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## IDRC responds to research needs of developing countries

*"In 1980, the raison d'être of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) remains as pressing and the demand for its activities as high as at the time of its birth," writes IDRC President Ivan Head in the centre's 1980 annual report, entitled Searching. "Research continues to be regarded increasingly by both North and South as an absolutely essential element in the economic and social processes," he says. Excerpts from the report, which looks back at the centre's first decade, 1970-80, follow:*

The International Development Research Centre is an institution quite unlike any other. Both in terms of its role as a Canadian quasi-governmental organization, and in the international context, it has never quite conformed to any of the standard definitions.

The centre is, in the words of its first chairman, the late Lester B. Pearson, "something that is unique in international organizations". This uniqueness is no accident, the centre was designed to be different.

Recognizing the sensitivity and the essentially high-risk nature of development research, the architects of the IDRC Act created a flexible organization — a government-funded public corporation that has no parallel in Canada. What distinguishes it most is its board of governors. Composed of 11 Canadians and ten members from other countries (six of whom are usually from developing countries), this board approves all major projects and sets the centre's policy directions.

### Different approach

At the international level what distinguishes the centre from other government or non-government development agencies is its approach. Since its inception the centre has operated on the assumption that the best people to decide what the developing countries really need are the people of those countries, and that research aimed at meeting those needs is best carried out by scientists of the developing world. Ten years ago it was a fairly revolutionary approach. Even today it is still unusual.

At their first meeting in October 1970, the board of governors agreed that

the primary "target group" of IDRC-supported research should be the rural poor, especially in the semi-arid tropics, where the rural people are at greatest risk, and in greatest need. Throughout the centre's first decade these two guidelines have remained constant.

The centre's project grants are administered by four program divisions: agriculture, food and nutrition sciences, health sciences, information sciences, and social sciences....

### New program begins

Over the years there have been some changes in the structure and responsibilities of the program divisions, but the basic structure has remained unchanged during the centre's first decade. During 1980 the first steps were taken to establish a new program.

This move is part of the centre's response to a commitment made by the Canadian delegation to the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD) in Vienna in 1979. Canada promised funds for a program to enable the developing nations to share in Canadian research and development expertise. IDRC was asked to undertake this new program by the Canadian government, an invitation accepted by the board of governors "on the clear understanding that the independence of the centre not be weakened".

Canada's pledge at UNCSTD was made in response to a proposal by developing countries that a portion of the domestic research and development capacity of developed countries be applied to the solution of developing country problems, such application to be undertaken as far as possible through co-operative arrange-



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Canadians are celebrating Canada's one-hundred-and-fourteenth birthday, July 1.

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