

## **Social Science Research in India and the Role of Donor Agencies**

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The social science research scene in India presents a picture of great contrast. There exist, on the one hand, a few centers of excellence with front rank researchers whose work is recognized internationally, and on the other a large body institutions and individuals whose contribution to social science research can only be considered marginal. One consequence of this sharp duality in the quality of social science research is that the tradition of research and analysis-based policy formulation in the government is rather weak and unevenly developed, especially at the level of state governments. The central government not only has access to the premier research centres, many of which are located in the national capital, but has also built up considerable capacity within its own ministries, departments and agencies for policy research and analysis. This also helps them in establishing links with various research centres and think tanks for seeking policy-oriented advice thereby creating a two-way process of interaction between the government and research centres and think tanks to the mutual benefit of both. The government gains by getting the advice of independent experts, who in turn get access to data and information and the thinking of the government at the highest levels on important issue of policies and programmes.<sup>1</sup>

The situation is quite different at the state level. However, a caveat needs to be entered at the outset. There are 28 states in India with a very wide variation in size of population – ranging from 540,493 in Sikkim to 166,052,859 in Uttar Pradesh. Thus there is bound to be considerable variety in the capacity and capability of the state governments. In general, the larger states, defined as having a population of 10 million and above and numbering 18 according to the 2001 census, may be considered to be better endowed than the others in terms academic resources and expert. Even among the larger states, barring a few notable exceptions, the tradition of research and analysis based policy formation is not very well established. This in spite of the fact that India has a fairly large and spatially spread out infrastructure of social science institutions.

At the base of this infrastructure are the more than 225 institutions of higher learning including universities, institutions deemed to be universities (e.g., India Institutes of Technology) and other institutions imparting higher education (e.g., India Institutes of Management). The universities and higher education institutions are spread out all over the

country with each state, except Sikkim (population 540,493) and Mizoram (population 891,058), having at least one university. Almost all universities, including some technical universities and institutes, have departments of social science. However, while all are engaged in teaching at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels and most also have provision for doctoral studies, the research capability at this level is rather uneven. There are a few centers of excellence, largely concentrated in a handful of prestigious universities and institutes located mainly in metropolitan cities and large urban centers. The rest have not been able to make a significant contribution to social science research - either theoretical or applied and policy-oriented. This has serious implications for governments trying to seek research inputs for policy formulation. Their choice is restricted to a handful of institutions, mainly at the national level, that are not able to meet the diverse demands on their limited resources. This may partly explain the weak tradition of research and analysis-based policy and decision-making at the level of state governments.

The lack of adequate research capacity in the social sciences became a matter of concern for the Government of India by the end of the sixties. The rapid expansion in the number of institutions of higher education, especially universities and colleges, after independence and the large increase in enrolments in these institutions exacted a heavy price in terms of a fall in standards. The problem was especially worrisome in the case of some of the older and established universities and colleges and in the "soft" disciplines of humanities and social sciences. Some policies of the government in the immediate aftermath of independence, especially the desire to achieve rapid economic growth through the application of science and technology, also contributed to the neglect of social science on the one hand and ironically, to the decline of scientific research in the universities on the other. Prompted by the desire to promote scientific research as the basis of development and growth, the Government of India set up specialized bodies like the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) etc. These bodies established a chain of specialized research institutions and laboratories outside the university system. Being much better funded than university departments they attracted some of the best scientific talent from them. This had an adverse affect on the research capacity of university departments. Most of these specialized bodies for scientific research had been set up soon after independence. Some like the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) came into existence towards the end of the eighties.

Influenced by the “success” of these bodies in promoting scientific research, the Government of India set up the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) in 1969 for promoting research and studies in social sciences. In addition to providing support for research studies, doctoral work, seminars, publications and documentation, the ICSSR also funded research institutes. Unlike the CSIR, ICAR and ICMR, it did not establish its own research institutions but provided assistance in the form of grants-in-aid to independent research institutes. In the initial years most of the institutions supported by the ICSSR were located in a few large cities, especially in Delhi. With a view to achieving a better geographical spread of social science research capacity the ICSSR adopted a policy of supporting new institutions only in the states, and not in Delhi. Allied to this was its insistence on matching grants from the state government concerned as a precondition for funding support from the ICSSR. Over the years the number of research institutes supported by the ICSSR has risen to 27. (Vaidyanathan, 2001; Sethi, 2000) Of these five are located in Delhi and the rest in the various states: 3 each in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh (Hyderabad), 2 each in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, and one each in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Punjab (Chandigarh), Rajasthan, Orissa, Bihar and Assam. For roughly the first two decades of its existence the efforts of ICSSR to promote regional capacity in social science research through the instrument of research institutions located in the states and jointly funded by it and the concerned state government seemed to work well. This was a period of gradual expansion in the number of such institutions as well as in their activities and faculty strength. Financially too they did not face too many problems as the grants from the ICSSR along with matching grants from state governments were generally enough to meet their normal expenses. During this period many institutions also built up infrastructure in the form of permanent buildings and campuses. In many instances, especially where the institutions were facing funding problems, the ICSSR also arranged special grants from the Ford Foundation. These grants were used to strengthen libraries, provide infrastructure facilities like computers, photocopiers etc. and support additional faculty and research support staff.

Towards the end of the decade of the eighties, and more especially in the nineties, the finances of the ICSSR came under stress. It was not able to get adequate funding from the Government of India - its only source of funds. The Government of India too was in the throes of a severe resource constraint that only became more acute when the country adopted structural adjustment policies and the attendant programme of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. Budgetary support for higher

education and research was reduced, or at best kept constant in nominal terms, on the ground that support for these activities fell in the category of non-merit subsidies that needed to be eliminated over a period of time. Given the generally high rates of inflation in the early nineties, this meant a sharp decline in real terms. The ICSSR funded institutions in the states faced a twofold disadvantage because the state governments (with a few exceptions) generally interpreted their obligation to provide matching grants in a strict way by matching almost to a penny, and no more, what the ICSSR gave.<sup>ii</sup> Thus any reduction in grants from the ICSSR meant a similar reduction in the share of the state government.

It may be recalled that decline in state support to higher education has been a worldwide phenomenon during the last two decades. Higher education institutions are now expected to meet a large part of their expenditure. What we see in India is therefore not entirely unique. Yet the transition from full state funding to partial funding has not been without considerable pain and stress. Unfortunately only a few ICSSR funded institutions have proved equal to the task. Those that could not adjust to the changed situation have tended to stagnate and decline. Unfortunately, the fate of the ICSSR itself has not been any different. It too has tended to stagnate and has not been able to adequately fulfill its mandate of guiding and providing leadership to social science research in the country. This period of financial stress for the ICSSR and the institutions funded by it has not been entirely without a silver lining. It has at least resulted in sifting the grain from the chaff in the sense that the institutions that have been able to adjust to the changed circumstances also show better achievement in terms of research contribution.

Social science research in Universities and ICSSR supported research institutes, which are part of the state supported infrastructure, suffers from some specific shortcomings. With only a few honourable exceptions, the research work in these institutions tends to be centred around individual faculty members and researchers. If these individuals leave the institution their research legacy also tends to go along with them. The institutionalization of research is rather weak and only a few institutions have emerged that have been consistently engaged in quality research and have developed a strong research profile. Many of them are located in Central Universities and institutions, especially Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Hyderabad Universities, Indian Institutes of Technology and Indian Institutes of Management, and only a few in state universities. The same holds true of ICSSR supported institutions as well. Only a few may be considered to have developed an institutional profile and programme of research. A large number of these institutions have become almost totally

dependent on sponsored research projects. In many cases these projects merely involve collection of data for government agencies with little or no analysis, or are in the nature of short-term consultancy assignments bringing little academic credit. Increasingly many institutions appear to be responding to requests for studies and/or data collection from outside sponsoring agencies rather than acting on the basis of their own research agenda (Vaidyanathan,2001; Sethi 2000).

There are a number of reasons, some quite obvious and understandable, why this has happened. Clearly, funding constraints have played a major role. Faced with a rising gap between receipt and expenditure, research institutes have found such assignments a very tempting and easy source of funds. However, as more and more assignments of this kind are taken up, the limited faculty and professional resources tend to get preempted by them. Not enough time and resources are then available for pursuing an institutionally defined agenda of research. Non-availability of any free money within the regular institutional budget for research has only exacerbated the problem. Institutions could have responded to resource and funding crunch in one of two ways: (i) identifying their research priorities and programmes, developing ideas for research and soliciting funds from donors and funding agencies by using their own past research record and faculty profile to elicit donor support and respect; and (ii) responding to requests for short-term consultancy assignments, evaluation studies, data collection exercises, and training programmes from programme/project implementation agencies at the cost of their own research priorities. Many institutions, unfortunately have opted for the later path. In the process they appear to have compromised with their own research reputations on the one hand and on the other their capacity to undertake serious research.

In addition to the social science research institutes, NGOs have emerged as another important player in the arena of social research in recent years, especially during the last two decades. NGOs interest in social research can be related directly their involvement in social action especially in the development sector. Involvement in social action, particularly at the grass root level, brings the NGOs in direct contact with the social, political, economic and cultural realities and complexities of India. This could challenge many opinions, beliefs and assumptions about Indian society and prompt a search for fresh insights and answers to some of the dilemmas confronting them. In many instances the attempts of NGOs to understand the reality around them may fall short of the rigorous standards applied to academic research in the social science. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that the issues they seek to understand

are not mere academic puzzles for them, but essential parts of the reality in which they operate. Hence much of their activity in the research arena falls within the genre of action research. Research for them is an aid to action in so far as the issues for research emerge from action programmes and the end-use of the results of research is to aid action and enhance its quality.

While the bulk of NGO activity is concentrated at the micro level, there are now many NGOs which function at the macro level: national, regional and even international. These NGOs seek to influence policy at these levels and also build alliances with grassroots level NGOs on specific issues. Their involvement in research, therefore, takes a different form altogether. The issues that concern them generally have a macro relevance: issues like globalization, structural adjustment and their impact on national policies and priorities as well as on specific groups and sections of society: workers, farmers, women, children etc; strengthening civil society; good governance; sustainable development policies; conservation and management of natural resources and biodiversity conservation etc. Like the grassroots level NGOs their interest in research is not merely academic. Rather it has an instrumental value as a tool for advocacy and for influencing policy. Clearly, alliances with grassroots NGOs through collaboration in research and advocacy for policy changes can prove to be of considerable benefit to both kinds of NGOs. The large NGOs involve not only other NGOs in their research and advocacy work but also seek the involvement of academics and professionals. This enhances the academic rigour, credibility and acceptability of their research studies on the one hand, and on the other adds greater weight to their advocacy efforts.

It may be mentioned here that NGO involvement in social research – whether at the grass root level or at the macro level - is a relatively recent phenomenon in India. It is directly related to the growth of NGO activity that has taken place during the last quarter century. Non-governmental activity is not a new phenomenon in India. It has existed, generally as philanthropy, throughout history. It acquired an organised form in the nineteenth century when the legal framework in the form of Societies. Registration Act 1860 was created. The rise of nationalism and the freedom movement further emphasized the role of voluntary agencies. Gandhi's emphasis on constructive work alongside political activity provided a new impetus for the growth of these bodies. With the achievement of independence Gandhian organisations engaged in constructive work became close allies of the new state. These links, however, were snapped after 1975 when the Gandhian organisations

joined the movement against the state of emergency imposed by the India government under Mrs Indira Gandhi. The emergency and the return to democratic functioning in 1977 marks a new phase, as it saw the emergence of NGOs as we know them today. Their involvement in social research also began during this period.

A major issue with NGOs in India, as perhaps in other parts of the world, has been their dependence on donors for funds. Only a few have been able to break out of this dependence by developing their independent sources of income. Dependence on donor support also extends to the research activity of NGOs. Thus the research work undertaken by them is either supported by or even proposed by the donor organizations. Generally this need not create a problem because the organizations only take up those research studies and assignments that correspond with their own understanding of and approach to issues being investigated. In many cases the NGOs have long-standing relationship with donors so that they not only understand each other but may also share a common world-view. The problem really arises when the research problem is identified and the design developed by the donor agency and the participating NGOs participate only as junior partners and data gathers. This does not really result in any sort of research capacity-building within the participating organizations. The problem here is actually similar to the dilemma that some of the ICSSR research institutes have been facing.

## II

Support of foreign donor agencies has been available for social science research for a number of years. The nature of this support has varied over time and from agency to agency. Although a number of agencies are involved in funding research we have selected the following donors for our review as they have had a fairly long association of support to social science research in India and have developed clear programmes and guidelines for funding such research:

- Ford Foundation
- International Development Research Center (IDRC)
- Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute (SICI)

In addition we have also examined the contribution of the Indo-Dutch Programme on Alternatives in Development largely funded by the Netherlands government and implemented in collaboration with the ICSSR.

## **Ford Foundation**

The Ford Foundation is perhaps the oldest donor agency in India, with a history of almost half a century of active work in India and South Asia through its New Delhi office. It set up its New Delhi office, the first outside the United States, in 1952 at the invitation of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. During this period it has provided support and assistance to the government in various development programmes, been instrumental in the setting up of new institutions and initiation of innovative programmes, extended support for strengthening many institutions and funded action and research projects by NGOs and education and research centers.

During the first two decades of its operations in India the Foundation functioned both as a grant making organization and an operating agency focusing primarily on agriculture and rural development. In addition to providing technical advice it also implemented projects directly. Since 1972 it has functioned mainly by giving grants to research institutions, NGOs, government agencies and universities. Over the years it has made major commitments in the areas of agriculture, rural development, reproductive health and population, planning and management, culture, rights and governance. Its grants are designed to strengthen individual and institutional capabilities, support innovative projects and disseminate information on successful approaches. ([www.fordfound.org/menu.cfm?office=New+Delhi&language=english&text\\_version=no](http://www.fordfound.org/menu.cfm?office=New+Delhi&language=english&text_version=no))



Among the notable successes of its efforts, mention may be made of the following:

- Intensive Agricultural Districts Programme (IADP) and Intensive Agricultural Areas Programme (IAAP) supported by it in the sixties that was the precursor of the Green Revolution in India.
- The Sukhomajri project that demonstrated the feasibility of community-based natural resource management and provided inspiration for other watershed development projects funded by the foundation (eg. Fakot and Khulgad in UP hills).
- Support for establishment of institutions like the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA) and Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development (SPWD).

At present the programme activities of the Foundation are concentrated in three broad areas of concern:

- Rural Community Resource Management
- Women's Status and Well-Being
- Diversity and Pluralism

### **Rural Community Resource Management.**

The objective of this programme is to improve livelihoods of the rural poor by focusing on evolving more equitable, productive and sustainable institutions for managing forest and irrigation. These issues are addressed by attempting to facilitate government-community partnerships. The specific programmes being taken up are:

- Joint Forest Management (JFM). This is a new approach to forestry based on partnerships between state forest departments and local community institutions for the protection and management of forests. The foundation gives funding support to NGOs and institutions for community level action, research, documentation, training, extension, networking and policy analysis to facilitate community institution building. Though JFM is being implemented in 16 states, the Ford Foundation is supporting the above activities in 5 states viz., West Bengal and Orissa in the East, Gujarat and Rajasthan in the West and Haryana in the North. At the national level it funds the National Support Group for JFM at the SPWD as well as research, training and advocacy institutions examining ecological, economic and institutional aspects of JFM. The studies

supported relate to issues like community institution building and participatory

micro-planning; innovative silvicultural approaches to enhance productivity and meet multiple objectives; equity issues with special reference to gender dimensions; income generation through processing of NTFPs; management of funds generated from forest product revenue; and understanding the causes of conflict and tools for its resolution.

➤ Water Resources Development and Management.

The focus of Foundation work is on support to participatory development and management of small scale water resources especially small tank-scale irrigation in Tamil Nadu, local control of surface irrigation systems and evolving more sustainable patterns of ground water use in Gujarat and improvement of hill irrigation in Nepal including development of participatory planning, policy making and more appropriate designs and refining models of farmer-government partnerships in resource mobilization and transfer of management. In all the three areas special emphasis is given to analysis of water rights (statutory as well as customary) and alternative, especially local, mechanisms of conflict resolution and developing policies for promotion of sustainability, equity and productivity.

➤ Women's Status and Well-Being

The social and economic advancement of women is a theme pursued by the Foundation since the mid-70s. Its initiatives have included support to women's development research centres, livelihood and employment, empowerment, reproductive health and women's rights and legal literacy. The focus of its programmes is on critical reflection and agenda-setting process on gender-related issues. The research component of the reproductive health programme emphasises "policy oriented research, advocacy and experimentation in order to empower women as the major users and providers of child survival and reproductive health services. Support is also provided for applied social science research on women's reproductive health issues, especially the social, economic and programmatic factors which prevent women from effectively resolving reproductive health problems."

➤ Diversity and Pluralism.

The aim of this programme theme is to preserve and strengthen the great diversity and pluralism of Indian society by helping to “increase tolerance and appreciation of diversity particularly in the area of cultural expression, and to help reduce prejudice and discrimination against vulnerable segments of society.” One of programmes taken up under this theme is Campus Diversity Initiative designed to help faculty and student to understand and appreciate the inherently diverse and plural nature of Indian society especially in the realm of cultural tradition and expression.

➤ Folklore studies and Outreach

This sub-theme, in existence since 1987, supports a programme of folklore research and teaching and promotion of folk arts in South India.

➤ Local Governance.

This programme seeks to work towards strengthening of local governance through the Panchayati Raj institutions which have now been provided constitutional status in India. Among other activities of support to these institutions e.g. training and support to women panchayat members, the foundation also supports action research and monitoring of state policies in implementing the constitutional mandate in this regard.

➤ Regional Peace and Cooperation

With a view to promoting peace and cooperation in the South Asian region the Foundation has adopted a three-pronged approach: Track II dialogues among a cross section of leaders and opinion makers; strengthening independent policy research and media reporting; and encouraging joint approaches to water resource management in the Ganga-Brahmaputra Basin.

[www.fordfound.org/programs.cfm?office=New+Delhi&language=english&text\\_version=no](http://www.fordfound.org/programs.cfm?office=New+Delhi&language=english&text_version=no)

A listing of some of the research studies funded during the last one year gives an idea of the range of topics that have found support in the Foundation’s research support programme. These studies are:

- Links between Panchayati Raj and tank irrigation

- Participatory irrigation management policy:
- Water resource system performance.
- Research and documentation on Indian Philanthropic sector.
- Pastoral and non-agricultural function of a river system.
- Tribal-managed, forest product-based enterprise development in protected areas.

## **International Development Research Centre (IDRC)**

The IDRC is a public corporation created by the Parliament of Canada in 1970 with the objective of supporting research in developing countries in order to help them seek solutions to their social, economic and environmental problems. The Parliament of Canada is also the main source of funds for IDRC, although support is also obtained from other sources - bilateral and multilateral – as well.

The New Delhi office of IDRC was opened in 1983 to serve the countries of the SAARC Region viz., Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

In 2000, IDRC formulated a Corporate Strategy and Program Framework (CSPF) for the five-year period 2000-2005 which is spelt out in its publication **IDRC In a Changing World: Program Directions 2000-2005**. The CSPF commits IDRC to strengthen and to help mobilize the indigenous research capacity of developing countries in three broad programme areas:

- Social and Economic Equity
- Environment and Natural Resources Management
- Information and Communication Technologies for Development.

These programme areas are defined in rather broad terms and cut across disciplinary boundaries. In the words of the CSPF document, “IDRC starts with the problem and determines what knowledge and which disciplines can contribute to its solution”. In order to give a concrete shape to this approach it organises multi-disciplinary teams of its staff into Program Initiatives. Apart from arranging funds for projects, the initiatives act as networks linking research on specific problems and for setting the research agenda. Because of its very nature, the work of Program Initiatives may fall under more than one programme area. Another initiative of the IDRC is to convene multiple donors to work towards common goals. The instrument used for this purpose is the International Secretariat, a kind of research consortium made up of several donors that provides administrative and financial infrastructure needed to undertake a long-term research agenda. The Secretariats are located within IDRC, but they are guided by independent steering committees.

In 2000, IDRC supported 11 programme initiatives, 9 international secretariats and a small number of large projects in the four regions in

which it worked viz., Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East & North Africa, and Latin America & Caribbean.

IDRC supports research in six broad thematic areas internationally:

- Biodiversity conservation
- Information and Communication
- Equitable use of natural resources
- Strategies and policies for healthy societies
- Food security
- Sustainable employment

Of these the first four are of particular relevance for the New Delhi office as most of the research supported by it is concentrated in these areas. The Program Initiatives in these four areas are:

- Sustainable use of Biodiversity (SUB)
- Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM)
- Micro Impacts of Macro-economic and Adjustment Policies (MIMAP)
- Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health (ECOHEALTH)

### **Sustainable Use of Biodiversity (SUB)**

The SUB Program Initiative focuses on the relationships between the local management of biodiversity and global policy initiatives. Research activities seek to diversify, augment and sustain the food security, health systems and livelihood options that local communities derive from biodiversity. The specific objectives of the SUB PI are:

- To promote use, maintenance and enhancement of the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities that conserve and sustainable use biodiversity.
- To support the creation of models for policy and legislation that recognise the rights of indigenous and local communities to genetic resources and to the equitable sharing of the benefits of the use of those resources in the context of intellectual property regimes.
- To develop incentives, methods and policy options that facilitate community participation in the design and implementation of *in situ* agricultural and aquatic biodiversity conservation and development strategies.
- To support the development of options for sustainable livelihoods and in cluties for the sustainable use of natural

products from biodiversity resources, especially medicinal plants([www.idrc.ca/biodiversity/index\\_e.html](http://www.idrc.ca/biodiversity/index_e.html))

## **Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM)**

The objective of this Programme Initiatives is “to assist women and men living in ecosystems that face increasing resource exploitation to manage and use their natural resources sustainably.” It supports research that concentrates on:

- Enhancing livelihood options, food security, and improvement in the wellbeing of the different members of the communities
- Reversing the practices that lead to degradation of the natural resource base
- Providing a clearer understanding of power and gender relations within communities to promote policies and programmes that enable women and other disadvantaged groups to contribute more actively to the effective management of a community’s natural resources
- Developing an understanding of local and national policies that promote and enhance CBNRM
- Developing new gender sensitive methods, processes, technologies, and policies in support of CBNRM.
- Adopting and refining innovations developed under IDRC support by other donors, governments, NGOs, and local communities. ([www.idrc.ca/research/index\\_e.html](http://www.idrc.ca/research/index_e.html))
- Under the SUB Program Initiative an important activity supported is the Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Programme in Asia (MAPPA). The objective of MAPPA is to “promote the conservation and sustainable use of medicinal and aromatic plants by involving indigenous and local communities in research and networking projects. A number of projects explore new approaches to conserving and using medicinal plants, cultivating them, and improving the understanding and documentation of indigenous knowledge” ([www.idrc.ca/biodiversity/index\\_e.html](http://www.idrc.ca/biodiversity/index_e.html)). MAPPA has replaced the IDRC Medicinal Plants Network which since 1994 has been attempting to network national research institutes, universities, drug companies , NGOs, government agencies, and international donors in three main areas of research: biodiversity conservation through support for the cultivation of medicinal plants and other alternatives to forest collection; indigenous knowledge and resources; primary



health care through support for research on safe and effective plant-based medicines .

## **Shastri Indo–Canadian Institute (SICI)**

The Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, named after Lal Babadur Shastri, Prime Minister of India from 1964-66 was founded in 1968 jointly by the governments of Canada and India as a non-profit charitable organization. It is funded by grants and contributions from the two governments. The SICI is located in the University of Calgary. The Institute at present is engaged in funding of research, linking institutions in the two countries and organising seminars and conferences in the humanities and social sciences. In the initial years it was involved in encouraging teaching and research on India in Canadian institutions, funding fellowships for this purpose and distributing Indian books and journals to libraries in its Canadian member institutions. Based on its success in this work, the institute took up the work of promoting Canadian studies in India in the early eighties and by the end of the eighties it expanded its activities into the field of development studies and also included law, management, education and the arts in its areas of interest.

The SICI has as its members most of the major Canadian universities and specialized institutions like the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Initially it had only 4 members, all universities. At present the membership stands at 21 and includes some of the premier institutions in the country.

An important initiative of SICI during the decade of the nineties has been the launch of the Development Studies Programme. This programme supports individual and institutional academic collaboration between the two countries in the form exchange of scholars, journalists and speakers in the field of development, and projects that have a catalytic effect in promoting Indian studies in Canadian universities. Funding for the programme is provided by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). A major component of the programme is the CIDA-SICI Partnership Project. Under this, funding is provided for collaborative research by bi-national teams of Canadian and Indian researchers on topics of mutual interest. The first phase of the project was from 1992 to 1996 and the second phase from 1996 to 2000. A third phase is planned to commence in 2001. In the first phase support was provided to projects in the areas of environment and gender issues, economic growth and business development, and demography and development. In the second phase 11 bi national projects in the fields of development and environment, social and economic reform, private sector development and gender and development were supported. The criteria of selection was the potential of the studies to contribute to policy development in the subject areas.

[www.ucalgary.ca/~sici/textsite/tshastriOrg.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/~sici/textsite/tshastriOrg.html)

## **Indo-Dutch Programme on Alternatives in Development (IDPAD)**

IDPAD, as the name suggests, is a collaborative programme of research on development between the ICSSR and the Netherlands. The programme was initiated in 1981 and has so far completed four phases of four years each. The duration of the various phases was as follows: Phase I from 1981 to 1984; Phase II from 1984 to 1988; Phase III from 1990 to 1995; Phase IV from 1997 to 2001. The current, or the fourth, phase is coming to an end this year and the fifth phase is likely to start thereafter. Agreement has been reached between the ICSSR and the Netherlands committee to extend the programme for another four years. Though the programme is a collaborative one between the ICSSR and the Dutch side, almost the entire funding (over 95 percent) is provided by the latter. The academic programme is supervised by two committees consisting of independent scholars and researchers – one in the Netherlands and the other in India.

The basic objective of IDPAD is to encourage and support social science research on development, especially issues connected with equity and the impact of development on poor and marginalized groups and regions and on alternative ways of meeting the needs and aspirations of the people through development policies and programmes.

IDPAD has supported three kinds of research activities:

- Individual research projects and studies conducted either singly or jointly by Indian and Dutch scholars.
- Seminars and conferences on themes and topics of relevance to development.
- Exchange of scholars between the two countries.

Ever since its inception IDPAD has funded a total of 96 research studies in India: 17 in Phase I, 21 in Phase II, 27 in Phase III and 31 in Phase IV. These studies cover a very wide range of themes and topics. Some of the major thematic areas are: industries (small scale and export-oriented), multinational corporations, womens studies, international economic order, comparative perspectives on Asian rural transportation, recent trends in European society, environment and development and state and society. Many research studies funded by IDPAD involve collaboration between Indian and Dutch scholars.

Based on this brief review of donor support to social science research in India, we find that a number of agencies, mostly governmental but also including important non government agencies like the Ford Foundation, are activity involved and have been so for a number of years. The Ford Foundation has been in India for almost fifty years while others like the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute have been functioning for over thirty years. Programmes and agencies like IDRC and IDPAD are much younger, being 15 to 20 years old.

Given the sheer size and diversity of India in general and of the institutional base for social research in particular, donor support can only constitute a very small part of the total resource needs of these institutions. For the bulk of their need the research institutions will continue to depend on indigenous sources of funding - largely from the state, but now increasingly also from corporate and other sources. This does not, however, imply that donor support is unimportant or even peripheral to the needs of these institutions. It provides crucial support in certain key areas like institutional capacity building, infrastructure development, research programmes and activities, sharing of ideas and experiences (seminars and conferences etc.) and dissemination of research findings (publications).

### III

The foregoing analysis shows that, unlike in many other developing countries, there exists considerable social science research capacity in India in its numerous universities, research institutes and now the NGOs. Yet, major problems remain e.g., the inadequacy of the institutional infrastructure and its geographical spread, relevance of social science research from a policy perspective, and the poor linkages of NGOs engaged in research with the social science research establishment. This issue needs to be elaborated.

We have noted earlier that there are more than 220 universities in the country with most having social science departments. Not all of them, however, have been able to make their mark as centres of social research. Most social science departments are primarily teaching centers with hardly any facilities for worthwhile research, while a few universities are mainly examining bodies with only a handful of teaching departments. Hence very little, if any, social science research takes place in them. Infrastructure of social science research in the form of library with access

to latest books and journals, computer facilities, internet connection, research grants etc. are often not available in many places. The resource crunch that has hit higher education during the last decade has only exacerbated the already difficult situation. Universities and research institutes have had to cut back on purchase of books and subscription to journals.

A related problem is that the few centres of excellence that do exist in the university departments of social science tend to be concentrated in the large cities. These numbers are wholly inadequate for a country of India's size (both in terms of population and area) and diversity. The diversity in India, let it be remembered, encompasses geography, history, ethnicity, caste, religion, language, culture, mores, occupation, economic status etc. with multiple and overlapping structures of status and hierarchy. The universities and other institutions of higher education have failed to adequately represent and project this diversity not only as an essential feature of Indian society, but ultimately as a source of its strength. On the contrary they have been operating within a system that imposes a drab and stultifying uniformity in the name of common standards and equality (Ghosh,2000). The real victim in this case is the capacity of these institutions to address the great variety in Indian society, especially the different shades and nuances that get suppressed in the concern with the larger picture or the "mainstream". This ultimately has a debilitating effect on the capacity of the society to withstand the pulls and pressures exerted by forces like the market, technology, globalization etc to conform to a drab pattern of world-wide uniformity. On the other hand natural processes underline the importance of variety and diversity as factors responsible for the survival of species.

Research institutes within the ICSSR system also face almost the same problems as the universities. They too have a few centres of excellence, again situated in the metropolitan centres and large cities. Unlike the universities they cannot justify their existence on the basis of their teaching functions. Hence many face a serious problem of relevance. The tradition of policy-oriented research too is rather weak in many of these institutions. Combined with a severe resource crunch faced by the ICSSR and the state governments that in many cases provide matching grants, their cup of woe is really full. Thus many research institutes, especially those in the states and more particularly the backward states, have not been able to establish their credibility and credentials as serious centres of relevant social science research that can illumine the prevalent social pathologies and thereby help in finding solutions on the one hand, and on the other provide valuable inputs into the policy process. This has also

had an adverse effect on the efforts of the research community to plead for higher allocations of funds from the government (central as well as state) to these research institutions. As one commentator on the state of ICSSR funded research institutes puts it: "From less than half-a-dozen in the early 70s, the number of ICSSR institutions has expanded to 27 now ..... Many of these are but a parody in the name of research. This proliferation of ill-equipped, low quality research centres further undermined concern about inadequate funding at the higher levels of decision-making." (Sethi,2000). In other words if the legitimate demand of the research institutions for more funds from the public exchequer is to carry weight and be taken seriously then they have to pull themselves up and put their own house in order by delivering quality research output which has purchase in the academic and policy market. "Social support and respect" Sethi argues "cannot be assumed; they have to be earned."

As regards the NGOs engaged in social research, it may be said that though their numbers are not too large as of now, since this phenomenon is of quite recent origin, their main advantage over the formal institutions of research is their commitment and dedication to the social problems being studied by them. Research most often, is not simply an academic puzzle or exercise for these organizations, but is closely related to their own activities and therefore of immediate relevance. Many of them through their consistent work in selected areas have had considerable impact on the policy process. Unfortunately NGOs engaged in research are not generally accepted as genuine researchers by the dominant and formal structures of social science research. They rather tend to ignore them. As a result they are denied access to funds and academic legitimacy that the social science research establishment controls. This is a pity, because in a country of India's size, plurality and diversity, NGOs can play a vital role in extending the reach of the social science research establishment and enriching and deepening the understanding of social reality at the grass root level. In fact there is a very strong need to develop greater interaction and collaboration between NGOs and formal research institutions in the area of research.

While examining the role of donors in social science research we have noted that given the large size and diversity of India the resources that they can commit to research can only have a limited reach. Hence it is quite understandable that they have tended to concentrate their limited resources in a few strategic areas instead of spreading them thin over a large area. Thus each donor agency has selected for itself a few thrust areas, and in some cases priority regions too, in which it concentrates resources and attention. In such a situation it is inevitable that large gaps

remain where research capacity may need to be built up. These gaps could be both spatial as well as issue or theme related. We have for instance pointed out earlier that the tradition of research and knowledge-based policy formulation is fairly well developed at the level of the central government, but quite inadequate at the level of some state governments, especially those states that exhibit clear signs of economic and social backwardness. In fact it may even be argued that the persistence of poverty, economic stagnation and social backwardness in these states is related to the poor capacity within them to base policy on sound data, research and analysis. Hence development of such capacity is also likely to act as a catalyst for their development and growth.

Another critical gap that needs to be filled in the area of social research is support to NGOs. As has been argued above NGOs need to be accepted as legitimate research agencies and therefore fit candidates for development of research capacity on the same terms as the “formal” research institutions. Support to NGOs for building research capacity will help to enrich the tradition of action research and participatory research pioneered by them. Both these traditions provide a wholly new perspective on social issues and problems as they bring to bear on them the perspectives of practitioners and ordinary people. Many-a-times this provides fresh insights and a very useful corrective to the perspective of the “academic” researcher.

Beyond this, each donor agency would, of course, define for itself the priority or thrust areas in which it would support research. The thrust areas, moreover, cannot be determined once for all as they are bound to undergo modifications and changes from time to time in response to changes taking place in the wider society. The experience of all donor agencies supports this fact. Yet it would be useful for donors to keep in mind what one senior Indian social scientist has to say on this point:

Increased funding must be accompanied by measures to ensure its effective use. Several measures are necessary for this purpose. Funding agencies should be encouraged to prepare, in consultation with experts from both government and non-government institutions, a broad agenda, covering both current and emerging issues on which more information and analytical studies are needed. Besides entertaining individual research proposals relevant to this agenda, a more conscious effort to support sustained institution-based work on well defined themes would benefit both government and research. Endowments for units in institutes (*and NGOs*) to work on selected broad subjects and medium-term contracts with institutions for work on a mutually agreed set of specific studies can be effective means to this end. (Vaidyanathan, 2001) (Matter in parenthesis not in original).



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<sup>i</sup> This optimistic view of research and analysis-based policy-making in the central government is not shared by Vaidyanathan who, in a recent paper, has argued: “Policy-makers’ demand for data is not matched by interest in rigorous, empirically well-grounded analysis as an essential input into decision making.” (Vaidyanathan,2001)

<sup>ii</sup> Unfortunately it has not been possible to get any information on the level of funding provided by state governments to the research institutes where the share of state government grants is much higher than that of the ICSSR. The ICSSR explained that these institutes provide them only limited information on the quantum of state government grants received by them.

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