

## DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH IN COUNTRIES IN TRANSITION



IDRC: Peter Bennett

*IDRC recently analyzed why and how it has worked in countries in transition during the past three decades — in transition from dictatorship to democratic rule, from communism to market economies, from war to peace. The goal was to better understand how IDRC gathers and shares pertinent information to inform programming and decision-making. How was the Centre alerted to impending transition? How did it investigate the situation? How did it respond?*

*Case studies were prepared on Algeria, Burma, Cambodia, Kenya, South Africa, the Southern Cone, Vietnam, and the West Bank and Gaza. Together, with an introductory brief, these eight cases show that IDRC has long been prepared to work in high-risk contexts before and in early transition periods, has played a distinct role in supporting research and policy-making for development, and has usually succeeded in adapting its programming to the fluid context.*

## KENYA

Kenya's 2002 general election, replacing a notoriously corrupt regime with a coalition government committed to reform, was seen as a landmark event in the country's history. IDRC, active in Kenya for some 30 years by then, reacted quickly with a package of projects expressly designed to advance and take advantage of the promised governance changes. Within months of the election, the Kenyan transition was displaying potential for responsive, policy-relevant research. But it would also soon show its vulnerability to setback.

The 2002 election put an end to the discredited misgovernment personified by Daniel arap Moi, the departing president. Moi's designated successor was overwhelmingly defeated at the polls by Mwai Kibaki and a multi-ethnic alliance known as the National Rainbow Coalition. Kibaki and his supporters campaigned on an anticorruption platform of economic recovery, transparency, and accountability. Enjoying widespread popular support, the new government looked well-placed to initiate thorough and lasting reform — a transition of historic scope, overturning Kenya's old politics of patronage and plunder.

By early 2003, just four months after the election, IDRC management had already given provisional approval to eight projects totaling CA\$1 million in IDRC contributions to research and capacity building in the new Kenyan transition. By June the funding was committed, an exceptionally fast turnaround from project conception to implementation. Several factors explained the speed of decision and execution. IDRC had been support-

ing research in Kenya since 1972: more than 300 projects had been undertaken, and more than CA\$30 million had been disbursed. The Centre and its people knew Kenya and Kenyans well. In addition, IDRC's regional office for Eastern and Southern Africa happened to be located in Nairobi; the regional director and her staff (some of them Kenyans) were fully connected with interlocutors in government, civil society organizations, the research community, and the private sector. Procedures were also accelerated by an easy triangulation of decision-making from Nairobi staff to program managers in headquarters to personal engagement by IDRC's president. As well, IDRC's activities and objectives paralleled Canadian foreign policy and foreign aid support of the new Kenyan government's promised program.

In close consultation with Kenyans in and outside government, IDRC was able to assemble a mix of projects suited for early action. Some projects responded directly to ministerial priorities, while others were drawn from the pre-transition pipeline of research ideas already in preparation. As one result, the package combined timely interventions custom-fit for the transition with other initiatives refined by longer analysis and groundwork.

The eight projects in brief: governance and ethics capacity building, supporting Kenya's Governance and Ethics Department in investigating illegalities and irregularities in land allocation under earlier regimes, and in tracing looted public assets; integration of biodiversity management in rural agricultural reform, including the testing and conservation of traditional medicinal plants; two projects aimed at policy development and promoting public access to information technologies; a transition project directed specifically to economic recovery; civil society participation in transition; Ministry of Water activity, including supply-and-demand assessments; and aid to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

All these projects were concentrated on a one-year time frame — a design advocated both by IDRC and by recipient partners for fast effect. But scope for expansion and follow-up was acknowledged: indeed, several projects flourished in later years, some with support from other donors. And it is important to add that other donors have contributed significantly to transition-related reform. CIDA — the Canadian International Development Agency — has worked extensively on governance and democratic development in Kenya since the first multiparty election in the early 1990s.

The IDRC-supported projects were devised from the start as small-scale initiatives. They were designed as sharply focused attempts to help the new Kenyan leadership transform vision into action quickly, by providing on-demand knowledge, new findings, and institutional structures to pursue and sustain reform.

To address the special difficulties of treating corruption in government, IDRC worked on these issues by funding projects through Transparency International's Nairobi office. This partnership was favoured as much by Kenya's ethics-in-government authorities as by Transparency International itself.

If there was any disadvantage to fast-tracking the transition projects, it lay in the danger of excluding or neglecting alternative prospects for IDRC funding: there was no project specifically supporting health policy, for instance. But the overall advantages of quick reaction were considerable. Where relations between the research community and policymakers had previously been strained or absent, ministers and senior officials now welcomed research-based advice. And if the whole project-approval process lacked a degree of rigour or substantive risk analysis, the diversity of the chosen projects — and the quality of partners — served to reduce risk and improve the probabilities of success.

It must be added, however, that the Kenyan anticorruption program appeared to falter by the end of the Kibaki government's first year in office. In the words of one analysis sponsored by Transparency International in late 2004, miscoordination of reform mechanisms created "opportunities for the corrupt to re-invent themselves and to lodge themselves afresh in the new system." Evident setbacks in the reform movement, and political manipulation of long-standing ethnic divisions, signalled a resumption of spoils politics and undermined popular confidence in the president and his administration. In February 2005, the permanent secretary for governance and ethics resigned in frustration. In November 2005, amid renewed allegations of unchecked graft, Kibaki dismissed his cabinet after losing a national referendum on constitutional amendments. Kenya's transition, like most transitions, has proven susceptible to disappointment and reversal. For that very reason, IDRC has continued its support for Kenyans' own efforts to improve public participation, transparency, and accountability in government.

*This case study is part of a longer report prepared by Nancy Smyth and Maggie Gorman, Policy and Planning Group, IDRC.*

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 more than 35 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.

**International Development Research Centre**

PO Box 8500, Ottawa, ON, Canada K1G 3H9

Tel.: 613-236-6163

Fax: 613-238-7230

Email: [info@idrc.ca](mailto:info@idrc.ca)