IDRC has supported research in Guatemala since 1973. Early work targeted farming efficiency, access to water, sanitation, and health care. One study found, for example, that basic health education could help avert diarrhea epidemics in children under age five. Researchers also developed a low-cost coffee drying machine powered by coffee waste instead of diesel.

In 1996, IDRC-funded peace and reconciliation initiatives contributed to the Guatemalan peace accords, which ended 36 years of civil war. Since prejudice against indigenous people was a root cause of the war, the Centre continues to support initiatives like the National Campaign for Inter-ethnic Dialogue, a public education campaign that reached about 120,000 Guatemalans between 2004 and 2006.

**Fighting Chagas disease**

Chagas disease, transmitted by insects, affects between 10 and 15 million people in Latin America — a greater burden of illness than all other tropical diseases combined. Left untreated, the disease produces irreversible organ damage and even death. Insecticide spraying, the traditional control strategy, must be repeated several times per year to be effective.

In 2004, IDRC-funded researchers at the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala pioneered an “ecohealth” approach to Chagas prevention that focused on the environment and its link to human health. The researchers garnered community support for improved hygiene and housekeeping practices — encouraging people to cover their mud walls with plaster, for example, to eliminate a common insect hideout. The results were dramatic: the average intervention eliminated infected insects for five years. Policymakers in Guatemala and six other Latin American countries have committed to use this approach.

**Digital training in K’iche’**

Throughout Latin America there is a growing demand for computer and Internet training in rural indigenous communities. IDRC and other donors financed Ajb’atz’ Enlace Quiche Association, a Guatemalan community association, to develop a training program that would help Guatemalans cross the digital divide.

Ajb’atz’ generated a 571-term vocabulary describing information and communication technologies in K’iche’, a Mayan language. The association then designed six computer training courses, sharing its material with other community development groups.
Some current activities

IDRC continues to support ecohealth research in Guatemala. Researchers are also studying tobacco control, youth violence, the delivery of public goods and services, and healthcare inequality.

- **Fighting chronic disease**
  - Funding: $207,900
  - Duration: 2009–2013
  - Grantee: Fundación Aldo Castañeda, Guatemala

  Chronic diseases — such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease — account for between 35 and 65% of mortality in Guatemala. IDRC is recruiting research fellows to study policy issues related to chronic disease, starting with tobacco control, and to translate this knowledge into action.

- **For fairer taxes and benefits**
  - Guatemala: $347,400
  - Duration: 2010–2011
  - Grantee: Universidad Rafael Landívar, Guatemala

  Since the 1980s, Latin American governments have cut deficits, steadied fiscal policy, and increased public spending. Yet the large gap between rich and poor remains. Together with the United Nations Development Programme, Guatemalan researchers are coordinating studies on tax and benefit plans in Guatemala, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay. Their efforts are providing policymakers with tools that predict the winners and losers of potential tax and social policy reforms.

- **Confronting youth violence and crime**
  - Funding: $399,900
  - Duration: 2009–2011
  - Grantee: Instituto de Estudios Comparados en Ciencias Penales de Guatemala

  Central American countries report some of the highest homicide rates in the world as well as significant organized crime and transnational gang activity. Researchers are mapping the incidence of crime in Guatemala and five other countries in the region, and will propose public policies that discourage youth violence.

  The Instituto’s growing credibility was illustrated by the December 2010 appointment of its director, Claudia Paz y Paz Bailey, as Guatemala’s Public Prosecutor.

- **Extending the ecosystem approach to human health**
  - Funding: $1,458,560 (Regional)
  - Duration: 2009–2012
  - Grantees: Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada, and Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica

  The new field of ecohealth investigates how changes in ecosystems are related to human health. This initiative brings together scientists and other professionals to strengthen ecohealth concepts in academic and professional training programs across Latin America. In Guatemala, one university professor is using the approach in her study of leptospirosis, a potentially deadly bacterial infection caused by food contamination.

**Bolstering think tanks**

IDRC is strengthening the capacity of the Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales. Core funding of $1.9 million from the Think Tank Initiative allows this independent policy research institute to focus on economics, political science, and legal studies and to improve communication with policymakers.

The Think Tank Initiative is supported by IDRC, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the UK Department for International Development, and the Netherlands Directorate-General for International Cooperation.

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