

International Development Research Centre Celebrates Fifteen

Fifteen Years of Research Cooperation

This year, the International Development Research Centre celebrates its 15th anniversary. IDRC's very existence is testimony to the fact that, in 1970, Canadians recognized that development solutions must come from the peoples they are meant to serve. Every year since, Canada has confirmed its commitment to this concept by devoting millions of dollars to IDRC's projects worldwide. Since 1970, IDRC has contributed \$75 million to support 568 projects in Southeast Asia alone.

Ground-level research

IDRC is the antithesis of a large aid agency in that its projects are small. Yet, as many Southeast Asians know, IDRC's size belies its development impact. Its role is not to conduct research but to support the efforts of Third-World researchers financially and otherwise.

The first IDRC projects in Southeast Asia revealed its intent and direction. In fact, the first Southeast Asian project was an ambitious regional undertaking that examined the very roots of the Green Revolution. Working under the auspices of IRRI — the International Rice Research Institute — project researchers analysed how the "revolution" was affecting Asian rice farmers. They found that, in some cases, tenant and peasant farmers weren't benefiting from new rice varieties as much as well-to-do farmers.

From such beginnings, it was clear to IDRC project staff and researchers that development research must proceed at ground level to be truly successful. For example, developing a new cereal variety is only part of the job. Researchers need to work on the farm from the start to ensure that results are practical and profitable. In this way, the farmers become colleagues and advisers in the research and technology-transfer process.

Producing answers

Development from the people's perspective is a hallmark of IDRC projects. In Southeast Asia, that means being sensitive to needs as various as better bamboo and rattan, improved crop handling and storage, clean water supplies, and increased farm productivity.

Most people don't think about fish when they think about farming, but fish farming or aquaculture is booming in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asians enjoy fish and seafood, which account for about 60 per cent of protein consumption in coastal areas. Supply is not assured, however. At the present rate of growth, the demand for fish could surpass the production capacity of the world's oceans and lakes well before the end of the century.

Though aquaculture provides less than a tenth of the yield from capture fisheries, the potential is enormous: The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that Indonesia, for example, has six million hectares of coastal wetlands that could be converted to fish farming.

Practised intensively, aquaculture can produce 25 tonnes of fish annually per hectare. In reality, yields may be only six tonnes per hectare. Fish are often reluctant to breed in captivity. Their diet must be accurately monitored and they must be protected from the stresses of captivity and overcrowding. With IDRC support, the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center or SEAFDEC is producing impressive results to resolve these problems. Its success in encouraging milkfish or bangus to spawn in captivity using hormone therapy has captured newspaper headlines since 1977. Given a dependable supply of cultured "seed" stock from such sources, the way is clear for higher yields from Southeast Asian fish farms.

Host to world development

The wisdom of supporting developing-country researchers is borne out when these people and institutions begin to assist other researchers and institutions in the Third World. IDRC enthusiastically supports the establishment of such research networks; they are a clear sign that ground-level funding strengthens research capabilities.

The IDRC-supported Asian network of handicrafts researchers established in 1983 is a case in point. Handicraft workers and artists are part of an almost invisible economy. After gathering research in seven Asian countries, the network sponsored the International Workshop on Handicrafts and Economic Development in November 1985 under the auspices of IDRC's regional office in Singapore.

Truly international in that it included



"In all its research endeavours, IDRC emphasises self-sufficiency."