

A helping hand in the Americas:

Canadian assistance makes a

difference

For many years, Canada has helped countries in the Americas with their development needs. The primary channels for this assistance are the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

CIDA is the main agency through which Canada's assistance flows to developing countries. In 1998-99, CIDA's assistance totalled \$1.81 billion. Of that amount, \$303.3 million went to programs in Latin America and the Caribbean. CIDA's programs cover four key areas: basic education; health and nutrition; HIV/AIDS; and child protection. In each area, there is a strong focus on gender equality.

IDRC was founded in 1970 to help Third World countries build solid platforms of knowledge for their development plans, so that they can find practical solutions to their problems. To fulfil this mandate, IDRC gives support for research. Since 1971, the Centre has provided a total of \$368.3 million to 2078 research projects in the Americas. In 1998-99, some 20.2 percent of the support given by IDRC went to this region, compared with 39.6 percent to Africa and 14.9 percent to Asia.

IDRC has recently published a plan mapping out world needs and its assistance priorities over the next five years. According to the plan, IDRC-supported research will focus on the building of social and economic equity, management of environment and natural resources, and the use of information and communications technologies in development. The Centre also plans to increase its support for research on building peace and managing conflict.

Following are a few of the many examples of Canadian assistance.

Bolivia and Nicaragua: building negotiating skills

Will the launch of mining operations in a remote community be a blessing or a curse? It depends, in large part, on the conditions that the community negotiates up front. Enter CoDevelopment Canada (CoDev), a Vancouver-based NGO that specializes in helping small communities negotiate. With IDRC funding, CoDev answered a request for assistance from several Latin American mining communities and, in consultation with NGOs in the region, it developed a decision-making framework for community leaders. CoDev is also helping Indigenous communities in Nicaragua and Bolivia acquire the skills they need to negotiate on equal terms, on issues ranging from environmental impacts to social and economic benefits.

Guatemala: postwar rebuilding

IDRC and other donors funded the establishment of the War-Torn Society Project (WSP), under which UN and other organizations help devastated countries rebuild. In Guatemala, days after the government and guerillas made peace, WSP launched a rebuilding program. Among the goals: modernizing and strengthening state institutions, supporting social and economic development, enhancing public safety, and improving administration of the justice system.

Peru: human rights monitoring

With CIDA funding, Peru has established a national ombudsman's office to serve as a human rights watchdog. The office upholds the rights of prison inmates: it monitors their treatment, provides legal support and applies for pardons for people serving time for crimes they did not commit (so far, over 460 prisoners have won release). In response to growing demand, CIDA has announced that it will provide longer-term funding for the ombudsman's office.



photos: CIDA