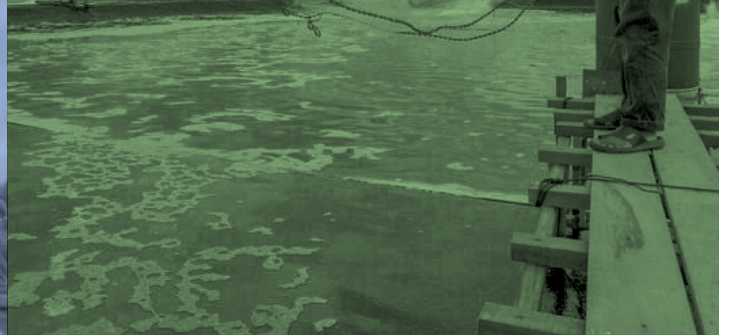


Unlocking Research for Development in-and for-ASEAN Member Countries



In a world grappling with climate, economic, and social challenges, not all knowledge is equal. Research that is locally driven, policy-relevant, and collaborative holds the key to sustainable growth and social inclusion. This document by the Global Development Network highlights the transformative impact of development research funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and partners in ASEAN between 2016 and 2022 — an investment of over CA\$136 million across 180+ projects. With impact stories carrying the voice of regional researchers, it showcases inspiring successes and calls for a renewed commitment to expand collaborations and funding to amplify the power of research to create lasting change across ASEAN.



1 Why Research for Development?

Not all knowledge is equal—especially when the purpose of knowledge is to drive sustainable economic growth and promote social inclusion in a world tackling unprecedented climate and environmental challenges. As the world faces these interconnected crises, the type of knowledge that creates meaningful and lasting change needs to be research-based, evidence-based, policy-relevant and locally generated. Alongside having these qualities, knowledge should be open, inclusive and collaborative to ensure its impact is widespread and sustainable.

Knowledge that is grounded in data, analysis, and systematic inquiry can identify the root causes of challenges, propose solutions, and evaluate the effectiveness of actions. It can offer the critical insights needed to develop evidence-based policies that produce change and impact.

If research addresses the needs of policy, then it can be directly applicable to current societal issues, enabling governments and organizations to craft effective strategies, policies and interventions.

Empowering local research ecosystems helps to ensure that interventions are not only relevant but also culturally appropriate and feasible, leading to greater ownership, and more successful and sustainable outcomes, along with greater cost-effectiveness. Localising research capacity is key to serving the interests of people within their own social, economic, and political context, while also contributing to global debates.

Research that is collaborative and that spans the relevant sectors, disciplines, and countries is more likely to address complex and urgent questions.

Open research and science that transparently shares data, methodologies, designs and results enables greater innovation, and more effective dissemination. It empowers more people to contribute to solutions, ensuring all can participate in, and benefit from, advancements in science, technology, and policy.

Finally, research that is inclusive, promoting a diversity of voices and a range of perspectives, is essential for fostering inclusion in broader society.

This is the essence of what research for development aspires to be. This document is a collaboration between the Global Development Network (GDN) and Canada's International Development Research Center (IDRC), and it explores the achievements and impact of research for development, with a focus on IDRC's work in ASEAN member countries over the last decade.

The aim of this document is to spark interest and restore commitment to a broad coalition in support of more research for development in the ASEAN member community. The goal is for this to enable development impacts at scale for all ASEAN member countries.

2 Is all Research Funding equal?

Funding research is not the same task as funding research that drives development impact. Research funding agencies worldwide focus on advancing knowledge through excellence. Although this is a critical component of progress and innovation, excellence alone is not sufficient to address the most urgent societal challenges or inform today's policy debates.

Moreover, reliance on national research funding agencies falls short in several ways:



Not every ASEAN member country has its own national research funding agency.



There are few national research funds that prioritise development research.



Typically, national research funds cannot support international collaborations or research-policy interactions.

In short, development research requires dedicated champions and specific funding channels. An example of this is Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is one of a few national institutions operating with this mandate on a truly global scale. It works collaboratively with peers through a network of national and international funders to increase resources for local researchers, to create opportunities for development research, and to drive impactful research that improves policies and enhances people's lives.

The **objectives of the centre** are to initiate, encourage, support and conduct research into the problems of the developing regions of the world and into the means for applying and adapting scientific, technical and other knowledge to the economic and social advancement of those regions (art. 4.1)

Research includes any scientific or technical inquiry or experimentation that is instituted

or carried out to discover new knowledge or new means of applying existing knowledge to find solutions to economic and social problems (art. 2)

International Development Research Centre Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. I-19), accessible at <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/I-19/FullText.html>

IDRC works through a network of five regional offices and invests its resources across five thematic areas. The result is a matrix that funds projects across disciplines and countries. The ASEAN region falls under the regional office for Asia, based in New Delhi, India. The presence in the region reflects its long-term commitment to advancing development there, but also a strong interest in working close to its partners across the region.



This document presents the findings of a study conducted by the Global Development Network, an international organization created to support the link between local research and development policy globally. The study assesses the impact of development research funded by IDRC and its partners in ASEAN countries between March 2016 and May 2022. The study highlights the value and impact of IDRC funding through the

perspectives of researchers in the region. The document describes successful and inspiring examples of impact that demonstrate the unique value of research for development. It underscores the importance of expanding investments and fostering collaborations to support development research in ASEAN through partnerships between national, regional, and international agencies.

3 IDRC's Work in Asia and in the ASEAN Region

IDRC's five thematic areas are: Climate-Resilient Food Systems, Global Health, Education and Science, Democratic and Inclusive Governance, and Sustainable Inclusive Economies. Together, these areas reflect IDRC's commitment to promoting impactful research that addresses diverse challenges within the region.

IDRC works by providing financial support to research teams and their partners. The evaluation

focused on a database of 180 IDRC funded projects (or grants) under 95 programs, undertaken in, or targeting, the ASEAN region. These correspond to a scope of investment of 159 million CAD, over a period of just over 6 years (see Figure 2). This is an estimated average investment of 26m CAD per year across ASEAN member countries.



Figure 1: IDRC Project Countries in ASEAN Region

Area	No. of multi-grant programs	Amount (CAD mn)	% of Funding per Area	% of Unique Grants per Area
Global Health	9	5,250,000	4	6
Climate-Resilient Food Systems	20	41,000,000	30	33
Democratic and Inclusive Governance	26	20,250,000	15	22
Education and Science	23	34,250,000	25	17
Sustainable Inclusive Economies	14	30,000,000	22	21
Catalytic Fund	3	5,250,000	4	2
Total	95	136,000,000	100	100

Figure 2: IDRC programs, funding and projects for the five thematic areas.

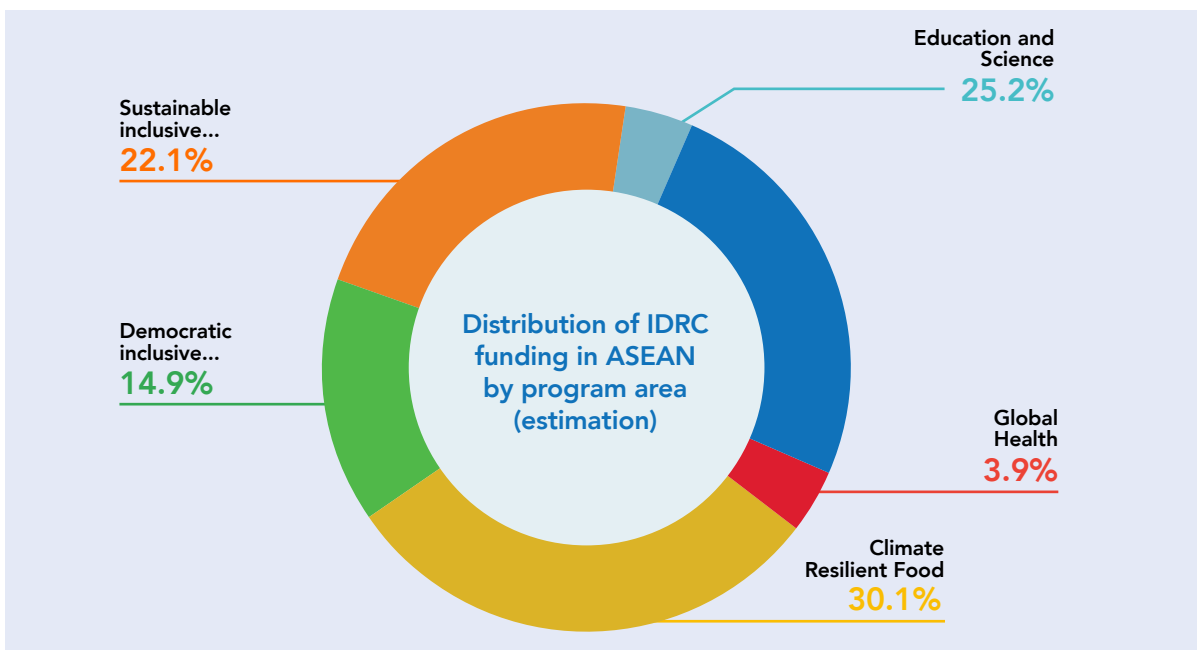


Figure 3: Distribution of IDRC funding in ASEAN by program area (estimation).

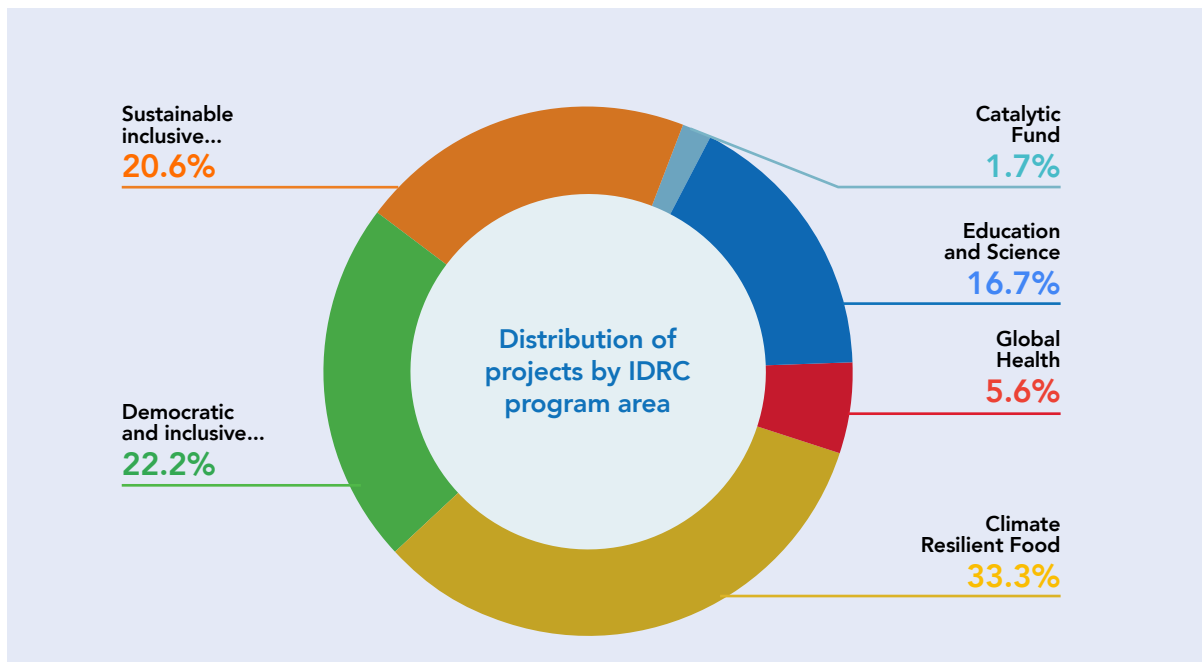


Figure 4: Distribution of projects by IDRC program area

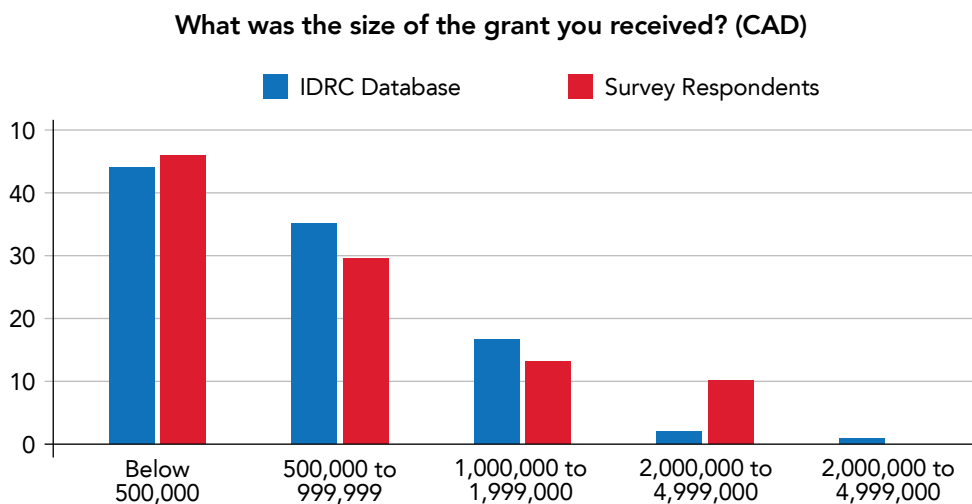


Figure 5: Distribution of different grant sizes (data from IDRC database and survey)

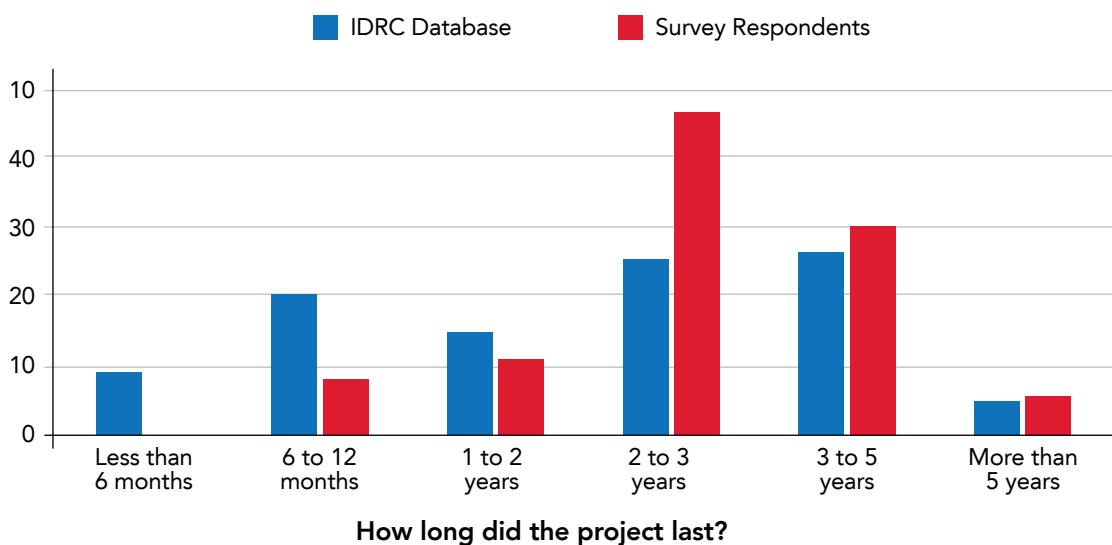


Figure 6: Variation in length of projects (data from IDRC database and survey)

IDRC projects in the region vary greatly in financial size and duration, but 80% of them (or 144 out of the 180 reviewed) correspond to grants below CAD 1m (see Figure 5). Approximately half of the projects have durations of 2 to 5 years, with the remainder lasting less than 2 years (see Figure 6).

One quarter of IDRC grants in ASEAN member countries go to international institutions (e.g. institutions from Canada,

the UK, and the USA) that collaborate with local counterparts, with the rest (75%) being routed directly to institutions in the region, working 'at home' or in the ASEAN community (see Figure 9). Countries like Myanmar receive substantial support from regional partners, addressing unique local needs while reinforcing local research and policy capacity. This balance of local leadership with global collaboration is key to IDRC's strategy across ASEAN.

Distribution of IDRC projects in ASEAN by location of intended impact

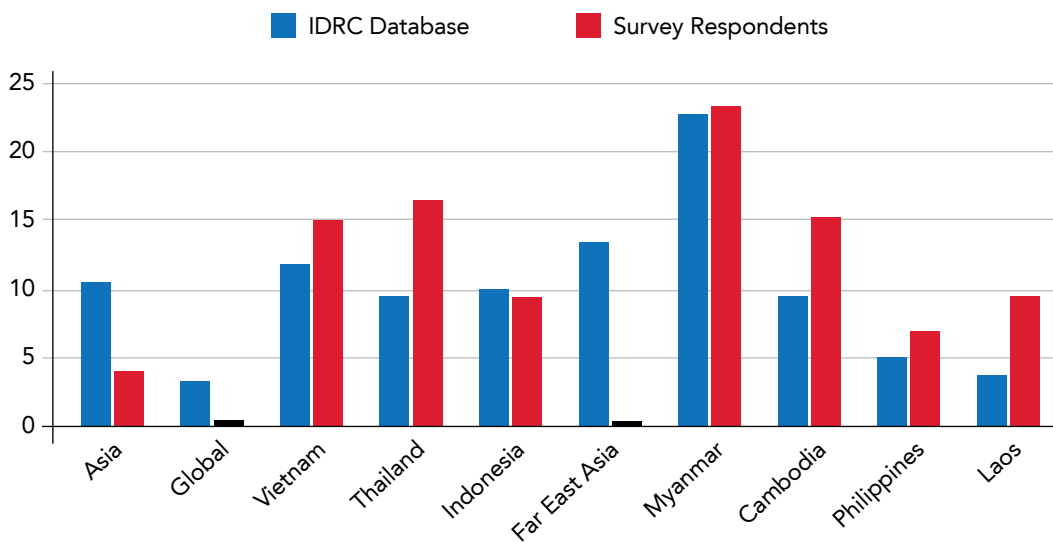


Figure 7: Distribution of IDRC projects in ASEAN by location of intended impact

Over two-thirds of projects emphasize building local research capabilities (see Figure 8). Many projects are partnerships that bring together regional and international institutions,

leveraging global expertise while empowering local institutions to produce and apply research that informs policy and development debates.

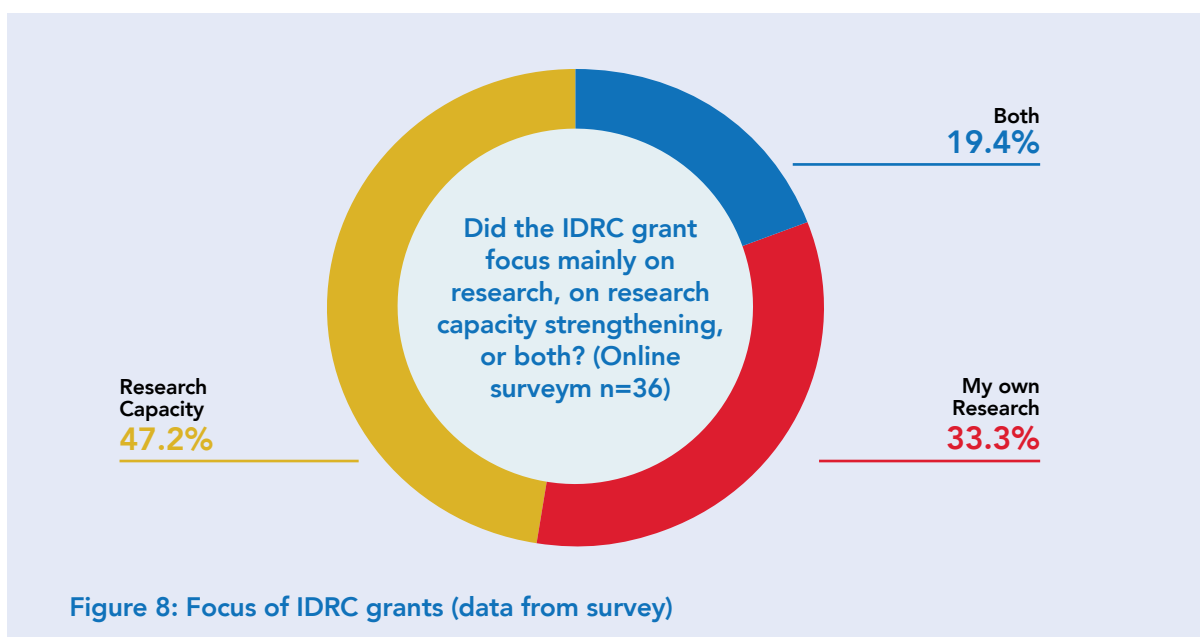
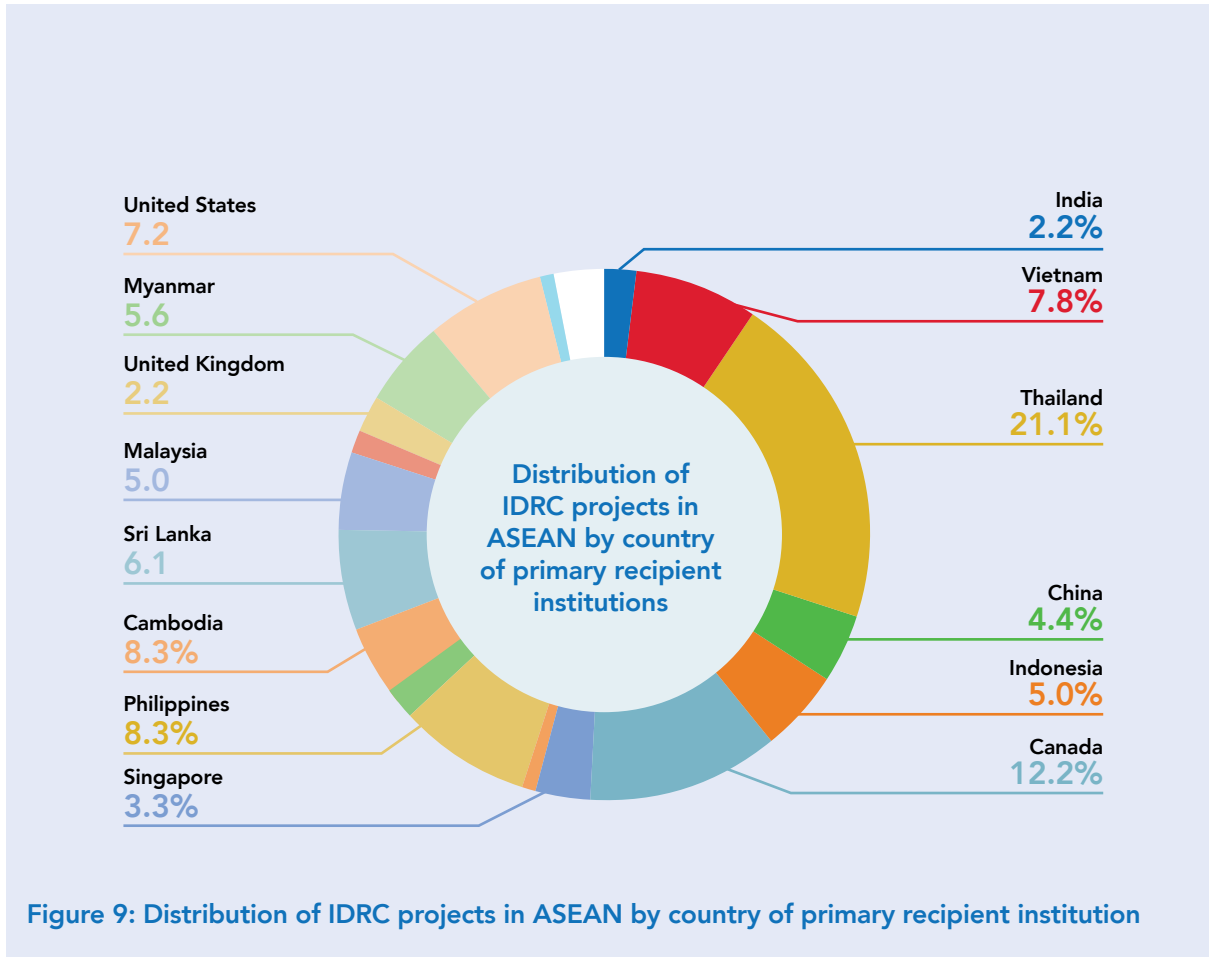


Figure 8: Focus of IDRC grants (data from survey)



4 Stories of Impact

In the following section, we feature six exemplary stories that showcase the added value of development research in the ASEAN region.

THINK CLIMATE INDONESIA

Project Overview



TITLE

Think Climate
Indonesia 109103



TIMELINE

Jan 2019 to
Dec 2023



FUNDING

CAD 1,5
million IDRC,
CAD 1,5
million Oak
Foundation



PARTNERS

World Resource
Institute (WRI),
Indonesia; Koka Kita;
Kemitraan; Kelaka;
PATTIRO.



LOCATION

Indonesia

Challenge

Indonesia is one of the largest greenhouse gas emitters in the world. The country's rapid economic growth has led to tremendous environmental changes, including pollution and contamination of inland and coastal waters, deforestation, overexploitation of resources, and loss of biodiversity. This is adversely affecting the quality of life and climate change adaptation capacity of the country's poorest, most vulnerable people.

Solution

The Think Climate Indonesia (TCI) initiative responded to these challenges by supporting Indonesia to meet climate-mitigation commitments and engage in climate-adaptation actions by supporting independent policy research organizations to undertake high-quality research, communicate evidence, and engage policy audiences and communities on climate change. The initiative supported five Indonesian think tanks, which were selected through an open competitive call. The World Resource Institute's (WRI) work had a particular focus on how local communities use their forests.

Impact and Results

Research projects under the TCI initiative collected data and observations on the impact of climate change directly from the communities. Establishment and assessment of community empowerment takes time: however there were observations of changes in the behavior of local people, such as increased

awareness in protecting forests and in utilizing resources more sustainably. Dissemination of results has been a central activity, with over 500 presentations and outputs. For example, several policy dialogues were organized, the final one in October 2023 on "The Strategic Role of Civil Society Organizations and Youth in Promoting Climate Change Action in Indonesia National Elections 2024." Memorandums of Understanding have been signed with several Ministries and several studies have been published. Youth camps were established to raise a new generation of activists,

Future prospects

The work with local communities continues, for example through the AQUADAPT partnership (2023–2027), which is also funded by IDRC. Project partner WRI has been working for the last couple of years with local communities of shrimp farmers, trying to find ways to prevent mangrove degradation while fostering the shrimp aquaculture.

Role of IDRC funding

IDRC funding was flexible, but it was directed towards strengthening the organization capacity by creating a small unit on gender. The funding allowed WRI to deliver work on sustainability and low carbon development, and helped build new concepts or test established ones in some pilot sites. This kind of research-focused project is very relevant to the WRI mission and it enables WRI to influence policy-making processes through scientific-based proposals.

PARLIAMENT IMPACT

Project Overview



TITLE

Building Parliamentary Research Capacity in Shan State, Myanmar



TIMELINE

2017–2019



FUNDING

CAD 383,475



PARTNERS

Parliamentary Centre (PC), Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation (EMReF)



LOCATION

Shan State, Myanmar

Challenge

Under the Myanmar 2008 constitution, 14 state and regional governments were created with the responsibility to debate and pass local legislation as well as to approve local budgets and oversee their spending. However, the capacity of sub-national parliaments to exercise their roles was extremely low. Research suffered immensely during the years of military dictatorship and held a limited role in decision-making. There was a need to rebuild an evidence-based system for the foundation of a more inclusive and open democratic society.

Solution

The aim of the project was to strengthen parliamentary research capacity in Shan State, Myanmar. This was done through training sessions on gender-sensitive research and information access, alongside building resources, which included establishing library systems for research and legislative records, the creation of tools like the “Parliamentary Research Training Manual” and a follow-up mentoring process that involved about 50 people, MPs and members of staff.

Impact and Results

The project established a sustainable research support framework, creating tools and resources that are still used across Myanmar's regional parliaments. For example, the MPs developed a manual for library management procedures and built an actual library with a collection of periodicals, digital resources and records of

their own debates and proceedings. This was financed with their own budget, their own staff, and support from the Union Parliament. The project also empowered female MPs like Daw Htar Yee to conduct independent research, which enhanced the quality of legislative debate.

Prospects

Despite setbacks due to the 2021 coup, the project has laid the groundwork for future democratic resilience and evidence-based governance. There have been a couple of additional small projects that the Centre implemented on its own and with IDRC resources under the Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar initiative (K4DM). The project coordinator facilitated some direct exchanges between those in Myanmar who were elected but could not take seats and members of the Canadian Parliament, and continued working with the Myanmar diaspora in Canada, Thailand, and through digital channels. The focus, which has been mirrored by other funders, has been on providing direct support to those who are trying to change the situation in Myanmar and bring the country back to a path towards inclusive and federal democracy.

Role of IDRC Funding

IDRC's flexible funding enabled adaptive, impactful work connecting local research capacity with legislative needs. Its catalytic support fostered long-term, sustainable partnerships and follow-up projects, sustaining democratic governance efforts post-coup.

CLIMATE SMART VILLAGES

Project Overview



TITLE

Climate Smart Villages – Resilience Building, Women Empowerment, Equity and Sustainable Food Systems



TIMELINE

June 2020 to November 2022



FUNDING

IDRC (900.000 CAD)



PARTNERS

International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR)



LOCATION

Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar

Challenge

There is an urgent need to make food systems more resilient to climate fluctuations. Millions of small-scale farmers in Asia, already under the burden of food and nutritional insecurity, are experiencing the compounded impacts from climate change. The climate smart agriculture movement promises to adequately tackle this, but there is still a lack of information about costs and benefits from specific cases.

Solution

Responding to these challenges requires transformational change that embraces the development of more inclusive, resilient and sustainable food systems with special attention to small and marginalized farmers, while helping to reduce gender inequalities in employment in agriculture. The project generated evidence on how to build resilience and climate change adaptation through sustainable outcomes in the areas of household resilience building, economic empowerment of women, and also local food production systems.

Impact and Results

The project demonstrates that tangible results in climate change adaptation can be generated within three to five years already. The research team identified practices, technologies, and innovations within the food system through a portfolio of socially inclusive options. These include promoting stress-tolerant varieties of primary crops; new platforms for agriculture production, such as integrating

and improving small livestock production, and vegetable production in patches of land around households; reducing the footprint of fertilizer use; integrating trees into existing farming system to generate new sources of income; and creating microclimates around the farm to protect them from storms. The project developed a methodology for measuring household resilience based on several indicators.

Future prospects





The International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) continues to work on local community-based platforms in the Philippines by building on this rich evidence base. It has entered into a new partnership (2022 to 2025) with ClimBeR, a CGIAR initiative on building systemic resilience against climate variability and extremes. IDRC's partnership with AQUADAPT (2023–2027) continues, which addresses the intertwined critical challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and food insecurity through research.

Role of IDRC funding

IDRC funding allowed IIRR to shift its focus to measuring impact and establishing evidence and knowledge, and to expand the work to Myanmar and Cambodia. A close communication with the program officer, before, during and after the project ensured guidance, responsiveness and flexibility, and this was maintained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

JOBS AT THE BORDERS

Project Overview

				
TITLE	TIMELINE	FUNDING	PARTNERS	LOCATION
Jobs at the Borders: Promoting Gender Equality and Growth in ASEAN's Economic Zones	2016–2019	CAD 382,600	Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Mekong Migration Network	Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand

Challenge

Rapid growth of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in ASEAN has raised concerns about the rights and protections of migrant workers, especially women, in these zones. Women represent the majority of the sector's workforce and they are often concentrated in the lowest-paying positions with the least recognized skills. This is especially true within the growing number of garment industries that are establishing themselves in these zones, bringing issues around gender and women's economic rights to the forefront. This raises a critical question: can an SEZ-driven growth model co-exist with, and even promote, gender equality in the region?

Solution

The project explored how the employment of migrant women in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) can enhance economic outcomes for women in ASEAN's rapidly changing garment industry. The project involved analyzing SEZs as frameworks that foster labor exploitation and remove worker protections, particularly for women. Its insights highlighted the need for childcare services, better skill recognition, and consistent working conditions in SEZs across ASEAN. The findings were shared via policy briefs, workshops, and media, increasing visibility on issues of migrant labor and gender equality.

Impact and Results

The project highlighted the sacrifices that migrant workers make in their working conditions and caregiving responsibilities—such as childcare and elderly care—as a result of contributing

to the economy. The project engaged SEZ management and government officials on policy changes and it advocated for childcare services in SEZs. The project also influenced the migrant registration process and raised awareness of gender-specific needs in labor zones. Additionally, researchers from the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) defended three academic theses on SEZs. The project maintained a public presence through media coverage and photo exhibitions. Its findings and policy briefs were disseminated via YouTube videos, with similar outreach efforts conducted by other NGOs.

Prospects

The SEZ manager from Myanmar expressed interest in the project's findings and participated in multiple meetings, showing a willingness to support the implementation of recommendations, particularly regarding childcare facilities. Unfortunately, following the coup, no concrete developments occurred in this area. AIT continues to address migrant labor issues in ongoing workshops and seminars. AIT has established a Master's program in Gender and Leadership alongside a platform called the Gender Lab, which educates students and supports migrant women and gender equality initiatives across ASEAN.

Role of IDRC Funding

IDRC funding was flexible and supportive, allowing AIT to adapt during project challenges. Additionally, IDRC's approach promoted a collaborative, problem-solving environment, enabling a responsive and impactful project.

TECHNOLOGY FOR INCLUSION AT SCALE

Project Overview



TITLE

Improving Maternal and Child Health for Ethnic Minority Women in Vietnam using Digital Health



TIMELINE

2012-2016, with follow-up 2022-2027



FUNDING

CAD 406,000 initial, CAD 700,000 follow-up



PARTNERS

Institute of Population, Health and Development, Simon Fraser University, University of Melbourne, and health authorities in Vietnam



LOCATION

Myanmar

Challenge

There have been significant improvements in maternal, newborn and children's health outcomes in Vietnam. Between 1990 and 2020, infant mortality fell from 37 to 17 deaths per 1000 live births and under-five mortality dropped from 52 to 21. Maternal mortality decreased from 139 to 124 during these years, but within this group there were significant health inequalities - the maternal mortality ratio amongst ethnic minority groups (15% of the population) was four times higher than amongst majority Kinh ethnic group. The main reason for this is because ethnic minority communities tend to live in remote, rural and economically marginalized areas where access to health services is limited.

Solution

From 2013 to 2016, the Institute of Population, Health and Development in Vietnam piloted a low-cost mobile health intervention targeting women from ethnic minorities who often walk as far as 20 km in mountain areas to visit government health centres. The system used SMS to reach women over their mobile phones, providing information and guidance before, during and after their pregnancy. Each woman received up to 75 one-way messages. Healthcare staff in provincial and district clinics were offered a small incentive (around USD 5 / month) to support the pilot.

Impact and Results

The pilot phase of the project demonstrated increased health awareness and proactive behavior among women. Many health workers reported that women phoned them more frequently to seek information about their own health and the health of family members. The project also shifted family dynamics around health: many women shared and discussed the messages with their husbands, which is uncommon in a society where maternal and infant health have traditionally been considered women's domain. There was a high level of engagement with the project, including the women who participated, their families, and the healthcare workers involved. This was evidenced by the fact that the drop-out rate among the 900 women who participated was zero, and that healthcare workers gave up monetary incentives to continue the program past its first phase.

Prospects

The impact of the project raised the interest of Vietnam's Ministry of Health, which led to sign a Memorandum of Understanding in May 2022, for a joint scale-up project in 2022 (funded by IDRC) to include the use of a smartphone-based app alongside the SMS system, which is currently being rolled out in four provinces, reaching over 9000 women.






Role of IDRC Funding

IDRC funding made a significant difference in enabling pilot testing with flexible funding, supporting evidence generation for national scaling, and allowing collaboration with the Ministry of Health to sustain and expand the program.

¹Dao, Binh Thi Thanh, Huong Thi Trinh, Phuong Hoai Lai, Tahli Elsner, Sumit Kane, and Liem Nguyen. 2023. "A Cluster Randomised Control Trial of an SMS-Based Intervention to Promote Antenatal Health amongst Pregnant Women in a Remote, Highland Region of Vietnam" *Healthcare* 11, no. 17: 2407. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11172407>

FINDING LEVERS OF CHANGE IN MYANMAR'S FRAGMENTED KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

Project Overview

 TITLE	 TIMELINE	 FUNDING	 PARTNERS	 LOCATION
Assessing social science research systems in Myanmar's transition to democracy	2019-2021	CAD 188,700	Global Development Network (GDN), Centre for the Economic and Social Development (CESD)	Myanmar

Challenge

Myanmar's universities conduct almost no research, and this is unique to the region. Instead, the majority of evidence is generated by private research groups or non-profit organizations, primarily funded by international donors (until the 2021 coup). This has created a vicious cycle where the low demand for quality data and analysis results in an almost nonexistent supply of evidence to inform development policy which in turn further diminishes the role of universities in generating this evidence. This is impacting all sectors, from trade and labor to health and education.

Impact and Results

2017 data show that only 0.37% of Myanmar's investment in research and development goes to development research in the social sciences, which is a miniscule amount. Less than 10% of the researcher population work in economics, sociology, demography, and related disciplines. Bureaucratic pressures discourage active research careers in universities, and the relationship between policy makers and researchers is plagued by a deep mistrust. The study identified three key levers of change to address these deep-set problems: reforming career advancement and access to funding, promoting promoting collaboration between sub-national parliaments and sub-national universities, and drafting a national research policy to guide the sector.

Solution

GDN, in close collaboration with the Yangon-based local think tank CESD, has conducted a study to understand the systemic barriers and opportunities that keep research out of the national university system, and excluded from policy discussions. The study was done using the 'Doing Research Assessment' tool, an approach used by GDN across the global South. GDN and CESD involved an advisory group of key people from universities and the ministry to oversee the project.

Prospects

Before the coup, the research team was invited to draft the research priorities for the National Education Strategic Plan by the Ministry of Higher Education. The Rectors' Committee then developed a plan to establish a national research foundation with a key role for research funding and policy.

Role of IDRC Funding

IDRC provided flexible funding, enabling a virtuous collaboration between national and international agencies who were deeply committed to supporting evidence-based policy.

5 Research for Development: What's Next?

The results from the survey² showed ASEAN researchers highly value the opportunities made possible through IDRC's support, noting numerous benefits while also identifying a few challenges. Both the advantages and challenges present opportunities to strengthen partnerships and enhance investments in development research across ASEAN member countries. These findings serve as a call to action for revitalizing support and fostering a broad coalition rooted in ASEAN countries to scale up development research efforts.

The funding gap for development research in the region has not been quantified, but researchers report the benefits of this type of research and lack of funding of this type of research has negative impacts, which extend beyond financial incentives.

Most of the time, we conduct the study and we publish a nice paper and send a report to the government and it sits there. Applicability is low. [With the IDRC-funded project], we run an intervention: it's more risky but we managed to develop a model that is replicable. But of course it costs more.

Dr. Liem T. Nguyen,
Institute of Population,
Health and Development, Hanoi, Vietnam

Researchers express a strong desire for greater flexibility in funding, citing IDRC's approach as a shining example. According to the survey, the IDRC model also provides increased opportunities to build capacity and for researchers to advance their careers.

Many of the IDRC-funded scholars are now working for the Ministries in their governments and having influence in decision making. Others are in civil society

organizations working for and with the grassroots people. Many are lecturers in universities and mentoring young people. We would have wanted more of this.

Dr. Maria Cristeta N. Cuaresma,
Program Head, Graduate Education and
Institutional Development Department,
SEARCA, The Philippines

IDRC funding stands out for its flexibility in adapting to the complexity of local policy contexts, as well as its emphasis on capacity building and fostering long-term partnerships, compared to other international donors.

Mr. Min Zar Ni Lin,
Centre for Economic and Social
Development, Yangon, Myanmar

The current gap in funding affects all dimensions of development research which are outlined at the beginning of the document. Responses to the survey show that flexible, mission-driven funding is essential to support research in the most sensitive settings and on some of the most transformative issues.

²The online survey tool was circulated across all 180 project leads, with a 20% response rate (n=36). The results from the survey, along with in-depth interviews carried out with 8 project leads in the weeks that followed, delivered the bulk of the evidence presented.

The Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar initiative was exceptional. I love IDRC, they can be picky in terms of their own demands, but it's one of the best organizations in terms of their understanding of gender in context. They are unique in looking at high-quality research on gender. They fill a gap. And they continued after the coup.

Dr. Philippe Doneys,

Associate Professor,
Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand

If IDRC funding were to see a significant rise, I envision several positive impacts specifically tailored to the unique socio-economic landscape of ASEAN. Firstly, enhanced funding would enable investment in critical areas such as sustainable development, climate change mitigation, and technological innovation. This influx of resources could pave the way for local research initiatives that directly address pertinent issues faced by member states, including environmental degradation and public health crises. Moreover, a boost in financial support would facilitate greater collaboration between local researchers and international experts, fostering an exchange of knowledge and best practices. This collaborative spirit could lead to the development of innovative strategies tailored to the region's specific needs, ultimately resulting in more effective policies and practices. Furthermore, increased funding can help strengthen local institutions by providing them with the necessary resources for capacity building. This not only empowers local communities by equipping them with skills but also enhances their ability to contribute to policy-making processes that affect their lives. Finally, I believe that a significant increase in IDRC funding could stimulate economic growth within the region. By investing in education, technology, and sustainable practices, we could see new job creation and improved livelihoods across ASEAN, reducing poverty rates and fostering overall economic stability.

Zakiullah (Zaki) Munshi,

Program Director – Asia,
Trade Facilitation Office (TFO) Canada

Central to achieving this vision is sustained support that goes beyond the capacities of international funders alone, including IDRC. Many important projects come to a halt without IDRC funding, even after receiving multiple international grants.

If the international donors want to see policy impact, they should provide funding for a longer-term project, for example, a three to five years project. I don't think a one-year project can make a visible achievement. [D]onors need to support not only research, but also the network engagement between the local, transnational and global policy groups.

Ms Aye Lei Tun,

Independent Research on Gender Issues,
Myanmar

There is a clear link between the number of IDRC grants a project receives and grantees' perceptions of its impact. Projects with a single grant receive an average impact rating of 5/10, compared to 9/10 for those with three or more grants. Notably, 53% of survey respondents attribute the project's impact fully to IDRC, while 83% credit its support fully or largely to IDRC. This highlights IDRC's role in addressing a funding gap, occupying a niche with little competition from other donors. However, this reliance underscores a double-edged sword: while IDRC enables significant impact, the sustainability of its support remains constrained by the structural limits of international funding.

The vision outlined in the document positions international funders, such as IDRC, as trusted and competent partners with local connections. However, the future clearly lies in partnerships with regional and national funders committed to sustain researchers in ASEAN countries in the long term, and strengthen the use of evidence in development policy at a whole system level.

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