) have begun to recognise the limitations of traditional development, and to move towards new modalities that will encourage greater local ownership of the development process. These involve more comprehensive modalities of support, such as Sector Wide Approaches (SWAs). The idea behind SWAs is simple: donor funding should focus not on projects, but on an entire sector, and donor funding should support the government's own program for that sector. Beyond SWAs lie even more radical approaches of pooled funding and general budget support. With pooled funding, donors pool their money in an account earmarked for a particular sector. In general budgetary support, donors provide assistance that is not earmarked for a specific sector, but supports the general expenditure policies of the government (Baser and Morgan 2001; Baser and Morgan 2002).

Such changes entail a 'paradigm shift' that is easier for some donors to make than others (ibid). One of the difficulties has to do with the challenge that these new modalities pose for accountability. Donors need to demonstrate that expenditures are in fact producing desired results; that they are not being blunted by bureaucratic inefficiencies or worse, squandered through corruption. As a result, donors have a natural preference towards project-based support, focusing on results that can be achieved and measured in the short-term. Support tends towards the provision of things that can be counted, such as training events, books, and materials. SWAs and newer modalities offer fewer things to count and the results that are envisioned tend to occur over a longer term. This makes it more difficult for donors to demonstrate that results were achieved with their funding, thus making it more difficult for donors to 'sell' development at home.

Another difficulty for donors is that these approaches to capacity development require donors to relinquish control and greater control is precisely what traditional technical assistance provides. Northern consultants that provide technical support are able to generate reports and statistics, providing donors with critical eyes and ears on the ground (Fukuda-Parr, Lopes et al. 2002).

For donors interested in the moving towards new modalities, 'capacity development' appears to have taken on an increasing importance. There has been a shift away from

‘hard’ capacities like equipment and infrastructure, and an increased interest in ‘softer’ capacities like leadership, strategy and support for good governance. Donors have become much more interested in programming that strengthens policy process, improves accountability and public management; all the sorts of capacities that institutional systems will require in order to effectively utilise the more comprehensive support envisioned for the future.

3.4 CD as a means, an end, and as an on-going process

The character of capacity development activities undertaken by an international development agency and the criteria by which those activities will be judged is often determined by the way that ‘capacity development’ is understood (Eade 1997). Three different overarching ways of understanding the purposes of capacity development can be seen: as a means-to-an-end, an end-in-itself, and as on-going process. A summary of these different ways of understanding capacity development is provided in Box 1.

The difference between understanding capacity as a means-to-an-end and an end-in-itself underscores much of the capacity development literature. For instance, it is present in the arguments of authors who observe that for donors, ‘capacity development’ often refers to the *means* by which they ensure skills and resources in place to support their interventions. These authors are also critical of NGOs that use capacity development as a heading to secure more programming money (Eade 1997; Black 2003). It is also what distinguishes new modalities of donor support (i.e., SWAPs, pooled funding, general budget support) from more traditional ‘technical assistance’. At least in the way it is presented in the literature, the traditional approach to technical assistance in the past was a means to implementing donor programs, whereas new modalities are premised on relinquishing control to enable greater local ownership of problems and solutions – i.e. there is a greater tendency capacity development is more of an end-in-itself.

Box 1. Capacity as a means, a process, and an end (adapted from Eade 1997:35)		
Developing capacity as means	Developing capacity as process	Developing capacity as ends
Partners abilities are strengthened to carry out specific activities that support donor's programming	Development of relationships and understandings for mutual benefit. Creation of on-going exchange to support partner's viability and ability to adapt to changes in their	Core abilities of partner organisations are strengthened to enable them to survive and fulfil their own mission, as defined by the organisation

Understanding capacity development as an on-going process tends to emphasise the 'development' part of 'capacity development'. It differs in the extent to which 'capacity' is understood as a change in state that results in improved performance. For development agencies that see capacity development as an on-going emergent process, capacity development is less about measurable results and more about establishing processes that lead to on-going adaptation, learning and change.

3.5 Approaches to assessing capacity

Capacity as a feature of systems

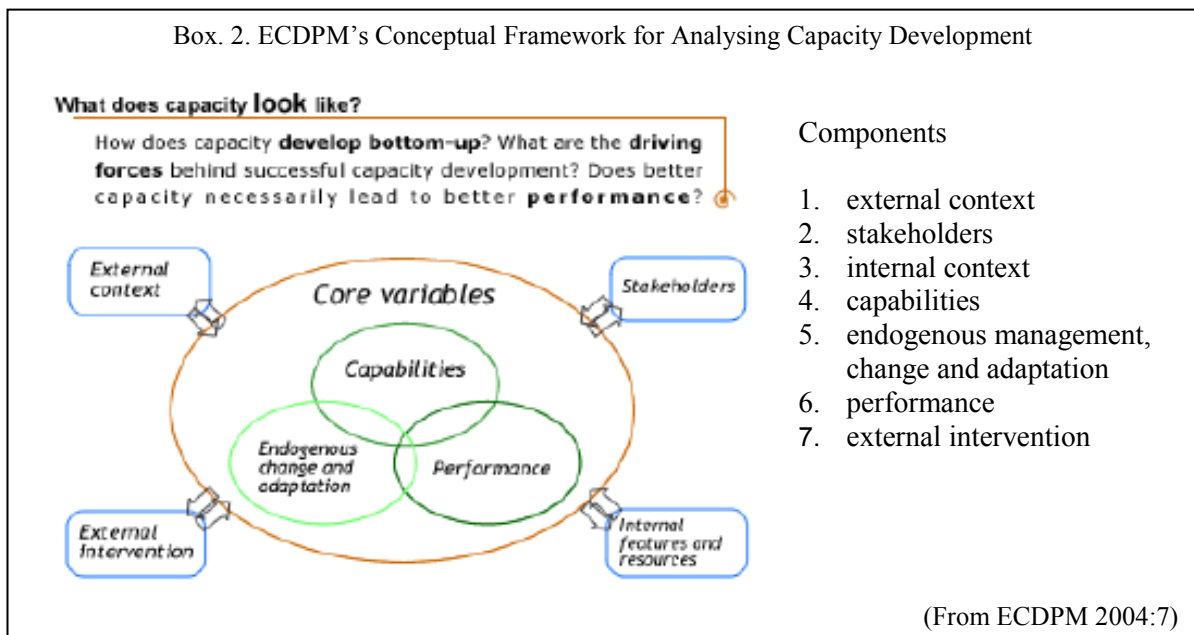
Underlying most of the writing about capacity development is the recognition that 'capacity' is a feature of systems. Examining the capacity of a system entails an examination of the factors that condition its ability to perform its functions effectively (Lusthaus, Adriene et al. 2002). Thus 'capacity' refers to more than the sum total of skilled individuals, but also encompasses the opportunities that individuals have to use and extend those skills. Capacity does not only exist in individuals but also between them, in the institutions and social networks they create (Fukuda-Parr, Lopes et al. 2002). For this reason, capacity is often discussed in relation to system levels, such as 'individuals', 'groups', 'organisations', or 'societies' (Dottridge 1993; UNDP 1998; Fukuda-Parr, Lopes et al. 2002).

This formulation also raises an important distinction between organisations and institutions. Organisations are the formal physical entities created to perform a particular function, but institutions refers to the system of values, norms and "rules of the game" in which human interaction takes place (Morgan 1998). These rules can be formalised written rules as well as unwritten codes of conduct that supplement them (Jütting 2003).

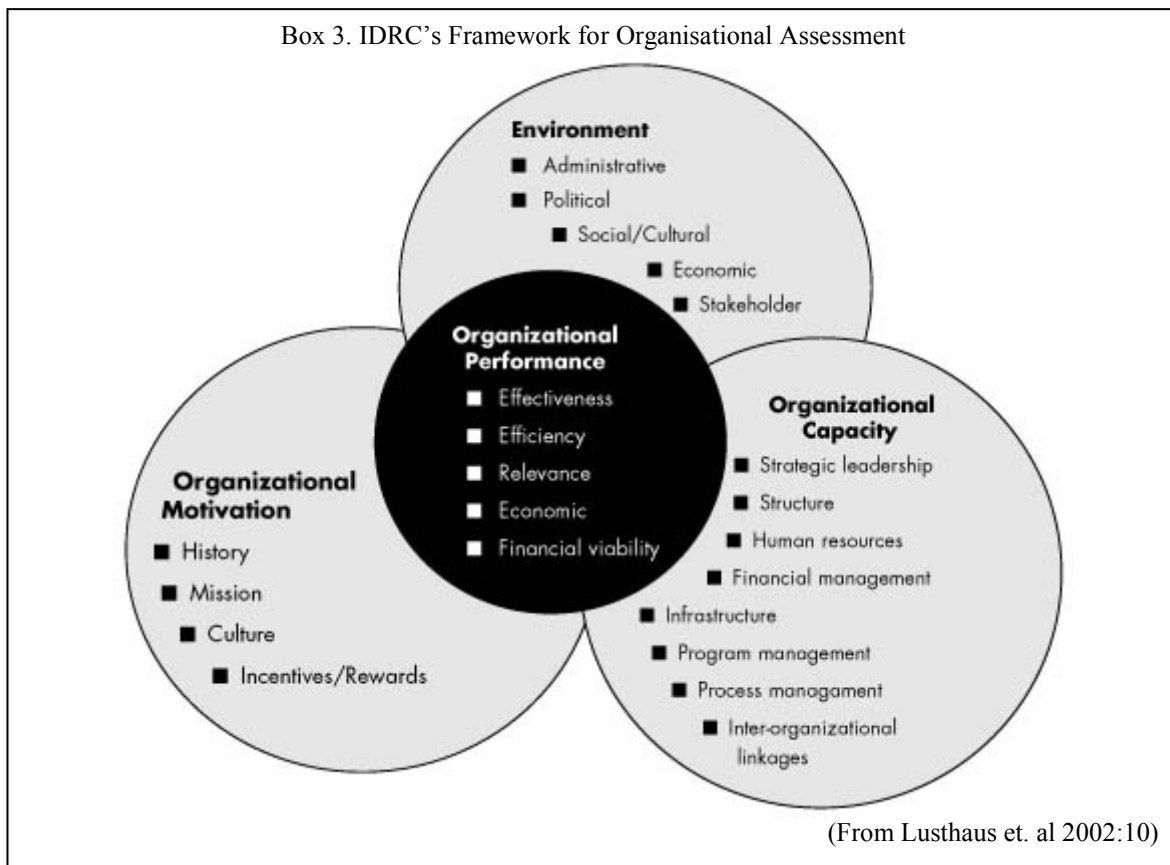
A study currently being conducted by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) is in the midst of a large-scale study into the capacity development of 17 cases of donor-funded projects supporting organisations and sectors. The definition of capacity that it has adopted incorporates the idea of interaction across levels, understanding capacity as a concept that incorporates individual *capabilities* and the *competencies* of groups into a coherent whole:

Capability refers to the collective skill or ability of a group of individuals, an organisation or a group of organisations to create some sort of public value. It includes *competencies* or skills and abilities at the individual level. *Capacity* then refers to the overall ability of an organisation or a broader system to perform. It brings together competencies and capabilities into a coherent system (ECDPM 2004:7).

The conceptual framework that ECDPM has developed illustrates their interest in understanding the interactions between different system components. Seventeen case studies were prepared for the study. And a conceptual framework was developed to direct researchers' observations towards the interaction of seven different system "variables" (see Box 2). The methodology emphasises that system components cannot be treated as isolated variables, but must be understood in terms of their interaction with the others.



IDRC's Evaluation Unit has published a series of tools for assessing organisational capacity, and like the ECDPM framework, these also provide a framework to guide the examination of the interaction of different system components (see Box 3). The IDRC and ECDPM frameworks incorporate similar concepts, but configure them slightly differently. The IDRC work notes the close relationship between 'capacity' and 'performance' and understands organisational capacity as the ability of the organisation to use its resources to perform. Thus capacity is related to but not precisely the same thing as performance. In practice, it can be difficult to choose indicators that distinguish between the two. For example the ECDPM study found, in the 17 cases it examined, the monitoring and evaluation systems that the institutions had in place tended to mix up questions of capacity and performance, or occasionally used performance measures as a proxy for capacity. The study goes on to recommend that the interaction between capacity and performance is best observed not through changes in performance indicators (such as increased efficiency or effectiveness), but through changes in the behaviour of individuals and groups working within the system of interest.



No Blueprints for Evaluation

The ECDPM and IDRC approaches are similar in that they recognise that the issues affecting the capacity of any particular organisation are likely to be quite different from case to case. Neither approach provides a blueprint or set of pre-determined instruments for evaluation. Instead they provide a set of inter-related concepts and definitions, and provide them in a framework as a heuristic to help analysts ask the right questions and develop indicators and instruments appropriate and meaningful to the specific context. Because the systems in which organisations are embedded are themselves subject to change, the two approaches recognise that there needs to be considerable flexibility to change so that the assessment can adapt to new situations and incorporate new learning that occurs along the way. The IDRC material states:

Just as IDRC's personnel must go through considerable learning to know how to work with and relate to certain institutions, so IDRC must be supportive of the knowledge development process inherent in conducting each institutional evaluation, for the process as well as the outcomes are likely to be in flux. Institutional assessments require experimentation and the continuous correction and adaptation of plans to keep pace with institutional complexity (Lushaus, Anderson et al. 1995: 6).

Similarly, the ECDPM framework is provided as general guidance to analysts preparing case studies. It ensures a level of comparability across case studies, but the methodology recognises that for each individual case study, the specific approach to data gathering and analysis will need to be customised to suit specific contexts and abilities of the research teams (Morgan 2003).

Learning through assessment

While both approaches provide flexibility for change over the course of a project, an important difference to highlight between the two has to do with the extent to which learning and adaptation is built into the process itself. The purpose of the ECDPM study is to assist donors in coming to a better understanding of what capacity development is, and what kinds of support are required. It is primarily concerned with generating understandings about the different kinds of factors and forces that influence capacity development (ECDPM 2004). The study is focused on contributing to knowledge about capacity development from the perspective of donors, but does not express an intent to

use the assessment process as an asset for capacity development activities. In contrast, the primary intended users of the IDRC tools and methods are its partners. The intended use is to provide evaluation as tool to stimulate learning that will be of benefit to the organisation itself (IDRC or partner organisation?). (Lushaus, Anderson et al. 1995; Carden 2000; Horton, Alexaki et al. 2003).

4. IDRC and the Broader Landscape

Sections 4 and 5 describe broad understandings of and approaches to capacity development in IDRC. The purpose of this section is to try to situate those approaches and understandings within the broader landscape of organisations that support southern research.

4.1 Shifting approaches to Southern Research Capacity Development

The role of knowledge and research production in development is well understood with research capacity development gaining widespread acceptance during the 1990s (Nchinda 2002; Velho 2004). Although most of the literature about capacity development is written in the context of mainstream development, the core issues are relevant to organisations that are focused on developing research capacity. The creation of knowledge and human capital has a central place in development thinking and, as in other kinds of development, the research capacity needs of developing countries reach beyond the need for individual skills and into the institutional landscape. Empirical studies into the research capacity of developing countries commonly cite institutional problems such as brain drain, the challenge of creating a “research culture” in countries where research funding is lacking, and institutional landscapes which limit individuals’ opportunities to grow and prosper as key constraints (e.g. Nchinda 2002; Hyder, Akhter et al. 2003).

Traditionally, support for research capacity development was pursued in a similar way as technical assistance, with attention paid mainly to the provision of hard capacities such as equipment and infrastructure (Horton, Alexaki et al. 2003). Emphasis was on the transfer of knowledge and equipment from North to South. Some authors have noted that the result of this has frequently been that Northern researchers have dominated partnerships, reducing the relevance of research to Southern contexts:

There have been cases of projects where Southern partners served as “glamorised” research assistants who provided the “raw data” for analysis by academic researchers in the North. Even worse, research co-operation programmes devised in the North have frequently been accused of contributing to the consolidation of research traditions, capabilities and reward systems that are divorced from the needs of the South. In effect, research co-operation has helped build a “peripheral”

scientific community with no ties to its socio-economic reality (Bautista, Velho et al. 2001).

There are signs that this situation is improving and that there is increasing awareness about the need for partnerships for developing southern research capacity to be based on more equal partnership. Horton et al (2003) describe that all of the twelve organisations that participated in the Evaluating Capacity Development (ECD) projects (of which IDRC was one) are increasingly approaching capacity development through principled partnerships and networking between institutions in the North and the South. Horton et al (2003) noted that partnering and networking was a key requirement in all cases as Southern organisations lacked the resources to achieve their objectives on their own, and needed to collaborate with organisations that had complementary resources and management capacities. In many cases, one of the key capacities that Southern organisations had to develop were ‘softer’ capacities related to effective collaboration, or “the processes of negotiation that people need in order to work and co-create together” (Ramirez 2004).

Another indication of improvement relates to the emergence of Northern government or quasi-government organisations whose role is to advise government policy research partnerships between domestic research bodies and southern institutions. The government of the Netherlands has been particularly active in this issue, being one of the earliest to voice concerns about North-South research partnerships in the early 1990s (see for example Velho 2004). It established the Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council (RAWOO) to provide policy advice to the Dutch government on research partnerships, and is centrally concerned that such partnerships are in the best interests of developing country recipients. It states among its principles that in order for these to come about,

...certain imbalances that exist in South-North relationships in research will have to be corrected. A new type of research partnership is needed, based on mutual trust, understanding, sharing of experience, and a two-way learning process. In such a partnership the various partners will work together on an equal footing at all stages and on all levels: during the process of setting the research agenda, as research

programmes are designed and implemented, and in the governance and management of these programmes⁴.

The Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships (KFPE) is also interested in improving research partnerships, and focuses on persuading the Swiss scientific community and Swiss authorities of the importance of building up and consolidating research capacities in developing countries. It provides a similar service for the Swiss government as RAWOO does in the Netherlands, although without the formal policy advisory role. KFPE also has provides guidance to Swiss organisations embarking on research partnerships with developing country partners, and promotes 11 guidelines on research partnerships, shown in Box 4 (KFPE 1998).

Box 4. KFPE 11 Principles for Research Co-operation.

1. Decide on the objectives together
2. Build up mutual trust
3. Share information; develop networks
4. Share responsibility
5. Create transparency
6. Monitor and evaluate the collaboration
7. Disseminate the results
8. Apply the results
9. Share profits equitably
10. Increase research capacity
11. Build on the achievements

(From KFPE 1998)

4.2 Organisations that support research capacity development

A recent study by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) found 49 institutions that support research capacity (Young and Kannemeyer 2001). Amongst this group, there is a wide range of different kinds of organisations (See Box 5). The study reviewed materials available from their web sites and found descriptions of what each of these organisations do, but the researchers had trouble identifying specific methods that they use to support research capacity development.

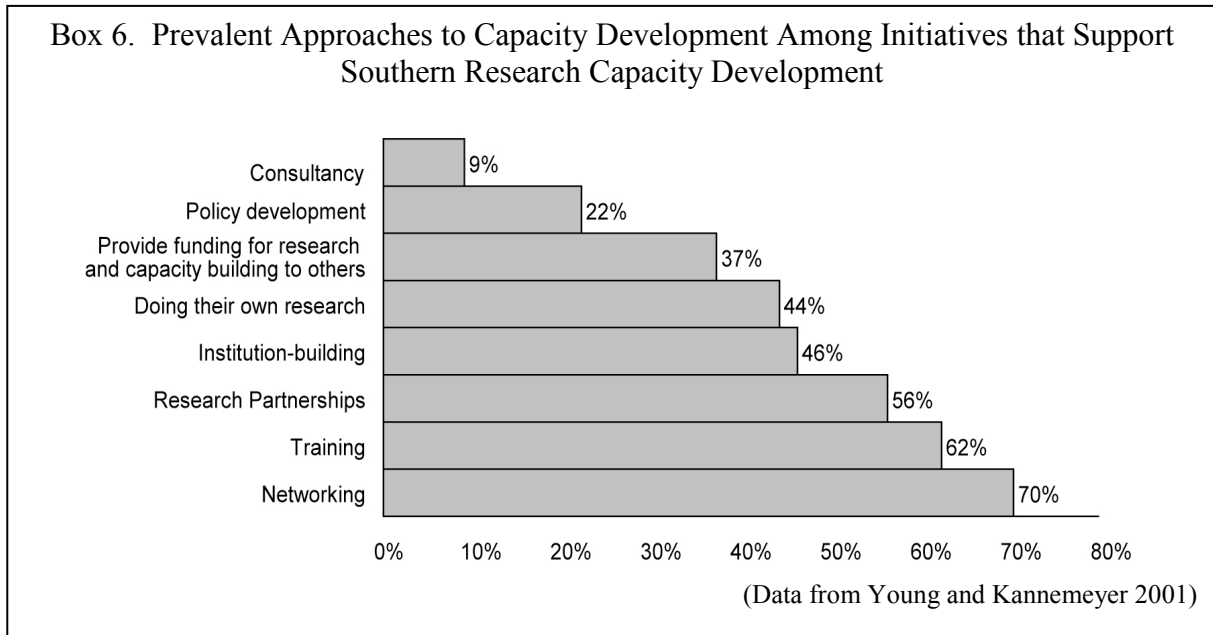
Although all claim in their literature or web sites to be involved in capacity building, often through research partnerships, it is difficult from this information to determine whether they really are, or are just using the language because that is what donors now demand (Young and Kannemeyer 2001:6).

Box 5. Breakdown of Organisations Supporting Research Capacity Development

Kind of Organisation	Number
UN Agencies	6
Foundations	4
CGIAR agencies	3
Co-ordinating agencies (e.g. RAWOO, KFPE)	5
Bilateral Programs	4
Research Institutes	7
International NGOs	11

⁴ <http://www.rawoo.nl/main-2b1.html>

Using the material that was available, the researchers prepared a summary of the



approaches that different organisations use (Box 6). These closely match IDRC's approaches, particularly the emphasis on networking and partnerships.

5. Characteristics of IDRC Capacity Development

Expressions in IDRC documents and interviews all illustrate that capacity development is a core consideration in what IDRC does. This first part of this section describes the overarching character of capacity development at IDRC, whereas the second part discusses some of the different ways staff understand their capacity development activities in more detail. Annex 1 provides a “holistic perspective” of how the different ideas from interviews fit together into a theory of change. The theory of change incorporates three characteristics of capacity development that are apparent at IDRC, which are discussed in this section:

1. **Capacity development is both an end and a means.** The production of knowledge and research is at the core of what IDRC does, but embedded within this is the need to nurture southern capacities to create and use that knowledge and research.
2. **Capacity development activities are directed at multiple levels.** Activities to develop capacities most often involve individuals, or involve groups within organisations, but usually these are supported for the purposes of strengthening inter-organisational systems for research and knowledge creation. In other words, the overarching purpose of capacity development activities is to increase the performance of larger knowledge systems in which partners are participants.
3. **Capacity development is an emergent process.** Capacity development does not appear to be something for which results can be meticulous specified, planned for, and evaluated. Capacity development occurs within a dynamic context, and plans appear to emerge as the process goes forward.

5.1 Corporate Expressions

The Act and CSPF

IDRC is founded on the idea that knowledge creation is a means to an end, one mechanism among many that contributes to development (Salewicz and Dwivedi 1996). The Act describes the Centre’s mandate “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” (IDRC Act 1970). One of the objects of that is to “assist the developing regions to build up the research capabilities, the innovative skills and the institutions required to solve their problems” (see Box 4).

Box. 4. The IDRC Act

The objects of the Centre are 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 in 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

In this formulation, “capacity” could be understood to refer to both the stores of knowledge available as well as the means of producing it. The hierarchical structure in which Act presents these ideas suggests that the production of research and knowledge is the primary aim, and that “assisting developing regions to build up their research capabilities” is secondary.

Tim Dottridge (1993) has described that capacity development has always been *sine qua non* of how IDRC operates, and Anne Bernard’s analysis of the Act and the CSPF elaborates how this is so not only through its actions, but also in its formal mandate. With respect to the Act, Bernard argues that IDRC requires the presence of rather sophisticated capacity in the countries in which it works. She also identifies statements from the 2000-2005 Corporate Strategy and Program Framework (CSPF III) explicitly directing programs to “selectively invest in accomplishments of the past” in order to continually build up skills and capability identifying deeper capacity implications in the breadth of thematic areas addressed by program initiatives. Particularly with regard to the breadth of issues covered by programs and the range of actors who are brought into the research sphere, Bernard sees that programming will necessarily involve developing capacity of multidisciplinary and multifunctional groups to stretch beyond their own backgrounds to adopt new perspectives and methods.

Despite their deep implications for capacity development, Bernard finds that these key policy documents are ambiguous in the direction they give to operationalise capacity

development as though it were an end in itself. She sees the deep capacity implications developing southern research capacity are not well matched by the “non-interventionist language” that is used to describe the role that IDRC should play in supporting the development of those capacities. Additionally, she finds that neither the Act nor the CSPF explicitly recognise that capacity development is “a field of professional expertise in its own right, and that systematic, professionally sound actions to enable it are fundamental to locally managed research realising sustainable outcomes” (Bernard 2002:1). Thus while the realities of IDRC’s approach make capacity development centrally important, there appears to be a lack of attention that the area receives in terms of dedicated expertise and resources.

The Corporate Assessment Framework

The Corporate Assessment Framework (CAF) is the most current expression of IDRC’s corporate-level aims, and it includes *Indigenous Capacity Building* as one of the areas it will monitor. The performance area is less ambiguous than other corporate documents, and it clearly presents capacity development as an end-in-itself. Capacity development is presented as a central goal both in the structure of the CAF – with *Indigenous Capacity Building* positioned as one of the core *strategic goals* – as well as in the way it specifies the types of individual, organisational and network capacities that it will monitor.

The structure of the *Indigenous Capacity Development* performance area closely resembles Dottridge's (1993) description of capacity development at IDRC. While the CAF framework specifies the types and levels of capacity as goals, the purpose of the monitoring plan is to gather information about the processes that IDRC uses to support capacity development. Monitoring information drawn from across the Centre will then be periodically synthesised and provided to senior managers to facilitate their learning about how processes that are being employed by programming are contributing to IDRC’s advance towards its mission (Evaluation Unit 2004).

5.2 Staff Expressions

IDRC CD activities serves multiple ends

Interviews reveal that developing partners' capacities is a goal that is intermingled with others. Programs find their purpose around a research theme and are, in large part, responsible for opening up new areas of inquiry, influencing research agendas, disseminating research and encouraging use of findings in practice and policy. In the midst of these imperatives, strengthening capabilities of individual partners and partner organisations can sometimes appear to be a means to securing programmatic ends. Other times, the significance of IDRC's support for partners' skills and abilities is described in terms of assisting partners' abilities to participate in and contribute to broader knowledge systems.

For instance, several program staff spoke of the need to increase partners' capacity to write better proposals or to manage IDRC research projects more effectively. Similarly, Resources Branch staff talked about training courses they provided to partners' administrative staff, with the intent of strengthening partners financial reporting to IDRC. Such statements, if taken on their own and not seen within the context of the larger research systems that they are supporting, could be interpreted as building partners' capacities to follow through with IDRC programming requirements. When questioned further, such activities are seen to have a wider relevance as well. For instance, Claude Briand and Kristina Taboulchanas both described that strengthening partners' financial systems is a basic step for helping partners get ready to approach other donors for funding. Thus strengthening partners reporting does not only serve IDRC's interests, but also contributes to partners' viability.

There were two notable exceptions of staff who described their work as being principally about supporting the development of partners' capacities. The first was Ronnie Vernooy. Rather than seeing 'capacity development' as isolated activities such as training or similar events, Vernooy described that he puts strong emphasis on making sure that such activities contribute to a larger stream of activities, such as strengthening teams or making organisations more effective. Vernooy described that he tends to see IDRC projects as a means to developing capacity:

In my mind, all the projects that we support are a means for capacity development. I mean they may at the same time hopefully solve some of the resource management problems – those are, after all, the issues we deal with. But I see the project as a means for researchers to 'learn by doing'. What we try to do within our projects is to bring resources together as part of the ongoing research.

Another exception was Gerd Schnöwalder, who explained that capacity development is often the core concern in for the Peacebuilding and Reconstruction (PBR) team's support of researchers in Palestine. Schnöwalder described that the conditions in which PBR's partners live and work has deteriorated to the point that the PBR's support is provided with the primary intent of keeping researchers active in their work and sustaining existing research capacity that can be re-invigorated and built upon once reconstruction can begin.

IDRC supports CD at multiple levels

Staff also tended to discuss capacity at three different levels: individuals, organisations and the broader research/knowledge system that the program is trying to support. Within interviews, staff had a tendency to blend together and connect ideas about the different levels. As they talked about their work with individual partners or groups, the significance of activities was seen in terms of how they contributed to the partners' abilities to contribute to broader research/knowledge systems.

One example was David Glover, who described that the Economy and Environment Program for Southeast Asia (EEPSEA) offers refresher courses in economics and short training courses on environmental science in order to bring prospective EEPSEA grant recipients up to speed. Glover described that although these courses have the narrow objective of getting skills up to a basic level so that grant recipients can take on EEPSEA research projects, there is a larger purpose of strengthening environmental economics in Southeast Asia:

Although the pointed end of the wedge, the narrow purpose, is to develop skills of researchers to look at environmental problems, around that there's the broader objective of developing the environmental economics field as a whole.

Another example was Laurent Elder, who also connected narrow programmatic purposes to the capacity of wider systems. When asked about his understanding of Acacia's approach to capacity development, he made a distinction between two broad kinds of

capacity. The first he called *institutional capacity*, which referred to partners' abilities to actually carry out IDRC research projects and follow through on commitments. The second he called *programmatic capacity*, by which he referred to partners' abilities not only to carry out the project, but also their ability to contribute to the development of a research sector investigating what Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) can do for development. This latter kind of capacity involves the abilities of partners to identify and develop research questions, form relationships and collaborate with other organisations, and drive forward research agendas. Elder also highlighted another challenge that arises when there is a complete lack of research capacity in a given area: it is not always feasible to work in a purely demand-driven mode. Sometimes Acacia finds it necessary to proactively "push" capacity development, as well as respond to partners' "pull".

Trade, Employment and Competitiveness (TEC) is an example of a program that conceptualises its work in capacity development to be about improving broader systems, but tends not to do so through skill development of individuals or institutions. One of TEC's objectives is to strengthen developing countries' capacities in world trade negotiations. Susan Joeke described that constraints facing developing countries in negotiations is not lack of individual skills but in the co-ordination of available capacities. The issue concerns imbalances in the available analytical capability backing up negotiation instead of individual's capabilities to negotiate. While negotiators from developed countries have teams of twenty or more specialised staff and analysts supporting them, developing country negotiators have small teams of three or four people that develop very strong competencies across a wide array of issues. In order to strengthen their ability to negotiate effectively, TEC concentrates on improving the linkages between country trade negotiators in Geneva and policy and research analysis capabilities in their home countries so that southern country trade negotiators can develop better-informed parameters for their bargaining positions.

CD as an on-going process

Much of IDRC's distinctiveness appears to come from its style of working. Program staff provide hands-on support for research which is labour intensive (e.g., Earl and

Smutylo 1998), and partners have expressed the value of close working relationships in developing their skills and abilities (Salewicz and Dwivedi 1996). In interviews with staff, the character of capacity development appears to be of an on-going emergent process.

There was a mixture of views about how carefully capacity development can or should be pursued. While some staff described that they put a great deal of effort into planning and conceptualising their capacity development activities, others felt that capacity development does not progress in a planned way. For them, capacity development instead unfolds as an experimental, ‘try and see’ approach, in which both partners and program staff learn about what is required as the work goes forward. In some cases, staff reacted negatively to questions that suggested they might approach capacity development with their partners with a framework or plan. For some staff, a key component of capacity development is supporting the vision and the choices of partners, because they will often have a much clearer understanding of what is needed in their particular context than IDRC.

5.3 Implications for understanding IDRC’s CD results

This mixture of seeing capacity as ends and means, of needing to “push” programming as well as respond to partners “pull”, and seeing capacity development as an open-ended process are not unique to IDRC. The interim findings of ECDPM’s (2004) on-going study suggest that a mixture of push and pull is often necessary, and that emergent planning rather than monitoring of structured goals and objectives is frequently seen as essential.

Process-based understandings of capacity development expressed by staff do not easily permit capacity results to be monitored and evaluated. Goals or end-points are not readily specified, and key accomplishments are often only apparent afterwards. Interviews did not identify any systems that staff use to monitor or track the capacity development of partners. Many staff also found it difficult to answer questions about how they knew that partners’ capacities had developed, although a few offered thoughts about what sorts of indications help them understand that things are going in the right direction. Bellanet, for instance, works with its clients (which include IDRC program

initiatives, other donors, as well as southern country partners) to help them develop ways of improving processes they use to collaborate and learn from one another. Allison Hewlitt described that when Bellanet's partners continue to use the knowledge management or knowledge sharing techniques that Bellanet has introduced, or if partners come back to discuss their experiences with different techniques and ask advice on how to do things better, she understands that capacity is developing.

Kristina Taboulchanas described that a way she understands capacity has developed through Cities Feeding People (CFP) programming is that work with partners does not just come to an end, but evolves in new directions after a project is completed. Work done previously opens new questions and partners have embarked into new areas of work.

Interim findings from the ECDPM study suggest difficulties in monitoring and evaluating capacity development are widespread. The ECDPM study examined 17 donor-funded projects and found that in the cases where monitoring systems are in place, monitoring frameworks tended to be filled in ritualistically and contributed very little to program learning about how capacities were developing. They also tended to mix up capacity and performance issues, or treat performance as a proxy for capacity (ECDPM 2004).

There is a subtle relationship between capacity and performance. The ECDPM study defined capacity as the coordination of different capabilities into a coherent whole. Lusthaus et al (2002) defined capacity to be the ability of a group or system to utilise its resources to perform its functions. Thus capacity is not performance, but refers to the configuration of factors that contribute to performance. In examining case studies, the ECDPM study finds that the "complex relationship between capacity and performance can be framed as changes in behaviour, relationships, activities or actions of people" (ECDPM 2004:8). Two staff members discussed their understandings of capacity in terms of changes in partners behaviour, suggesting that a behavioural approach to examining capacity development may be intuitive for staff, and the accumulated experience Outcome Mapping methodology (Earl, Carden et al. 2001) may provide ways of operationalising these understandings.

6. IDRC Approaches to Supporting Capacity Development

The previous section presented broad understandings of capacity development, and described how capacity development at IDRC is best understood as a process of on-going change and adaptation. It also described that it this change occurs at different levels, with an overarching goal of creating effective knowledge production systems. This section takes a closer look at that ways that both IDRC documents and staff describe how they support capacity development. These are organised into eight overarching themes, and are mapped onto the theory of change in Appendix 2.

1. Facilitating the development of new researchers
2. Supporting learning-by-doing
3. Supporting process results as well as research results
4. Institutionalisation of new approaches
5. Strengthening organisations
6. Working collaboratively through strategic partnerships and networks
7. Influencing incentives for doing research
8. Encouraging emergence of support features in the research environment

6.1 Facilitating the development of young professionals

Interviews and some documents discuss the importance of supporting the development of young professionals. There appear to be three ways that IDRC directs support to younger researchers, these include:

- providing opportunities for young researchers to do development research through training and awards schemes.
- ensuring a mixture of junior and senior researchers are a part of research projects
- providing young researchers with small grants for project development

Support through training and awards

For over thirty years, IDRC has provided support to researchers at the beginning and middle of their careers through funding and awards, and to-date, IDRC has granted approximately 3,600 awards to Canadians and developing country nationals. Of this number, just over 71% (2,582) of the awards were granted to developing country

nationals (Bowry 2004). Currently, IDRC offers a number of awards⁵ to graduate students from developing countries, including:

- *The Canadian Window on International Development Award*: Open to developing country nationals undertaking Masters or Doctoral studies at Canadian Universities
- *IDRC Doctoral Research Awards Program*: Open to developing country nationals undertaking doctoral studies at Canadian Universities
- *Training Awards*: Provided to individuals within projects to support skill development.
- *Internships and Professional Development Awards*: Many IDRC Program Initiatives participate in the Internship program, in which young researchers come to work at IDRC in a research program. Half their time is spent assisting in research management of the PI, while the other half is spent conducting an independent research project linked to the work of the PI.
- *Endowment Awards*: There are two awards that are managed by the Centre Training and Awards Program. The first is the Bentley Fellowship, which supports Canadians and developing country researchers to conduct Master's, PhD or post-doctoral on-farm research in sustainably managed agroecosystems. The second is the Bene Fellowship which provides assistance to Canadian graduate students undertaking research on the relationship of forest resources to the social, economic, cultural and environmental welfare of people in developing countries.
- *Research awards offered through programs*: Some programs offer awards for graduate students to do research. One example is the Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health offers awards lasting up to one year to fund research looking at linkages between the environment and human health. Cities Feeding People offers *Agropolis Awards* which provide research funding for graduate and post-doctoral research. Another is EEPSEA, which offers bi-annual awards to Southeast Asian economists to cover fieldwork to researchers that intend to remain in or return to their home countries following the completion of their studies.

Rita Bowry reports that by providing support for particular individuals at critical times in their personal and professional development, IDRC has contributed to the growth of a generation of competent practitioners in international development. Many young individuals have been encouraged to pursue a career in international development and strengthen their research capabilities. Many of these former recipients now hold high positions in government and development agencies (Bowry 2003). The Project Leader Tracer Study, as well as some interviews indicate that part of the reason for advancement

⁵ The full list of current Awards is available here: http://web.idrc.ca/en/ev-23273-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

may have to do with prestige that researchers were able to gather as a result of being affiliated with IDRC.

Interviews with staff describe that awards are valuable not only in strengthening individual skills, but they also add to value to IDRC programming. Awards provide graduate students with resources to conduct in-depth research in new research areas where little research has yet been done – providing in-depth analysis that is important in PIs that are exploring new areas. Awards also allow researchers to carry out work within IDRC partner organisations in developing countries. Thus award holders contributing to the work of the research program, and the researchers themselves become a part of the programs' research networks.

Kristina Taboulchanas describes that the Agropolis awards program has grown into a very important component of the Cities Feeding People (CFP) Program Initiative. It provides resources for Master's, Doctoral and Post-Doctoral research to be conducted on selected topics of interest (selected by an Advisory Committee). Agropolis Awards have also provided CFP with a means of developing synergies across different programming components. Some researchers formerly supported under Agropolis Awards have gone on to work in CFP's partners, and others have gone on to hold research supervisory roles in University departments. Taboulchanas describes this accumulation of researchers and research has allowed CFP to thicken its connections with the global Urban Agriculture research system it is trying to develop. Agropolis has become a critical link that allows programming undertaken in one area of CFP to influence other areas of programming.

David Glover provided an example of how awards are used to contribute to broader capacity goals, and to complement awards that are offered by other organisations. EEPSEA holds a bi-annual research awards competition that is intended to complement those provided by other donor organisations. These other awards provide funding for young researchers from developing countries to undertake graduate studies in the United States. While those awards typically cover maintenance and tuition costs, they often do not provide funding for fieldwork, resulting in students doing research that tends to either be of a theoretical nature, or be empirical but into a problem relevant to developed countries. The EEPSEA awards fill a gap by providing funding so that students can conduct empirical work on problems affecting their home country, with the hope of

coaxing them to return to the region once when have completed their studies abroad and to continue working in the area.

Declining support for young researchers?

Interviews and IDRC documents raised the possibility that IDRC's support for younger researchers may be declining. The suggestion arises in relation to interviews that note IDRC funding for awards declined during the 1990s, and also the findings of the 1996 project leader tracer study, which found that average age of project leaders was increasing. As an alternative, current areas where support for young researchers seems to be maintained is through small grants with some program staff expressing an interest in supporting research awards.

Rita Bowry described that the Centre used to be much more active in granting awards in the past. Peak funding for awards occurred in the 1980s followed by a sharp reduction of funding for awards in the 1990s, especially to developing country nationals.

Another indication that support for younger researchers declined during the 1990s appears in the 1996 Project Leader Tracer Study, which found there was a declining number of younger researchers (between 20 and 39) that were project leaders during the 1990s. The study mentions that younger researchers have been included in research projects, but argued that some of the most important skills gained through their collaboration with IDRC was professional advancement and project management skills. The Study argues that these kinds of capacities are most important for researchers at the beginning of their careers and the trend away from younger researchers may mean that IDRC projects might not be making the full contributions to capacity that they could be.

More in-depth analysis of IDRC records may indicate that support for younger researchers has not declined. For instance, one program officer mentioned that the delivery of small grants is a funding modality that their program frequently uses to direct funds to younger researchers. It is also important to point out that the findings of the Project Leader Tracer Study are from 1996. Interviews did not reveal whether there were more younger researchers now than in the 1990s.

Interviews did suggest that there may be increasing interest within programs to create new awards to support graduate and postgraduate research. One program officer

explained that programs have always had the ability to create awards schemes for graduate research, but because the cost of sending one person to do graduate training versus the amount of research that could be produced for the same amount of money, they have been reluctant to do so. With the possibility that IDRC may be moving into a period where funds are not as tightly constrained as in the mid-to-latter part of the 1990s, there may be an increase in funding that IDRC programs provide for awards

6.2 Supporting ‘Learning-by-doing’

In interviews, learning-by-doing is one of the most frequently cited processes through which partners capacities are understood to develop. Learning-by-doing features prominently in the 1996 Project Leader Tracer Study (Salewicz and Dwivedi 1996), particularly in relation to developing project management skills and is a frequently mentioned mechanism by which research capacity is seen to develop in evaluation reports (see for example (Evaluation Unit 2004).

Learning-by-doing refers to the multiplicity of deliberate and tacit ways that people learn through carrying out work. Interviews indicate that individuals, groups, and in some cases organisations can learn-by-doing. For the most part, learning-by-doing is understood as a process that IDRC does not need to manage directly, but in interviews, staff described ways that IDRC supports researchers’ learning-by-doing, including:

- Providing training and workshops
- Making sure support and advice is available
- Encouraging responsibility and ownership for results
- Supporting the systematic re-evaluation of experience

Ways that programs support learning by doing

1. *Training and workshops:* Training events and workshops are very common methods for supporting capacity development, for both programming and resources branch. For staff, training is often provided as a means of transferring knowledge and skills about research methodologies. Workshops are another important mechanism used by IDRC programs, but instead of transferring skills or knowledge, workshops tend to be structured for partners to learn and make decisions together. Workshops are used to

decide directions for up-coming research, or to re-align research that seems to be going off-course.

While workshops and training are certainly a major part of IDRC's work in capacity development, interviews indicate that training events are not understood as stand-alone activities, but that they contribute to a process of on-going learning within the project. Luis Barnola mentioned that skills training can help, but it really is just the "tip of the iceberg" for learning. Citing research into non-formal learning, he described that education researchers have found that most learning occurs as people encounter problems, try to apply new skills, experiment, and ask for help in finding solutions.

Staff from Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) also discussed how training and workshops need to be integrated into on-going processes of learning throughout the project. They have begun to experiment by including training sessions, collaborative workshops and peer networking to support partner learning as they conduct their research projects. Ronnie Vernooy explained that idea is to provide different kinds of support to researchers throughout the life of research – from research planning, carrying out fieldwork, and writing the results.

We used to have a tendency to assume that one-off training or workshops or events would do the trick. I think we now know that a series of iterative training events is more effective. The training covers both theoretical and practical aspects of doing the research over a longer period of time, and there is considerable hands-on involvement from the trainers and facilitators – there are people guiding the overall process.

2. *Availability of Support and Advice:* Several staff noted that researchers, especially those working in a new area, benefit from having resource people available from whom they can ask for advice, pose questions, or engage in discussions. Staff describe a variety of means to make sure that support resources are present, including: one-on-one program officer support (e.g. Gender Unit); assigning experienced professionals to act as resource people to researchers (e.g., EEPSEA); supporting inexperienced research institutions by bringing them into networks coordinated by strong network hubs (e.g., Acacia, CFP).

Allison Hewlitt emphasised that an important aspect of being an effective resource person is the ability to provide moral support and encouragement. Speaking about the support given in response to requests for advice about group facilitation techniques, she described that often what people only really need is encouragement and support. A person's confidence about their ability to complete a task successfully can have a strong influence on the outcome.

4. *Responsibility and Ownership*: Staff described that by giving partners responsibility for overseeing projects and following through with all the reporting that is required, incentives are created for that institution to learn and grow into new roles. The Project Leader Tracer Study highlighted that being given responsibility was important for individuals to learn new skills (Salewicz and Dwivedi 1996).
5. *Systematic re-examination of experience*: Interviews of program staff all emphasised that providing space in the project for partners to capture and collectively examine their experiences are important ways of supporting learning. In some cases, this has taken the form of programs consciously developing projects around challenging programme issues, which allows for learning on the part of both IDRC and their partners. An example of this is CBNRM, Social Analysis and Gender Analysis (SAGA) umbrella project. This project brings together staff and partners from across the NRM PIs and Gender Unit in order to examine what kinds of support are helpful.

For the most part, the kinds of learning that staff described in interviews referred to individuals learning. Bellanet was a notable exception as it specialises in developing technologies and techniques to facilitate group learning, and often provides these services to IDRC programs.

There is a massive literature on learning, much of it deeply imbued with social theory (e.g., Gherardi 2001), but there are also examples of papers written from perspectives of management, organisational development, as well as international development NGOs. There is a considerable amount of material from this latter group, perhaps owing to their heightened awareness of the need to support their own learning due to the difficulties that they have with attending to their learning (Hailey and James 2002).

For many authors, it is not entirely clear what the boundaries are, if there are any, between learning and capacity development, particularly when learning is considered in relation to organisations. Consider for example the description of organisational learning:

The process approach to learning is the one that has found the greatest resonance in development work because both are based on the idea of change. According to the process approach, assessments about whether a development organisation is learning must be based on whether there are observable improvements in its own development practice or its ability to influence others (Britton 2001:6).

6.3 Enabling process results as well as research results

Several interviews described how IDRC-supported work is often designed to bring about positive changes not only through the results reported in research products, but also through the process of doing the research itself. This occurs because the process of doing the research engages participants in such a way that it changes the way they think or act, and these changes are transferred to other areas of work, thereby developing the researcher's capacity. Some staff describe that these changes came from the nature of the collaboration. Others described process results as a built-in feature of research methodologies that are supported.

In an example of the former, Acacia's work with partners to develop open source applications has process benefits as well as benefits from the products themselves. Steve Song described that developing applications requires researchers and software developers to collaborate closely; which, together with the culture of openness and transparency that imbues open source software development, results in creating a collaborative culture that translates very well into other aspects of the work.

[Open source] is a very sustainable way of doing software development and maintaining an application. For us it's good because it's networking by nature. All software development is developed through networks of people working together. So culturally its a very positive thing because, intuitively, by the very nature of what open source software is, it promotes the kind of transparency, openness and knowledge sharing that we see as virtues in every other necessary venue. It has a kind of back door virtue as well as being free and useful and powerful.

Song went on to provide an example of how creating this culture of openness and sharing was well-translated in a project that Acacia supported with the University of Burkina Faso. The project involved the Law department and computer science department at the University of Burkina Faso, and incorporated technical assistance from the computer science department at the University of Laval. The project involved the development of an open source application where judicial decisions within Burkina Faso will be made available on-line. In addition to supporting the development of technical skills to utilise a sustainable technology, the partners are working together to develop a tool which will directly promote transparency and democracy in their country.

Staff from other programs discussed the value of supporting reflexive research methodologies for creating positive changes in the immediate context of the research. Staff from CBNRM spoke of their use of participatory research methodologies. In another example, Pamela Golah described the kinds of change that the Gender Unit tries to encourage by relating that change to the basic tenets of feminist theory. She explained how feminist research involves progressively deeper analysis and engagement as the researcher moves through the each stage of their analysis. Early stages deal with examining biases in the system under consideration. Analysts then try to understand how those biases affect the immediate context in which the research is being carried out and through political engagement, the research is used as a vehicle to stimulate change. Golah described that this kind of critical research which goes beyond arriving at research findings towards using research as a way of stimulating change, is very challenging for those undertaking it.

It's trying to uncover biases and to uncover unequal power relations, and there's a difficulty in doing that research and in building capacity for that research. There are vested interests to maintain power relations the way they are right now. At an organisational level, partners will experience backlash against the kind of work that they are doing.

Increasing the utility of the process of inquiry as well as the results is common in Utilisation-Focused Evaluation (Patton 1997). It is also central to what the IDRC-supported approach to institutional assessment does; provides assessment as a process for partners to learn about what is required in their own contexts. Interviews illustrated that

some programs designed processes for learning and action through the process of doing the research. The changes that occur in the immediate context are a fundamental part of the results that IDRC can help to bring about.

6.4 Mainstreaming and Institutionalising new perspectives and approaches

Several staff discussed how their programs attempt to support individual partners' efforts to 'mainstream' new perspectives and approaches in their organisation. Mainstreaming refers to the process whereby approaches have gained recognition within host organisations and receive dedicated resources. Staff also described that promoting wider 'institutionalisation' of these perspectives and approaches is an important way of developing sustained organisational backup for new ideas and perspectives.

Mainstreaming

There were several examples of programs that are attempting to encourage partner organisations to mainstream perspectives and approaches. Kristina Taboulchanas described that Cities Feeding People is a program which attempts to encourage its partners to promote mainstreaming Urban Agriculture in their institutions. Several programs are actively trying to mainstream social and gender analysis.

For those who discussed it, it was apparent that mainstreaming new perspectives and approaches is a very difficult task. For example, many interviews indicated a variety of challenges surrounding the inclusion of meaningful social and gender analysis in projects. Often inclusion of gender analysis is seen as a formality in the project, and programs are sometimes faced with the challenge of getting project recipients to go beyond the superficial inclusion of gender. Interviews discussed that this often comes from a lack of understanding about the value that a gender perspective adds to research.

Pamela Golah described that although donors have made a lot of progress in their own work in gender mainstreaming, as well as promoting it more widely, a new challenge arises which relates to holding onto the gains that have already made. On the donor side, Golah describes that gender has been 'mainstreamed into oblivion', and there

has been a reduction in the sense of urgency that gender issues once had. On the recipients side, in some regions she perceives a backlash against gender research.

Interviews suggest that mainstreaming and institutionalising often depend in large part on individuals. Taboulchanas described that the mainstreaming of Urban Agriculture in Urban Management Program occurred due to the energy, persistence and vision of two people. Even though those individuals are changing roles and will no longer be involved with IDRC, they have gradually mentored others into the roles that they were leaving, thereby keeping an interested spark within the organisation. Taboulchanas notes that it would make sense to incorporate processes like these into program strategies – an attempt to ensure that learning is handed over and activity can continue. Allison Hewlitt of Bellanet also observed that mainstreaming is often the result of individuals:

It's usually the individual. Whether or not an organisation is part of a network is up to an individual... so it's up to the individual to take that learning and translate it back to whatever it is they're doing - in their work within an organisation. And then somehow have it spread through the organisation.

Institutionalisation

Institutionalisation refers to a much deeper kind of change, in which the values and perspectives become a part of the rules and norms of how organisations conduct their work. In some ways, the challenge of institutionalising new approaches resembles issues examined by adoption-diffusion research, which attempts to examine factors that facilitate the diffusion of new techniques and technologies. The issues involved in institutionalisation are different however, in that they are not about the spread of technical innovations, but research perspectives and approaches in which values and perceptions are front and centre. While there is a wealth of research and experience available about adoption of techniques and technologies, there is significantly less that examines the spread of values and perceptions.

The way staff spoke about mainstreaming and institutionalising approaches was in regards to how it helps to generate sustained organisational backup for approaches. Diane Stone (2004) illustrates that these processes also constitute a kind of ‘soft’ policy transfer that are necessary complements for ‘harder’ transfers of policy tools, structures or

practices. One of the cases she uses to describe the dynamics of such soft transfers is the IDRC's Ukrainian Dnipro River project, as it was described in the EU-supported policy influence case study. The article illustrates that while attempts by programs to mainstream and/or institutionalise new approaches can be seen as a way to increase resources to push ideas forward, they can also be seen as a mechanism of introducing norms and setting the stage for policy influence. One area that might provide some more insights into how IDRC attempts to mainstream and institutionalise new approaches are the policy influence case studies.

6.5 Strengthening partner organisations

Strengthening partner organisations is a goal that is closely allied to mainstreaming and institutionalisation of new approaches and perspectives; strong institutions are necessary to provide a solid organisational backup for ideas. Strengthening organisations is about trying to solidify core functions that support the viability of organisations themselves.

IDRC's approach to strengthening organisational capacity concentrates more on "software" such as management and leadership skills rather than "hardware" like provision of research equipment or infrastructure. The types of organisational capacities that IDRC supports can be referred to as operational capacities and strategic capacities (Horton, Alexaki et al. 2003).

Operational Capacities

Operational capacity can be defined as the ability of partners to perform core functions relative to their day-to-day operations (Horton, Alexaki et al. 2003). An example of IDRC support of operational capacity, as indicated in interviews, is the strengthening of partners' financial administrative systems through training, and in some cases providing accounting software to assist in financial reporting. It also provides training to build skills in fundraising. These activities are provided to benefit both partners and IDRC. With strengthened financial systems and fundraising abilities, partners will be able to better manage funds, and also raise funds from other granting agencies. For IDRC, strengthening partners financial systems improves their reporting and also is seen to reduce financial risk. Furthermore, if partners are able to leverage funds from other donors, it reduces partners' dependency on IDRC for funding.

Adaptive Capacities

Adaptive capacities refers to the ability of organisations to adapt to changing circumstances (Horton, Alexaki et al. 2003), and few staff spoke directly about how IDRC contributes to partners organisations adaptive capacities. IDRC materials reviewed for this study indicate that a key support that IDRC provides maybe evaluation. The Evaluation Unit has developed tools and methods for organisations to try to strengthen their own capacities through institutional self-assessment (Lusthaus, Adriene et al. 1999; Carden 2000). IDRC staff and partners were also engaged in the Evaluating Capacity Development project, which itself was aimed at supporting learning of partner institutions (Horton, Alexaki et al. 2003). Such approaches use evaluation not as a external assessment for accountability purposes, but rather as a learning process driven by institutions themselves, in which evaluation is “part of the treatment” (Forss, Rebien et al. 2002).

Are there gaps in IDRC’s ability to strengthen organisations?

Interviews with some staff indicate that there are gaps in IDRC’s ability to strengthen organisations. IDRC support is most often provided through projects, and many staff recognise that organisations that survive on project-to-project funding face significant challenges. They must continually find projects to ensure continued cash flow, and this pressure limits organisations’ abilities to be selective about projects and their ability to maintain overall coherence. It also puts significant constraints on their ability to learn from work they have already done, or use resources on their own explorations to gain knowledge in new areas.

Several of the interviewed ICT4D staff were keenly aware of the value of core support. Allison Hewlitt described that one of Bellanet’s strengths is that it has core funding that allows Bellanet to devote a significant proportion of its resources to exploring new areas. This latitude permitted Bellanet to develop D-Groups, which would not have been possible otherwise.

In the case of D-groups, we didn't have funding to start that. We used core funding, and a couple people here who were interested had the time to experiment. It's actually a very good model for an organisation because it allows them to be a bit

creative and be able to spend some time on new ideas and different things that we want to try out. And not have the pressure of reporting back to somebody on the outcomes or trying to fulfil some sort of mandate set out by a project.

Lee Kirkham, IDRC's Nairobi Regional Controller, expressed that the way IDRC currently supports capacity development is inadequate for strengthening organisation. In his role as Regional Controller, the aspect of organisational capacity that he deals with is financial administration. However, he feels that challenges facing many institutions in the region are deeper than this. He felt that IDRC's current staple approach of strengthening organisations - training individual partners in financial administration - is likely to be ineffective in addressing these challenges.

I would say that from what I have seen from my own visits to partners, that finance and administration support is perhaps not the priority. I think for that many of the smaller organisations, organisational survival is probably higher on the list. This relates to their ability to attract funding to pay for core costs; their ability to focus on their *raison d'être*, rather than having to go off on tangents that donors will be prepared to pay for; structural issues within the organisation. All of these differ from organisation to organisation, and so taking a standard approach to what we can deliver in terms of capacity development is probably going to be ineffective.

In order to strengthen partner institutions, Kirkham sees a need for IDRC to adopt more holistic measures, likely for a longer term. The elements of the approach that he envisions involve multiple stages that could stretch over a number of years. Early on, there would be a rigorous needs assessment and the organisation would be supported throughout by an external mentor organisation. Kirkham sees the need for a process that::

...recognises the length of commitment that is necessary in order to be able to develop capacity effectively, and recognises the mentoring needs for organisations. Once you get past that initial flurry of activity at the beginning, the need for ongoing support in order to be able to make the learning sustainable, make the development sustainable, help people deal with the challenges that they face as they go through the process of change.

6.6 Working collaboratively through strategic partnerships and networks

Interviews and documents illustrate that much of IDRC's work depends on effective collaboration. IDRC supports collaboration between partners, but interviews also reveal

that effective collaboration within IDRC is critical to its ability to effectively provide support to its partners.

Bernard (2002) illustrates that collaboration is a core consideration of IDRC's program structure and strategy as program staff with different disciplinary backgrounds combine expertise within program teams. She notes that well-functioning programs require effective collaboration both within IDRC and between IDRC and its partners. Additionally, in order to produce multidisciplinary research, effective collaboration between partners with different backgrounds is also key. Research production is also seen to be a fundamentally social process and collaboration is critical in stimulating improvement of researchers. Steve Song illustrates the point with a hypothetical example:

Let's suppose you are a lonely statistician at the University of Dar es Salaam. If people keep dismissing you or not taking you seriously, or you're not able to find a way of seeking advice on what particular approach to solve a problem, you're unlikely to progress. But if you were connected into a community of statisticians, not only would feel increasingly validated in the work that you do because other people do it, you would also have a resource - a community to draw on to drive forward in your particular field.

Staff also spoke about how collaboration across IDRC branches is important in providing support to partners. In one example, Sachiko Okuda described that the ability of resources and programs staff to collaborate with one another is critical to IDRC's ability to come up with creative ways of supporting partners:

We had a researcher who was in the occupied West Bank, and she had mobility constraints.... At first we didn't understand why such a huge number of requests had come in for articles, because we thought 'well she seems to be near a university, what could possibly be the problem'. But then the program staff stepped in and said, 'well no she can't get out to go to the university', and then it made sense. And in terms of delivering the material to her - the program staff was aware of a Canadian researcher who was going to visit her. So we used that researcher as a coyote, and we couriered the material to him, and he took the material to her on the plane.

Interviews suggest that much of IDRC's approach to supporting capacity development is carried out through structuring collaboration. Two critical ways that this is done is through *creating strategic partnerships* and *creating networks or communities of practice*.

Creating strategic partnerships

In creating strategic partnerships, IDRC staff create linkages between partners so that they can learn from one another. Interviews revealed three common arrangements for doing this. The first involved linking partners working on similar problems but in different locations. The rationale for these sorts of linkages is to allow partners to learn from the experiences of others involved in similar kinds of work, but looking at problems in a slightly different context. A second kind of linkage that IDRC facilitates is the linking of organisations that work in similar fields but have different mandates.

Commonly this takes the form of creating links between an organisation that does research and an organisation involved in implementation. Such arrangements are seen to help in getting research 'off the ground'. The third kind of linkage is to put researchers together that have complementary skills. This sort of linkage is often encouraged when IDRC feels that some aspects of a research proposal is weak. In such cases IDRC will suggest bringing in researchers that specialise in those weak areas in order to strengthen the research.

Creating networks and communities of practice

Staff also discussed that they try to create wider systems of collaboration through creating networks and communities of practice. This was frequently seen as the main approach staff used to support capacity development.

Networks are seen as social venues that provide an engine for creative processes to occur. They are loci that support the exchange and development of new ideas. Networks provide a venue for likeminded researchers to discuss the findings that they produce, and they provide the intellectual energy for generating new ideas and opening new areas of work.

It's about establishing some sort of forum, or routine occasions for meeting and discussion which have some continuing life in them and provide a home for the kind of dialogue and discussion that we think is fruitful. And those discussions, they're not ones that take place in a void. They have to be fed, and the energy they take in comes from the research outputs.

In addition to networks facilitating the stimulation of new ideas, involving partners in networks is also seen as an important strategy for strengthening the capacity of weaker

partners. Networks are intended to provide partners with a wider system of support than is available to them in their home institutions. Some staff saw the support from a network as a way to support individuals in their attempts to promote or mainstream approaches in their institution. In other cases, strong institutions are positioned as network hubs to co-ordinate and support the work of weaker institutions. These arrangements provide support to weaker organisations, but they also provide a way of harnessing the talents of stronger organisations.

With our policy research network, there is an institution in South Africa that is the dynamo for the network and a mentor to other members of the network. And for us it kills two birds with one stone. Not only does it provide a positive way of stimulating the network - having one strong member of the network is a good way of making sure that things get done. It also gives us a mechanism for dealing with institutions that are in countries that are maybe a little bit too advanced to be considered developing countries.

As powerful as networks are for learning and support, interviews indicate that they are a mechanism that needs to be used judiciously, and managed with care. Lee Kirkham explained that networks have been seen by some partners as a drain on organisational capacity.

Interestingly, when I was in Zimbabwe recently, chatting with one of our partners, I happened to throw into conversation the development of networks is a capacity building tool. She laughed and said, 'capacity *building*? It works in the opposite direction. For many institutions it just takes people's time and energy in trying to engage in networks without any real product'. So one partner certainly saw the existence of lots of networks as being a drain on resources rather than being a means of strengthening institutions or strengthening of individuals.

6.7 Influencing incentives for research

Interviews discussed how IDRC contributes to the capacity of research systems by addressing incentive structures that influence research production. In the donor literature, perverse incentives are understood to be important for understanding why aid that has been provided by bilateral and multilateral donors has failed to translate into greater ownership and improvement in conditions in developing countries. There is little research discussing the incentives underlying the provision of support for development

research, but interviews reveal that IDRC can improve the capacity of partners to produce research by addressing incentive systems that influence their choices.

Incentives to open new areas of research

One of the most common ways that IDRC programs attempt to influence incentive structures of research systems is when they attempt to initiate a new area of research. To create incentives, IDRC programs hold competitions for small grants, or go on a road trip to talk to researchers and raise awareness about the issue. Usually IDRC will indicate that it can provide resources and network supports for researchers that might be interested in undertaking the work. Thus IDRC can provide an inducement to researchers to venture into new areas.

Providing incentives to stem brain drain

David Glover described how EEPSEA uses research awards as incentive to slow the brain drain of young economists from Southeast Asia. The overarching purpose of EEPSEA is to build the environmental economics field in the region to this end it provides research awards to allow younger researchers to carry out empirical work in their home countries. These awards allow Southeast Asian PhD students studying abroad to apply to EEPSEA for thesis fieldwork awards, which enable them to conduct fieldwork in their home countries and to attend EEPSEA workshops. This also helps develop linkages between the students and institutions in the region and increase chances that the students will return home to work after graduation.

Providing incentives for collective action

In another example, Andres Rius discussed how TEC was able to structure project funding for the MERCOSUR economic research network in such a way that it provided incentives for the researchers to collaborate with policy makers. To do this, TEC set aside a portion of the project funds which could be accessed exclusively by the researchers to undertake work demanded by a regional policy making group. Rius described that as the project came towards the end, the researchers realised that they had not done anything to interact with policy makers. In order to access the money, the researchers set up a series

of meetings with the consultative group of MERCOSUR Secretariat, which eventually led to a productive working relationship.

The consultative group of MERCOSUR Secretariat includes the business organisations, the labour unions and the consumer organisations. This group found it extremely interesting to have direct access to a group of researchers without having to put in any money, because they don't have any money. At the same time, these researchers could now access the pot. And after they had a series of meetings, they realised they were learning from each other more than they had imagined before that they could learn. This has become a more regular practice for researchers in this network, and it worked basically because it in a way changed the incentives to get researchers were facing to work with the policy makers.

Rius went on to describe that in providing funding to catalyse the collaboration, TEC provided critical impetus to overcome collective action problems for forming a regional research consortium.

The whole existence of this network is an example of trying to solve collective action problems. MERCOSUR countries have several strong research institutions, but doing regional research is a public good. No government is going to pay for it, and no institution is going to take lead in making the initial investment. But once we solved the co-ordination problem, there was an entire new market for research that didn't exist before and these processes are being undertaken by a regional consortium that wouldn't have been started by any one of these institutions.

Addressing perverse incentives against producing public research

A more pernicious problem for IDRC's work has to do with perverse incentives that lead talented researchers out of knowledge production. This was particularly apparent in the TEC program, which tends to work with economists that can be a scarce commodity in developing countries. On a number of occasions, it has been a challenge for TEC team to locate economists to do work, as they are working with high paying donors. Susan Joekes described the problem in Eastern Africa:

There are a very small number of institutions, a lot of them have management weaknesses, they have a very limited number of staff with these right skills, with a tremendous undersupply of analysts of this calibre in the region. They get poached by the World Bank or they go into the private sector and earn five times as much, or they work as consultants and they just cherry pick their commissions - drop the ones like a hot brick the minute they become outbid by something else. So there's a whole lot of institutional co-ordination and human resource problems there.

Andres Rius described similar changes in Central America.

At some points there was actually so much aid money flowing around that the most credible experts didn't have any interest in producing “public goods” types of research. They were more interested in getting the next contract from one of the international financial institutions. So it's not that there aren't qualified experts, it's that they are not interested in informing public debate on economic policies. They are producing research for foreign donors - foreign clients, essentially. We want to enrich policy debates through research, and we were only able to attract the weaker candidates because we don't have the money to give those big consultancy contracts. That's an example of how you have the incentives lined in the wrong direction. And you're not going to fix that with money, it would probably take more money than all of our programs can spend in one single region.

6.8 Encouraging the emergence of a supportive research environment

Some staff also mentioned the necessity of other support features that need to be present in the research environment in order to create the conditions in which researchers can grow and prosper. Many of the kinds of supports that are required have been discussed in previous sections, such as networks of like-minded practitioners to share ideas, and the need to work within institutions that provide adequate incentives and rewards for researchers to carry out work. Other elements mentioned by staff include their support for researchers to find publication outlets, or assistance in the creation of professional associations to help researchers develop webs of professional contacts both inside and outside the region in which they work. David Glover describes the necessity of these sorts of supports in EEPSEA's work building environmental economics field in Southeast Asia:

Researchers can't - in the short run I suppose they can - but in the long run they can't operate alone. They need colleagues, they need journals, they need publication outlets, they need contacts with established people outside the region, and they need people to share ideas with. They want to learn from the experience of other countries who have applied environmental economics approaches and see how they worked and so on. So in order to develop really effective researchers, you also need to develop all these other kinds of supports and resources. ‘No man is an island’, so you have to develop the kinds of things that they need to support them as well.

Jean-Michel Labatut described that the Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health PI has been actively trying to create some of these sorts of supports. As the programme area is

new, there are few dedicated publication outlets for researchers interested in publishing. EcoHealth is attempting to connect them with journals with relevant foci. Additionally, they are trying to stimulate demand for research through events such as the Ecosystem Health forum in 2003. These events are important for stimulating interest of donors which is important for encouraging future investment in the approach.

It is very important to sensitise other donors to the [Ecohealth] approach, because if we have not done so by the end of 2010 - which is the next CFP - we will have failed. Ecohealth will not be here forever at IDRC and if there is nobody to take the lead, then the sustainability of the whole idea will not be strong.

7 Further Questions

Some interviews revealed concerns with respect to tensions and tradeoffs with regards to IDRC's abilities to support the capacity development of its partners. This section highlights some of these and offers them as questions that could be investigated in subsequent stages of the strategic evaluation.

7.1 How can programs ensure CD continues as PO responsibilities expand?

Program officers expressed concerns about capacity development as their responsibilities expand. In part, expanding responsibilities is attributed to the expanding scope of concerns being addressed within IDRC programs, which has meant that project involve many more kinds of actors and demand a wider range of activities. The other aspect of expanding responsibilities is attributed to numbers and size of projects that program officers are responsible for, which in IDRC's hands-on approach to program rapidly multiplies work.

One program staff observed that expansion in IDRC's programming scope of programming was the right approach from the point of view of making research relevant to policy and practice, it has resulted in increasing demands on program staff. David Glover saw these increasing pressures as a threat to IDRC's ability to provide hands-on research support and IDRC's abilities to contribute significantly to their capacities. Glover described that as pressures mount for program officers to handle larger program budgets, there may increasingly be a need for programs to bring in intermediaries to handle some of the support.

I guess my concern is, in general, that people have so many large projects, so much money to spend and they're at such arm's length from the researchers themselves, that they can't reasonably do all of this. And I think its probably necessary to develop some intermediaries between the project officer and the researchers that could do some of this mentoring and checking and being available for researchers for answering questions. Checking interim reports and checking final reports, and all the other kinds of things I talked about, I think they need to be done. I don't think IDRC people have much time to do very much of that. And so, probably some mechanisms need to be built into the projects to provide some of that hands-on support to some of the researchers. We've found that it makes a huge difference, and I think it would also make a difference in other types of projects.

7.2 How do programs sustain CD through programming changes?

The Project Leader Tracer Study found that, from the perspective of partners, that programming changes were disruptive to capacity development (Salewicz and Dwivedi 1996). In interviews conducted for this study, staff described that changes to programming make it difficult to build on accomplishments that have been made in the past. Program officers that work in programs that have existed since 1997 expressed how valuable time has been in allowing activities and understandings with partners to mature. They described that a degree of exploration and experimentation is required early on in programming to learn about how to proceed. Time also permits programming to gain increasing coherence as connections between activities are made and synergies are achieved.

We've been lucky enough to have seven years, but our program is already adapting to something different now. And I understand the reasons for adaptation and evolution, but I think we need something to make sure there are some mechanisms that continue supporting work that is going in the right direction. That's something I think IDRC really should keep in mind.

7.3 How can IDRC most effectively contribute to strengthening weak institutions?

Section 5.5 of this report described views of staff from both Programs and Resources Branches about the support that's provided to struggling institutions. It also raised questions about the adequacy of the kinds of support that IDRC provides to address fundamental challenges that many of them face. For the strategic evaluation, this raises questions about what other sorts of support are possible. Given the high costs, institution building may not be a feasible for IDRC, but are there other approaches that could be used? Is training the extent of support that can be offered to institutions, or is there scope to make longer-term investments and more in-depth engagement with institutions?

Another concern that arose had to do with the possibility of IDRC drifting away from working with weaker organisations in favour of stronger ones. This is not the result of conscious choices on the part of program staff, but is the result of incentives that are arising in the through the combined influence of increasing program budgets and increasing interest within IDRC for managing administrative risk.

I am a bit concerned about some the trends that are being encouraged in terms of engagement with larger organisations that will help us to get more money out of the door quicker, and that will reduce transaction costs. Engaging with larger organisations frankly probably means engaging with pretty competent organisations, and that closes the opportunities for realising the mandate of strengthening research capacity in the South, because we'll just move away from those smaller organisations because they do demand more time.

We had at our all staff last week and the admin people came to speak to us, and the message was simple: 'You have to spend and spend well and get your financial reports in on time'. Essentially they were telling us to work with institutions that are established and that are institutions that IDRC can, in brackets, 'trust'.

7.4 Are there other modalities of support that IDRC could consider?

Another question concerns approaches available to IDRC to provide longer term, more complete support. Interviews and documents suggest that capacity development is understood within IDRC as an on-going process, but as Deborah Eade points out, the administrative requirements of project-based support may be at odds with this. She points out that many organisations that provide project-based support find a compromise by using project funds to facilitate partners' entry into long term alliances:

If capacity building is a process of adaptation to change and of internal re-affirmation that gives an organisation both the resources to deal with challenges as they arise, and the will to continue acting, it is questionable whether this is truly compatible with a conventional project-funded approach. The emphasis is much more likely to be to assist the counterpart to become an autonomous actor within in an alliance of actors. Criteria to judge the success of capacity development will therefor be developed jointly, and evolve over time (Eade 1997:34-35).

This report discusses how staff have come up with creative ways they use project support to foster the development of such alliances. The upcoming strategic evaluation presents an opportunity to look into specific strategies in more depth to see the extent to which they are able to meet partners needs, and to raise questions about what other, perhaps more comprehensive modes of support might also be of assistance.

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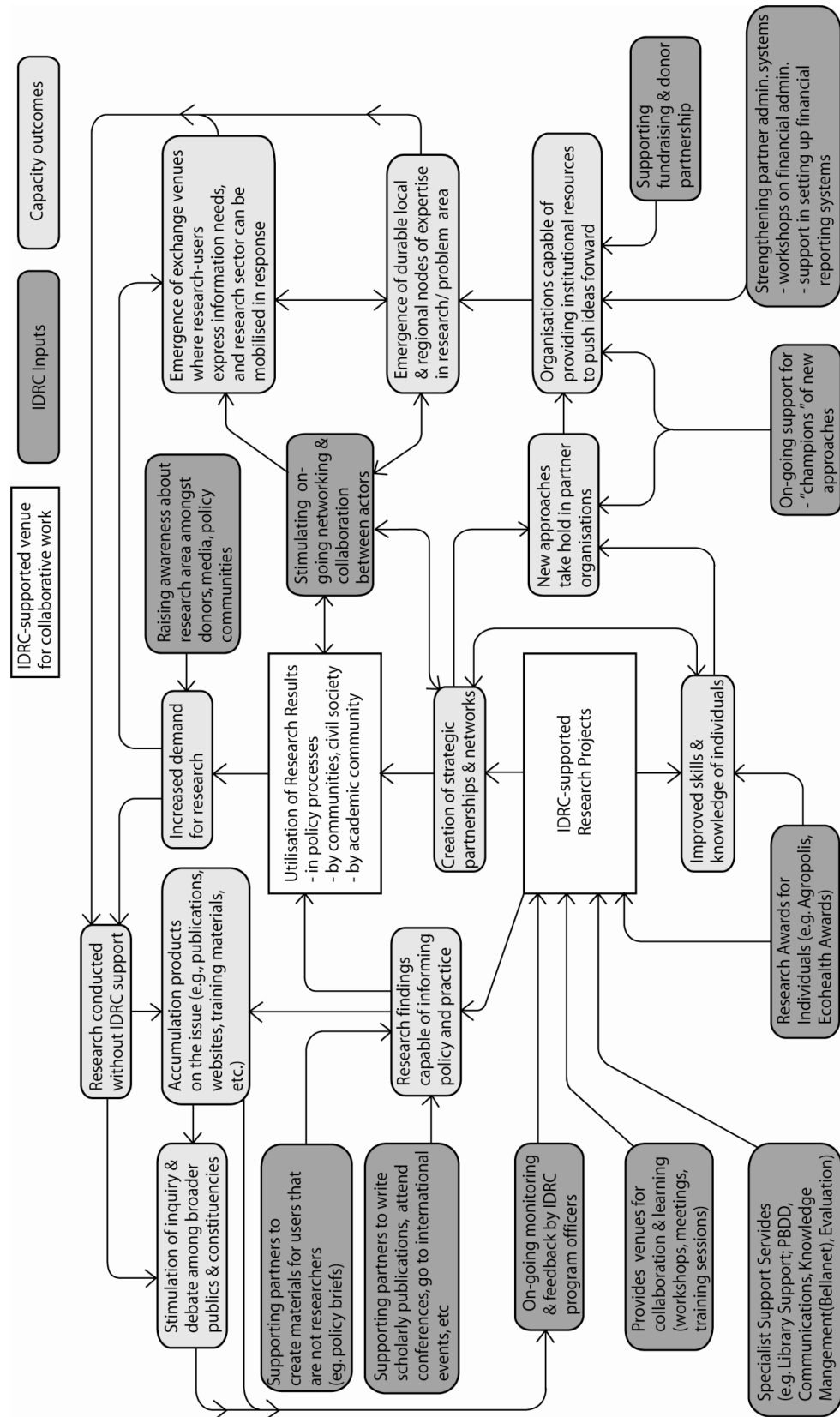
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Appendix 1: Theory of Change

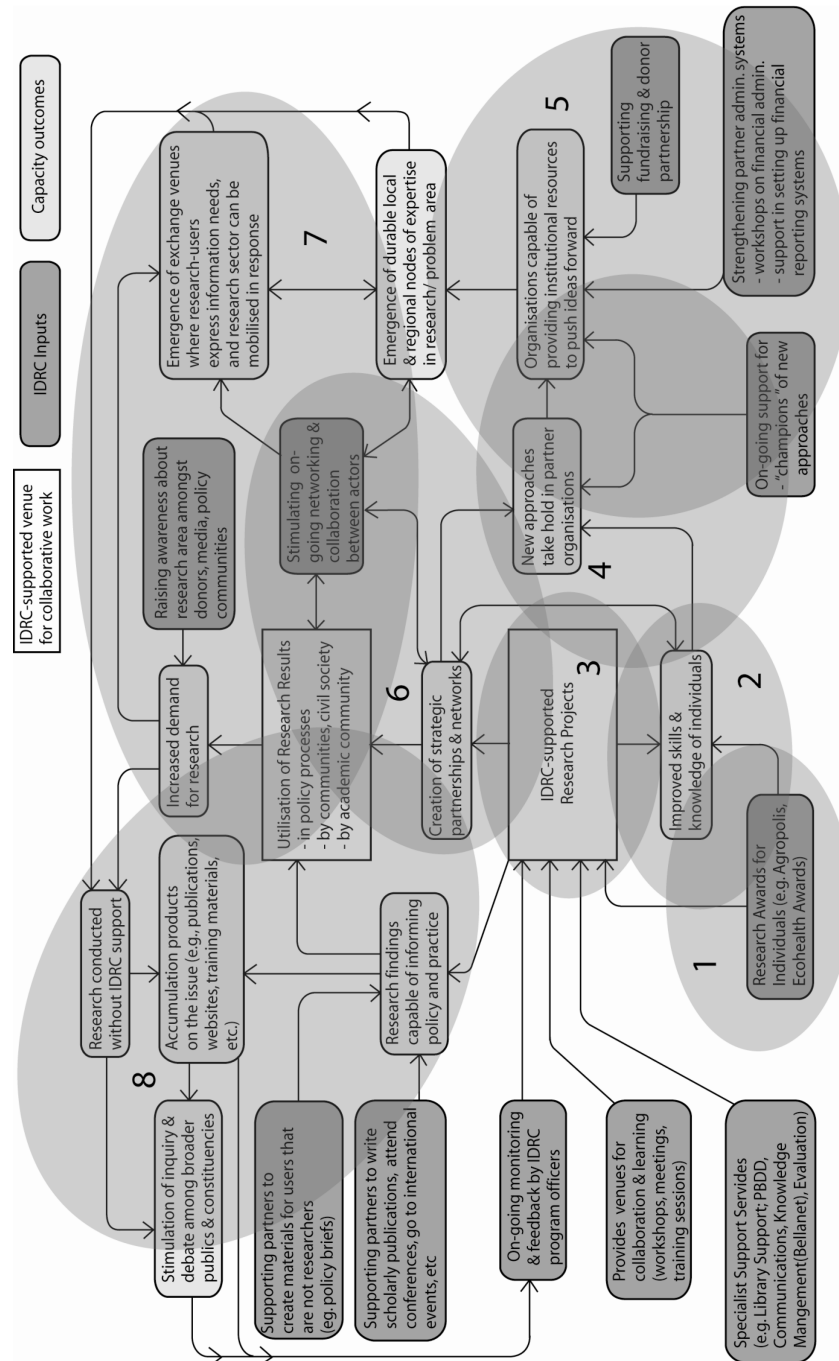
Theory of Change: IDRC Support for Capacity Development of Research Systems



Appendix 2: Approaches Mapped onto the Theory of Change

IDRC Support for Capacity Development of Research Systems

- Themes
1. Facilitating the development of new researchers
 2. Learning-by-doing
 3. Supporting process results
 4. Institutionalisation of new approaches
 5. Strengthening organisations
 6. Working collaboratively through strategic partnerships and networks
 7. Influencing incentives for doing research
 8. Encouraging emergence of support features in the research environment



Appendix 3: Schedule of Interviews

Name	Branch/ PA	Unit	Location	Date	
Kristina Taboulchanas	PPB: ENRM	CFP	Ottawa	9 August	
Ronnie Vernooy	PPB: ENRM	SUB, CBNRM	Ottawa	11 August	
Liz Fajber	PPB: ENRM	SUB, CBNRM	New Delhi, India	17 August	
Steve Song	PPB: ICT4D	Acacia, CA	Ottawa	20 August	
Laurent Elder	PPB: ICT4D	Acacia, CA	Ottawa	20 August	
Luis Barnola	PPB: ICT4D	Acacia, CA	Ottawa	25 August	
David Glover	PPB: SEE	EEPSEA	Singapore	2 November	
Lee Kirkham, Regional Controller	Resources Branch	N/A	Nairobi, Kenya	2 November	
Jean-Michel Labatut	PPB: SEE & ENRM	GEH, EcoHealth	Ottawa, Canada	3 November	
Laurent Elder, PO	PPB: ICT4D	Acacia, CA	Ottawa, Canada	4 November	
Allison Hewlitt, PO	PPB: ICT4D	Bellanet	Ottawa, Canada	5 November	
Liz Fajber, PO	PPB: ENRM	SUB, CBNRM	New Delhi, India	8 November	
Kristina Taboulchanas, PO	PPB: ENRM	CFP	Ottawa, Canada	8 November	
Pamela Golah	PPB: PPB	Gender	Ottawa	9 November	
Sachiko Okuda	Resources Branch	N/A	Ottawa	9 November	
Gerd Schonwalder	PPB: SEE	PBR, TEC	Ottawa	9 November	
Rita Bowry	PPB	SID	Ottawa	9 November	
Claude Briand	Resources Branch	N/A	Dakar, Senegal	10 November	
Andres Rius	PPB: SEE	TEC	Montevideo	10 November	
Susan Joekes	PPB: SEE	TEC	Paris	10 November	

Appendix 4: Interview Guide

PREAMBLE:

- Thanks for taking the time for this call.
- I am working for IDRC's Evaluation Unit, and working on a study that is part of a large study into IDRC's work on capacity development.
- I am calling with regards to your work in [program name], and I'd like to ask you some questions about the ways you support Capacity Development in your work.
- I will try not to keep you longer than an hour. I will keep track of time as we go – and if you need to pause or break off or anything – let me know and I can call you back.

Background:

So first off – a little background on what we are doing:

As you may know, IDRC's Evaluation Unit has begun a Strategic Evaluation on capacity development. The purpose is – like other strategic evaluations – to gather information about cross-cutting issues that the Centre is dealing with, and to improve IDRC's work. But we also need to do this for the Corporate Assessment Framework, in order to figure out how we are going to assess IDRC's performance in developing capacity.

This Study:

The reason I am calling you is that I am gathering information about how IDRC understands capacity development in order to try to situate IDRC's work within the broader development literature.

So the first part of my study is to gather information about IDRC:
(Doing that through these interviews as well as looking at some of the corporate documents).

There are 3 dimensions I am looking for:

1. At IDRC, what do we mean by “capacity development”?
2. What approaches does IDRC use to support the development of Southern country partners?
3. How do we think that capacity development occurs through our work? – or how does capacity development actually happen?

The second part will be to relate that to the broader field of thinking – so looking at development literature and some of the grey literature.

Does that make sense – Do you have any questions about what this is about?

PLAN FOR THIS INTERVIEW:

I have a list of about **10 questions** that I want to ask you

Although there are 10 questions – I expect to ask you additional questions about the things that you have said in order to unpack some of the ideas a little further.

But before we get to the interview, I have 2 things to ask you:

1. I will be taking notes as you talk, but I am wondering if it would be okay if I **record** our conversation?

The purpose is really for me – so that I have a very accurate primary record of what we spoke about that I can go back to.

Yes/ No

2. When I write the report for the Evaluation Unit, I may like to include quotations from program staff. If it comes up, would it be okay if I **quoted you in the report**?

Of course, before we made any such reports public, we would show it to you first, to get your approval of the way its been presented

Yes/ No

I will ask you again at the end of the interview, and ask if there are any parts that you would prefer I did not quote.

QUESTIONS

Whose Capacities?

1. In your work, are there specific groups whose capacities you are particularly interested in developing? Who are these? (To do what?)

What Kinds of Capacity?

2. What sorts of things do you find yourself trying to help your partners do better or differently?
⇒ Provide examples if helpful
3. In your work with partners, projects have objectives and deliverables and that sort of thing, are there any kinds of capacity constraints that you tend encounter, and find yourself having to overcome? What are some of these?
⇒ What are some of the ways that you try to overcome those constraints?

OPTIONAL

4. How would you characterise the overarching intent of your program, as it relates to developing capacity in the South?

Approaches to capacity development

5. When you design your projects, are there [strategies] specific activities that you build in from the outset - aimed at helping develop partners' capacities? What are some of these activities or components?
⇒ (probe: Are approaches within projects, or is the project itself the approach?)
6. Of the approaches that you have mentioned, would you highlight any as particularly effective? What are these?

III. How Capacity Development Occurs

7. Of these approaches, what is it about them that you think makes them successful? Why do they work?
8. In general, what do you think needs to be considered in projects in order to successfully support capacity development?

IV. IDRC's Role in Capacity Development

9. What recommendations would you give to IDRC that would make it easier for you – in your work - to more effectively contribute to supporting the capacity development of your partners?

Closing

That's all my questions

Thinking about what we talked about, is there anything you have said that you would prefer that I did not quote?

I am going to be looking over what we talked about in relation to other interviews as well, and I may come up with questions, or they may be some points that I'd like some clarification about. If so, would it be okay if I emailed you or telephoned you again to ask some follow-up questions?

Thanks again for your time. It's been very helpful.