

Informed policies

Informed decisions, strong societies

The value of the research IDRC has supported since 1970 is how it improves lives — by changing laws and attitudes, for instance, giving voice to the poor, increasing financial resources, making education more accessible. Sound policies are at the heart of that progress.

Information improves lives in the Philippines

Many communities in the Philippines now enjoy benefits made possible by accurate, current information about their living conditions: job training programs for youth; new water and sanitation facilities; small loans for family businesses; schools for teen drop-outs; daycare centres; foot-bridges to connect isolated villages to roads and markets; telemedicine programs; school food programs; subsidized health care.

These are just a few of the concrete measures taken to improve lives in thousands of villages, municipalities, and provinces in the Philippines. The goal: reduce poverty. The means: provide the most needed services to the neediest families.

Setting priorities

But how do you determine who is neediest? In more than 17,000 barangays throughout the country, a community-based poverty monitoring system (CBMS) provides the answers.

Designed in 1994 by researchers at De La Salle University, Manila, with IDRC support, the system makes it possible to accurately diagnose the extent of poverty in



Community involvement is key to the success of CBMS in reducing poverty.

communities and its causes, not just in terms of income, but of a number of factors that determine well-being — child and maternal mortality, for instance, access to water and sanitary facilities, and to education, adequate housing, and security.

Communities are key

The key to the system's success is the involvement of local communities in collecting and validating the household data — and holding government officials to account in how public funds are used to solve the problems identified.

With accurate up-to-date information, local governments have been able to get the most impact from their meagre resources. The information also helped them attract other donors to fund critical programs. The cost of gathering this invaluable information: 75 cents per household.

Local to national to global spread

From two pilot projects in 1998, the monitoring system has spread, thanks largely to the support of the Philippine government. In fact, the national 2004–2010 development plan called for the monitoring system to be carried out in each of the country's 42,000 barangays.

CBMS has now spread to 14 other countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. “This could herald a dramatic turnaround from traditional development planning and project formulation to a more evidence-based policy on social programs,” says CBMS network leader Celia Reyes.



MARK SURWAN

Access to new technology is one of the pillars of Mozambique's S&T policy.

Telecentres spur policy change in Mozambique

Imagine an entire country with only one Internet service provider and barely 100 users. That was Mozambique in the late 1990s. Now, you find a country that is committed to taking its place in the global information society.

The change began when Mozambique's government set out to establish a nationwide network of "telecentres" that provide public access to computers.

IDRC funded the first pilot centre in 1999, then the development of a network of centres, working through local grassroots organizations. Today the centres

not only provide computer services, they also operate community radios and have become multimedia centres.

The champion of telecentres, Venâncio Massingue, a long-time IDRC partner in the area of information and communication technology (ICT) and now Minister of Science and Technology, was one of the architects of Mozambique's ICT policy in 2000 — the first in Africa. Nationwide access to these technologies is one of the pillars of the government's science and technology policy.



RICARDO FUNARI / BRAZILPHOTOS.COM

Brazilian youth call for a new kind of politics in their country.

Brazil's youth enter the policy arena

"We don't believe in politicians, but we believe in politics. And we want a new kind of politics in Brazil...that involves us as partners in the process."

That was one of the key messages that researchers at Ibase — Brazil's Institute for Social and Economic Analysis — received from a pioneering IDRC-supported study of the country's young people. Researchers conducted some 8,000 interviews and assembled 40 focus groups of young people in a frank dialogue that put "soul" into their findings.

The result: real change, from something as simple as opening schools on weekends and holidays for young people to use for their own activities, to 200,000 government grants for university students to complete their studies. And real involvement: a National Conference on Youth led to the establishment of a National Council for Youth where young people sit down together with politicians and officials. It's all documented in a book, *Democracy, Citizenship and Youth*, edited by the coordinators of the study and published by IDRC.



DAVID ASTE

Uzbek migrant workers send hundreds of millions of dollars home to support their families.

Healthy competition boosts remittances in Uzbekistan

Families of migrant workers in Uzbekistan now have an estimated \$50 million more each year in their pockets — thanks to reduced fees charged on remittances from abroad. All it took was a little competition and a \$40,000 research grant from IDRC.

When Uzbekistan gained its independence in 1992, the country became a major exporter of labour. Soon an estimated half-million Uzbek migrant workers were sending home hundreds of millions of dollars in remittances to support their families.

Western Union, the first-comer into a new market for transfers, soon cornered

95% of the country's money transfer business, charging as much as 12% on each transaction.

The IDRC-supported study, carried out by the country's Antimonopoly Policy Improvement Centre, explored international money transfers and how best to provide a regulatory framework for the system. As a direct result of the research, the competition law was extended to financial services, new firms came in, and the charges on remittance transfers were greatly reduced.

About Canada's International Development Research Centre

IDRC supports research in developing countries to promote growth and development. IDRC also encourages sharing this knowledge with policymakers, other researchers, and communities around the world. The result is innovative, lasting local solutions that aim to bring choice and change to those who need it most.

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