

DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

DEMOCRACY BRINGS DEVELOPMENT

IDRC's mission is to support developing-country scientists in conducting applied, community-based research on practical problems. Although these efforts may appear to be value-neutral, in fact, democratic principles inform every aspect of IDRC's work.

This is because the standards and ideals that drive scientific research are also core elements in the struggle for freedom. For example, unfettered enquiry and debate — the essence of the scientific method — are the foundations of any healthy democracy.

At the same time, some of the applied, "hard" research that IDRC supports can strengthen democratic values. Studies on natural resource management, for example, might help citizens claim their rights while finding ways to resolve bitter territorial conflicts. High-tech innovations can make it easier for rural people to cast ballots or for government watchdogs to control corruption.

But IDRC also acts directly in the service of good governance. The Centre sponsors research that confronts, head-on, issues of equality, peace, conflict, and human rights. This brochure describes a small sample of these projects.

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STRENGTHENING POLITICAL PARTIES

In healthy democracies, citizens organize themselves in political parties in order to play a role in civic life. In the Middle East and North Africa, however, such institutions have yet to become effective agents of change. Most parties remain hostage to state control, ideological constraints, militarization, and undemocratic structures. Against this enduring backdrop, meanwhile, one thing has changed: during the past decade Islamist parties have become the most dynamic and vocal in the region. This complex situation calls for closer examination.

The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, funded by IDRC, has launched a review of the role political parties play in the Middle East. The study examines how parties relate to the state, how they function as conduits between the government and the people, and how their internal structures evolve. It focuses on six countries where governments have moved toward democracy or have opened up to political parties: Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, and Yemen.

With a view to fostering reform, the research aims to learn about the role political parties play during demo-



Ricardo Funari / BrazilPhotos.com

YOUNG BRAZILIANS GET INVOLVED

For democracy to endure and flourish, a nation's youth must take part in public life as informed and active citizens. Thanks to IDRC support, a pioneering approach to doing opinion research has helped Brazil's government improve conditions for the country's young people and guide them toward inclusion and participation. *(continues)*

cratic transition or in post-conflict situations. The project explores, for example, issues such as party formation, internal constitutions, and legal frameworks. As it proceeds, the initiative helps build a body of experts in political party development.

The policy recommendations will be drafted by researchers and academics from each of the six countries, and will be directed toward national and regional decision-makers to help advance the revitalization of political parties in the Arab world.

www.lcps-lebanon.org

Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is one of the world's leading institutions in the generation and application of new knowledge to meet the challenges of international development. For nearly 40 years, IDRC has worked in close collaboration with researchers from the developing world in their search for the means to build healthier, more equitable, and more prosperous societies.

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Prompted by reports of apathy and alienation, NGOs Ibase and Pólis decided simply to ask Brazil's youth how they felt about issues like employment, education, leisure, and personal security.

Researchers interviewed thousands of young people living in urban areas, and emerged with a useful statistical snapshot of their views. But then the investigators took their inquiry a step further. Reasoning that opinions and values are usually shaped by interaction, they invited smaller numbers of youth, from varied socio-economic backgrounds, to meet in "dialogue groups." The goal was to provoke collective reflection, the exchange of opinions, and debate, leading to a measure of consensus.

This innovative approach found that, contrary to the rumours of alienation, young Brazilians are deeply concerned about public issues, especially crime and violence. Furthermore, once each person chooses his or her most appropriate path toward involvement — whether it be conventional political activism, individual volunteerism, or membership in youth organizations — young people are ready and willing to take action and to claim their rights.

In Brazil, these findings have been widely publicized and have informed policy-making for youth at all government levels. Meanwhile, Ibase, Pólis, and local partners have been working with IDRC on similar youth studies in five other Latin American countries.

www.ibase.br www.polis.org.br

TRANSPARENCY FOR HEALTH

If open competition can be considered a form of "economic democracy," then practices like bribery and price-fixing should be regarded as affronts to good governance. When corruption diverts scarce assets from public to private hands, the community is disempowered. Bid rigging is as undemocratic as election rigging.

In Senegal, the country's medical system became overwhelmed by low-level graft; in fact, the sector grew so unreliable the health of the population suffered. Impelled by official concern, and funded by IDRC, the Senegalese branch of Transparency International, Forum Civil, conducted a three-year investigation — one of the first systematic field studies of corruption in health services ever carried out in Africa.

The researchers documented fraudulent surgeries, false invoices, and medical shortcuts that put people's lives at risk. They concluded that the country's health system was driven more by clandestine alliances and affinities than by clearly delimited roles and responsibilities. The system, in other words, lacked transparency.

The project's landmark report significantly influenced the dialogue for reform. With IDRC help, the findings were widely disseminated (including on DVD). They led to a flurry of media stories and a surge of political and civic activity.

One direct outcome is that hospitals have begun to change their procedures regarding the recruitment of staff and the punishment of inappropriate behaviour. Healthcare delivery has become more transparent, users are more aware of their rights, and the culture of corruption is being broken. Drawing on this success, similar research projects are being carried out in other public sectors in Senegal.

www.forumcivil.sn

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MINORITY WOMEN DEMAND THEIR RIGHTS

In many countries, women and girls are excluded from full citizenship on a customary basis, but even more so during inter-community disturbances. Ironically, such upheavals can sometimes empower disenfranchised females by creating opportunities for them to assume traditional male roles. With sound research, we can learn lessons from these grim episodes.

In 2002, in Gujarat, India, local communities clashed in riots that many argue were not spontaneous but were organized assaults on the Muslim population. During and after the violence, the citizenship rights of the Muslim minority were undermined; men and women, however, demonstrated very different patterns of reclaiming these entitlements.

The bravery displayed by many women in dangerous situations created such an atmosphere of trust within the community that they came to adopt leadership roles. Refusing to submit, these women challenged their exclusion by negotiating justice, compensation, and often, plain survival. In other words, they became agents of their own destiny and transformed their lives.

With the support of IDRC, and working with local partners, the NGO Yugantar has documented testimonies of the victim-to-agent transformation and has used this information to conduct an in-depth analysis of women's empowerment in post-conflict situations. In addition — perceiving justice and accountability to be social as well as judicial processes — the researchers have worked to strengthen the capacity of marginalized Muslim women to speak up and demand equal citizenship, especially in the context of violence.

SEE ALSO...

Some current IDRC books on democracy and development:

- ▶ *Globalization and Summit Reform: an Experiment in International Governance*, by Peter C. Heap, Springer/IDRC, 2008
- ▶ *E-Governance in Africa: from Theory to Action*, by Gianluca Misuraca, Africa World Press/IDRC, 2007
- ▶ *Gender Justice, Citizenship, and Development*, edited by Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay and Navsharan Singh, Zubaan/IDRC, 2007