IDRC’s first grant for research in Jordan, in 1976, improved reforestation methods on severely eroded and biologically degraded land. More recently, IDRC-supported researchers in the country have improved plant-breeding techniques and developed a new water conservation technology.

Support for research also focuses on the challenges and opportunities of new technologies — from the threat of “biopirates” who would patent traditional genetic resources to the promise of information and communication technologies in education and governance.

**New varieties build food security**

Formal plant breeding programs often fail to consider the needs of impoverished farmers who cannot afford fertilizers or sophisticated irrigation systems. In Jordan and Syria, researchers worked with local farmers to develop barley and wheat varieties that fit their needs. Their efforts led to new plant varieties that can grow better under the region’s arid conditions and increase food security. Jordan’s National Centre for Agricultural Research and Transfer of Technology has since adopted the participatory approach to plant breeding for its programs.

**Saving water, saving money**

According to the World Health Organization, people need at least 1,000 cubic metres of water each year to maintain their health. In Jordan, however, people can access, on average, only one-fifth of this amount. With support from IDRC, the Inter-Islamic Network on Water Resources Development and Management built affordable household systems to treat greywater — wastewater collected from laundry tubs, sinks, and showers. By irrigating their gardens with greywater, families on the outskirts of Tafila who tested the system were able to conserve water, produce more food, and save money.

The success of this simple and inexpensive system captured the attention of national and international policymakers. The Government of Jordan has encouraged more pilot tests and revised national building codes: future construction will separate greywater from toilet water.

Research is now targeting larger water consumers in Jordan, including university dormitories. Through the Royal Scientific Society, Jordan is also participating in IDRC-supported research led by the World Health Organization to assess health protection measures when using untreated greywater.
Research finds ways for health information to reach remote areas.

Some current activities

In a region fraught with political, economic, and environmental challenges, IDRC-supported researchers in Jordan are working with local communities, policymakers, and regional counterparts on issues such as water conservation, agricultural development, tribal politics, and industrial productivity.

Respect for collaborative plant breeding

Funding: $337,200
Duration: 2007–2010
Grantee: International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, Syria

Impoverished farmers are used to battling the elements to tease a living from the soil. But even as they work together cooperatively to improve their crops, they face a new threat. Existing laws protect new varieties developed by individual farmers and companies, but not those that result from collaborative plant breeding efforts. Research teams in China, Jordan, Nepal, and Peru are working with legal experts to develop much-needed policies, practices, and laws to govern fair access to, and benefits from, collective genetic resources and traditional knowledge.

Tribes and politics

Funding: $319,000
Donor: Middle East Good Governance Fund, supported by IDRC and the Canadian International Development Agency, in cooperation with Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
Duration: 2007–2009
Grantee: Centre for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan

In many Middle Eastern countries, politicians and rulers are keen to win over tribal leaders who wield considerable influence among the people. Indeed, some political parties emerging in Jordan are mere extensions of existing tribes. As researchers explore how tribalism influences the political system in Jordan, they are paying particular attention to how tribes influence citizens' participation in government decision-making, effective governance, and the involvement of women in the policy arena.

Policies for productive manufacturing

Funding: $343,240
Duration: 2006–2009
Grantee: Centre for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan

In a study of firm turnover in the manufacturing sector, Jordanian researchers are finding that their government needs to enforce its competition policy more effectively to enhance productivity. The research involving Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia seeks to understand why the removal of excessive regulations and trade barriers in the 1980s did not generate much new competition or significantly enhance productivity.

Health information in rural areas

Funding: $72,500
Duration: 2009–2011
Grantee: Royal Scientific Society, Jordan

With IDRC support, researchers are exploring how information and communication technologies (ICTs) can support social and economic development in the Middle East and North Africa. A small-grants program is funding initial research in seven countries to make the case for ICTs in education, job-skills training, local economic development, and women's participation in society. In Jordan, a pilot system using mobile phones allows young mothers in rural areas to register their children and receive appropriate childhood-health information.