

International Development Research Centre

participated in a project by the Colombian Agricultural Institute in Colombia's mountainous Cauca region. New high-yielding varieties of corn were tested with various planting and pest-control methods and new fertilizers. Although researchers designed a technology that could increase farmers' incomes by four times, the higher corn yields could be achieved only through a sevenfold increase in the cost of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. Only 27 of the district's 600 families participated in the scheme in 1974, and by 1977 the number dropped to 25. The one million dollar project was a failure. Rosemary Galli, writing in *Latin American Perspectives*, says: "The failure of the strategy was directly attributable to a lack of communication with peasants about their real needs and the bureaucratic alienating nature of the plan."

On the other hand, the Centre has sometimes been in such a hurry to move on to new projects that the published results of successfully completed research have gathered dust on the shelf. IDRC-sponsored research at Ontario's University of Waterloo produced an inexpensive village hand-pump made of plastic pipe and wood. It proved to be light, rugged and easy to repair during field tests in Malawi in 1977. But the hand-pump research languished on the shelf until the World Bank recently stumbled across it and included it in a multimillion-dollar campaign for the UN International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade. In an effort to correct this problem, the Centre has now begun to sponsor conferences to publicize research results and bring together interested Third World governments and donor agencies, including CIDA.

Head has also appointed a former chairman of the Group of 77 in the UN General Assembly, retired Jamaican

diplomat Donald Mills, to ask Third World leaders how the Centre can become more flexible and responsive to their needs.

Sad conclusion

Head is a careful administrator and he is not about to let the IDRC embark on any dramatic new research adventures. His personal goal as IDRC President is to prove to the government and the Canadian public that their money is well spent. "I'm anxious that the Centre prove itself as effective in the long run in the support of developing country research as it has proved itself innovative in the short run," he says.

As one of the original architects of a Canadian foreign policy that attaches great significance to North-South relations, Head can take much of the credit for restoring the IDRC to government favor after the demoralizing financial squeeze of the late '70s. This year's \$59.2 million parliamentary grant reflects a twenty-five percent increase, and the government has accepted a recommendation from the Parliamentary Task Force on North-South Relations to give priority to further funding increases for the Centre. Yet he also has allowed the government to impose its priorities on the Centre and has presided over the Centre's transformation from a loose association of professionals to an entrenched bureaucracy that stifles idealism and innovation.

The IDRC set out to show the development establishment that a government-funded development organization could be creative and flexible. Like so many of yesterday's flower children, it has ended up by embracing the very orthodoxy it once scorned. □

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