

# IDRC in El Salvador

**I**DRC has supported 13 research initiatives in El Salvador in the past 30 years. Most have been undertaken since 1992, when a United Nations-brokered peace agreement ended decades of internal armed conflict and made research support feasible.

Viewed as a model for other post-conflict societies, El Salvador has demonstrated significant progress in national reconciliation and democracy building, though challenges remain. Several initiatives funded by IDRC have supported the peacebuilding efforts. For example, research teams in El Salvador and Guatemala joined forces to undertake a comparative analysis of the peace process in the two countries. A book based on this research offers valuable insights for other societies rebuilding in the aftermath of conflict.

Many communities in Latin America struggle with violence, insecurity, and conflict, which are barriers to development and acute concerns for municipal authorities. IDRC is supporting a regional effort, involving El Salvador, Ecuador, and Guatemala, that aims to equip local governments with decision-making tools to help defuse potential conflicts. The Toronto-based International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives and the El Salvador branch of the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales are ana-

lyzing good practices in four cities, including Soyapango in El Salvador, to come up with guidelines and tools that local authorities can use to reduce conflict.

Other IDRC-supported research in El Salvador has focused on economic development at both the small enterprise and national levels. In a large undertaking, the Centre has supported researchers from five Central American countries in efforts to improve the quality of research and public discussion on topics related to the region's integration into the global economy. The research has examined the costs and benefits of entering into the Central America Free Trade Agreement with the United States, and helped to build regional capacity in trade-related research and negotiation.

At the domestic level, the Centre is supporting the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture as it helps a network of researchers and development workers share knowledge and expertise more efficiently, improving their capacity to assist small farmers with livelihood diversification. IDRC is also supporting the Fundación Omar Dengo of Costa Rica in its efforts to promote the use of information and communication technologies to help small businesses prosper in five Central American countries, including El Salvador.

## IDRC in El Salvador

Through the Teasdale–Corti Global Health Research Partnership Program, IDRC is supporting research on comprehensive primary health care (CPHC) in nine countries, including El Salvador. In this initiative, dubbed Revitalizing Health For All, researchers, health practitioners, and policymakers are joining forces to gather existing knowledge and explore the future possibilities of CPHC, whose principles were codified in the World Health Organization's 1978 Alma Ata Declaration. Sidelined in the 1980s and 1990s, CPHC is rising again in international policy prominence as a valuable public health approach, and new research in this area is timely.

Government decentralization is often touted as a means of strengthening democracy and participation, but monitoring the gender implications is critical. Since 2003, IDRC has supported research exploring the links between decentralization and women's rights in the developing world. The Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales in Argentina is coordinating this research in the region. In a study involving El Salvador and Honduras, the San Salvador-based Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo is analyzing how municipal policies and institutions have promoted or constrained women's rights in the two countries.

Natural disaster prevention has been another focus of IDRC support in El Salvador. Detailed research in the 1990s led to recommendations on preventing natural disasters such as floods and landslides, and reducing their impact. Some of the recommendations were included in a global document on natural disaster prevention and preparedness adopted at a United Nations conference in Yokohama, Japan, in 1994.

Past research to improve the productivity of the country's native swine had notable success. With IDRC support, El Salvador's Ministry of Agriculture, the Guatemala-based Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama, and McGill University in Montreal collaborated on two proj-

ects that examined the characteristics of native pigs and the use of local feed to increase production while reducing costs.

Another noteworthy achievement was the development of Alooo.com in a number of Central American countries, including El Salvador. IDRC supported the efforts of Inversiones Electronicas to perfect a telephone-based email communication platform, available free of charge via a 1-800 number, thus ensuring universal access to the Internet using the existing telephone infrastructure. Alooo.com also provides valuable electronic government and health services.

IDRC has invested CA\$5.2 million in research in El Salvador since 1977. There are currently two active projects in the country, worth more than CA\$1.6 million.

### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

#### Sustaining Peace and Democracy

During the 1990s, El Salvador and Guatemala signed peace accords that ended decades of internal conflict. The two United Nations-supervised agreements, and subsequent peacebuilding processes, have differed in the ways they resolved conflict and installed democracy. Both, however, have had a profound impact on the theory and practice of peacebuilding and are considered pioneering efforts that go beyond the ceasefires to support emerging democracies.

Few post-conflict studies in El Salvador and Guatemala have taken a comparative approach or examined recent democratic development. With IDRC support, the Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales in Guatemala and the Fundación Guillermo Ungo in El Salvador undertook a comparative analysis of the countries' post-conflict experiences. More than a decade on, democracy is still in place in both countries, and the political system has been given a chance. However, old problems and new threats are challenging the democratization process.

The researchers found that delinquency and non-political violence increased following the signing of the peace accords. This insecurity, they say, threatens the legitimacy of the police and judicial systems, and of democracy itself, because it leads citizens to doubt the state's ability to protect them. These and other findings are presented in a Spanish-language book (*Construyendo la democracia en sociedades posconflicto*, co-published by IDRC in 2007), which is expected to make a useful contribution to the global literature on peacebuilding and democratic transformation.

(Project # 101646, Consolidating Peace and Democracy: A Comparative Case Study of Guatemala and El Salvador; Duration: 2003–2007; IDRC allocation: CA\$448 610; IDRC contact: Colleen Duggan; Research partner: Dinorah Azpuru, Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales, Apartado Postal 1005-A, Guatemala, 01009, Guatemala; Tel.: 502-334-7178; Email: dazpuru@yahoo.com)

### Promoting Dialogue about Free Trade

Because of their size and location, Central American economies are heavily influenced by the United States. As small countries, they have limited room to manoeuvre in the global economy, and need strong research and negotiating skills to participate effectively. These capacities have been called on in recent years as Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua negotiated the Central America Free Trade Agreement with Washington. (Since 2004, when the Dominican Republic joined the talks, the prospective accord has been referred to as DR-CAFTA.)

Responding to the need for improved trade-related research and negotiating capacities in the region, IDRC supported a five-year initiative that ended in late 2006. Grants were provided to 200 researchers from 70 research institutes in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, to examine the impacts of trade on their countries. Research teams investigated the potential impacts of the trade accord with

the US, and studied the fiscal and taxation challenges of economic integration.

Researchers at the Central American University in San Salvador focused on the social impacts of CAFTA, while teams at the Higher Institute of Economy and Business Administration looked at the impact of CAFTA on regional integration, exchange regimes in Central America, and the role of labour in trade negotiations. Workshops and meetings in each of the countries promoted policy dialogue and raised awareness and interest around trade issues. The Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales of Guatemala and IDRC coordinated this large multi-country undertaking.

(Project # 102116, Central America in the World Economy of the 21st Century – Phase II; Duration: 2003–2006; IDRC allocation: CA\$692 900, IDRC contact: Andrés Rius; Research partner: Pablo Rodas Martini, Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales, Apartado Postal 1005-A, Guatemala, 01009, Guatemala; Tel.: 502-334-7178; Email: pablorldas@yahoo.com)

### Developing Digital Entrepreneurs

In Central America, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) account for about 90 percent of formal businesses and generate up to half of all jobs. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) hold great promise for improving the marketing abilities and competitiveness of these enterprises, most of which are family owned. However, poor communications infrastructure, and educational and cultural barriers, are among the challenges that must be addressed before small businesses can take advantage of new technologies.

IDRC and other donors are supporting the Costa Rica-based Fundación Omar Dengo as it develops locally adapted training tools to strengthen the use of ICTs by small businesses in five Central American countries, including El Salvador. Called Lanz@, from the Spanish word for “launch,” this initiative includes the development of a digital network that is allowing

## IDRC in El Salvador

the communities involved in the pilot projects to share experiences. Lanz@ is boosting the capacity of its institutional partners in each of the five countries — the Ministry of Economic Affairs' small-business commission, CONAMYPE, in the case of El Salvador — to develop technology-based strategies to increase employment and productivity, and ultimately, reduce poverty.

(Project #103590, Lanz@: Information Technology for Entrepreneurship, Citizen Participation, and Productivity (Central America); Duration: 2005–2008; IDRC allocation: CA\$1 078 200; IDRC contact: Ben Petrazzini; Research partner: Elena Carreras, Fundación Omar Dengo, Apartado Postal 1032-2050, San José, Costa Rica; Tel.: 506-257-6654; Email: Elena.Carreras@fod.ac.cr)

### Extending the Reach of Agricultural Research

Much useful research on agriculture does not benefit the poor in developing countries because of limited collaboration among researchers, donors, and development workers. An IDRC-supported initiative aimed at developing agricultural enterprises has led to an innovative approach to overcoming this problem, called “learning alliances.” The process involves sharing knowledge about approaches and policies that work in different cultural contexts, and is now being used to facilitate the sharing of research results that will be of practical benefit to rural communities in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

Building on previous work, the research team is testing innovative ways of stimulating collaborative learning among the partners. A virtual learning community has been established in the four countries that uses the Internet to promote the timely sharing of knowledge and expertise. Research identifying market opportunities for farmers is one example of the practical information exchanged under this program. In El Salvador, Catholic Relief Services, the Department of Agriculture and Environment, and Caritas International are taking part in the initiative, which is being coordinated by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture in Colombia.

(Project # 101944, Diversified Livelihoods through Effective Agro-enterprise Interventions (Central America); Duration: 2003–2007; IDRC allocation: CA\$559 000; IDRC contact: Merle Faminow; Research partner: Mark Lundy, Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT), Apartado Aéreo 6713, Cali, Colombia; Tel.: 57-2 445-0023; Email: m.lundy@cgiar.org)

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