

Strengthening the Core and the Periphery:

Organizational Case Study of the Peru Economic and Social Research Consortium (CIES) by Katrina Rojas and Mariane Arsenault

IDRC support to the CIES demonstrates how the Centre can act as a catalyst and a facilitator for a network that brings together multiple research and political perspectives.

The Peru Economic Research Consortium (CIE in Spanish, the predecessor to CIES) originated at the end of the 1980s amidst political and economic instability. During this time, Peru grappled not only with unprecedented recession and hyperinflation but also with the most violent guerrilla insurgency in the region. This situation was worsened by fluctuating State approaches to macroeconomic management and deepening poverty. It was within this context that IDRC and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) agreed to finance five Peruvian research centres to join as a consortium in order to conduct applied economic research and attempt to prevent more social science researchers from leaving the country.

CIE's original mission was to generate applied research, build the capacities of its researchers, promote dialogue among researchers and improve the quality of policy debate. After ten years, CIE had established its credibility and the Consortium's stakeholders viewed its results in positive terms. The 1990s brought greater macroeconomic stability and Peru entered a period of impressive economic growth. Economic growth did not, however, translate into social equity. High rates of poverty, unequal distribution of wealth, and wide social gaps still persisted.

This context also presented challenges for research for development: the scarcity of government resources for social science research meant that research, including that of the Consortium, depended heavily on external funding. In addition, the public investment in tertiary education had created a gap in the research capacity of Peru's public and private universities with a marked difference between those in the capital city of Lima and those in the provinces.

Under the backdrop of this contextual change, the sustainability of CIE's existing model came under question. IDRC and CIDA worked with Consortium members to create a new form of collaboration and governance. This new plan for partnership included:

- the addition of social policy issues to the research agenda; 'CIE' became 'CIES'
- a thrust to have research results considered by policymakers, as Peru did not have a tradition of evidence-based policymaking and evaluation; and,
- a shift to research grant allocation through competitions from its original pro rata basis.

Responding to changes

According to the case study, IDRC's support helped CIES become the well-respected institution it is today. It now has more than three dozen members, including private and public universities, private consulting firms, non-governmental organizations and government institutions, and the Consortium is involved in

a wide range of additional activities such as training, seminars and the publication of books and journals.

CIES has developed an array of support services to strengthen the research capacity of both its member organizations and their associated researchers. These include mentoring younger researchers and less experienced researchers (often from the provinces) throughout the research process, training researchers, providing internship/research awards, promoting cooperation among centres, implementing specific projects with funding from other donors and providing services to its members such as bibliographic research, publication dissemination, and negotiating access to databases.

The study notes that the Executive Office's administrative capacity has also been enhanced. It has acquired the ability to mobilise additional financial resources and to manage those resources using increasingly sophisticated systems. As CIES funding grew and became more diversified, IDRC/CIDA funding fell from 76% of the CIES financial resources in 2000 to 51% in 2006.

Strengthening the core has helped improve the organizational capacities of partner centres, particularly in the provinces. The long-term support for grant competitions has allowed organizations to plan their research agenda, in some cases establish and build a track record for their research program, and recruit young researchers and analysts. The evaluators found that winning a CIES competition gives credibility to the competing organization and may lead to other sources of funding.

At the systems level, CIES has built a body of Peruvian research and knowledge, and preserved a critical mass of researchers active in the country, creating a more enabling research environment.

Facilitating public debate

Strengthening CIES has supported the development of closer ties to public institutions and greater opportunities to influence public policy, concluded the case study. In 2003, for instance, CIES signed an agreement with the country's congress to provide technical support and consulting on current issues to the Parliamentary Research Centre (CIP, by its Spanish acronym). In 2006, CIES held workshops with congressional committees on draft laws on the legislative agenda. Individual Consortium researchers are also regularly called upon to directly advise high-ranking officials and to participate in policy formulation and assessment committees and/or social programmes. To maximise its influence on public policymaking, the organization has also become increasingly visible in the media and public fora.

Learning by doing

The case study noted IDRC's approach to supporting CIES reflects several of the identified 'good practices' that contribute to capacity development. IDRC, which has provided core funding to the Consortium since 1989, has used a 'reflect and learn' approach to its relationship with CIES. Mainly, it has responded to the expressed needs of the network, a strategy CIES values for the flexibility and autonomy it affords the Consortium. This in turn has translated into a locally defined research and organizational agenda.

The construction of partnerships between IDRC and the Executive Office, Board members, and associated researchers has also been fundamental. In particular, the study highlights the opportunity to establish friendly professional relationships built on trust between IDRC Program Officers and CIES (its Executive Office, members of the Board and some of the researchers

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representing partner organizations). IDRC also facilitated relationship-building between CIES and other organizations or individuals outside of Peru (for example: FOCAL and international consultants).

Other strengths of IDRC's approach that were noted by the case study as supporting capacity development at CIES include the generally well-coordinated efforts among IDRC's different divisions that are working with CIES (Programs, Partnership Division, and Grant Administration) as well as its work in partnership with CIDA.

According to the authors of the study, the long-term engagement and the continuity of IDRC support have been vital to CIES' success. IDRC's perseverance and commitment particularly at the main turning points in the Consortium's evolution demonstrates that the Centre can act as *catalyst* and *facilitator* in a difficult context and during reform processes.

The case study reveals that there are also certain challenges within IDRC's relationship with CIES. For example, variability of budget allocations and changes in strategies have the potential for repercussions on initiative development. The report noted that these aspects could limit IDRC's opportunities when longer-term visions and commitments are required, especially in terms of what can be conveyed to the partners. Another challenge could come from CIES simultaneously receiving funds from multiple programs. This challenge could become more acute in the future in the absence of concerted coordination among the different programs of the Centre. Finally, pressures to approve new projects may also limit organizational capacity development efforts that require a long-term perspective and sustained engagement.

Looking ahead

With regard to the future, CIES remains important to Peru as the State renews its attention to social development avenues for the poor. The case study authors highlight ongoing challenges to CIES' organizational development that will require attention, including the need to increase support via linkages and strategic intelligence, and revising governance structures.

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is a Canadian crown corporation, created to help developing countries find solutions to the social, economic, and natural resource problems they face. Support is directed to building indigenous research capacity. Because strengthening and mobilizing research capacity is a cornerstone of IDRC's work, in 2005 the Evaluation Unit launched a strategic evaluation on capacity development focusing on the processes and results of IDRC support of its Southern partners. The evaluation design and studies can be found at: www.idrc.ca/en/ev-70623-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html