

IRIS Center

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF Maryland



Women in Mymensingh, Bangladesh, produce distinctive papers for export to Germany.

Since 1997, IRIS has implemented USAID's Job Opportunities and Business Support (JOBS) project, working to expand markets, increase exports, and ensure the sustainability of Bangladesh's small, medium, and micro enterprises. JOBS identifies and develops sectors with the potential to expand and compete in global markets, such as the handmade paper sector.

A policy research and advisory center dedicated to facilitating economic growth and improving governance.

Focus ON Institutions

IRIS is a policy research and advisory center dedicated to facilitating economic growth and improving governance in developing and transition countries. In partnership with international donors, reformers, and scholars, IRIS conducts research, designs and implements programs, and promotes the sharing and application of innovative ideas. Based in economics, but taking an interdisciplinary approach, IRIS focuses on the role of institutions — the formal and informal rules by which individuals organize economic, political, and social activity. IRIS's main areas of expertise include:

- Economic and institutional analysis
- Enterprise development
- Governance and civil society
- Legal and regulatory reform

A source of innovative and strategic thinking on development issues, IRIS was among the first to show that market-augmenting institutions — such as property rights and contract enforcement — are key to development and are more secure when they are embedded in democratic governance institutions. Understanding

how these institutions evolve and applying these insights to particular problems form the work of IRIS's home office and field teams

History

IRIS was founded in 1990 by Mancur Olson, an eminent economist and social-science thinker, with a grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Olson was dedicated to developing and implementing the insight that strong political and legal institutions are not only a hallmark of good governance but also a critical determinant of economic growth. Development economics and growth theory (which traditionally concentrated on capital accumulation and technological progress) now broadly incorporate Olson's emphasis on institutions. Under the direction of Dennis Wood, IRIS employs approximately 25 economists, lawyers, and development specialists at its College Park campus. IRIS also supports a number of employees and long-term consultants working overseas in such countries as Sudan, Bosnia, and Russia.



IRIS's Public Education Specialist Nermin Nišić takes the message of democracy and public participation to a group of citizen representatives in Kakanj municipality, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

From 2002 to 2005, IRIS implemented the Administrative Law and Procedural Systems (ALPS) project for USAID with the goal of improving access to justice in the administrative arena, both for the business community and for the general public of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

Contact Information:

Dennis H. Wood, Executive Director
+1 (301) 405-3110
dwood@umd.edu

Facsimile
+1 (301) 405-3020

Web site
www.iris.umd.edu

Address
IRIS Center
3106 Morrill Hall
College Park, MD 20742

IRIS is located at the University of Maryland, College Park, and operates within University Research Corporation, International — a non-profit research and advisory affiliate of the University.

Research-Based Assistance

Focusing on the role of institutions in promoting economic growth and social well-being, IRIS research and assistance projects respond to three overarching themes:

- The relationship between economic development and political, legal, and market institutions
- Social capital, social norms, and collective action
- Theoretical and policy issues relating to international assistance

IRIS has carried out hundreds of research projects with its own staff and through collaboration with other scholars. A sampling of our current research illustrates the breadth of our institutional perspective:

- The special problems of political and economic transition and post-conflict recovery
- The untapped potential of the small enterprise sector
- Administrative reform and the latent “demand” for good governance
- The challenge of defining and measuring corruption

IRIS integrates analysis and practice — research both informs our advisory assistance and is enhanced by field experience. Application of the best tools of economics, law, and other social sciences to current (though perhaps longstanding) problems distinguishes IRIS.

From their inception, IRIS's advisory assistance projects include analytic and evaluative components that increase their effectiveness. IRIS projects are characterized by consistent attention to institution-building, through

- A collaborative approach
- An emphasis on local ownership and sustainable reform
- Capacity-building to strengthen institutions and civil society

Dissemination

IRIS findings and analysis are disseminated through publications and teaching, as well as in collaborative research and public discussion. IRIS makes its research and advisory assistance experience available to academics, development professionals, and others. Dissemination activities also include training programs, staff presentations, conference.

Clients

IRIS receives funding from USAID and other US government departments (Agriculture, Defense), as well as from the international development agencies of Germany (GTZ), Sweden (SIDA), and the United Kingdom (DIFD).

IRIS also works with the major multilateral development banks (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, Asian Development Bank), United Nations organizations (UNIDO, UNDP), country governments (Bangladesh, Zambia, Russia) and foundations (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Mott, Soros/Open Society Institute).