

# A CCIC / in common Policy Roundtable Strategies for Renewing Canada's International Assistance Conference Report

Chateau Laurier Hotel, Ottawa  
December, 1999

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## 1. Introduction

A Roundtable Dialogue on the future of Canadian aid was held in Ottawa on December 7, 1999, sponsored by the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) and the **in common** campaign. The Roundtable marked the launch of *Reality of Aid 2000*, the annual independent review of overseas development assistance (ODA). The event brought together key thinkers from a variety of sectors: parliamentarians, senior CIDA officials, academics, and the NGO community. It featured an address by the Minister for International Cooperation, the Honourable Maria Minna, with comments from Len Good, the recently appointed President of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Other speakers addressed two panels on **local ownership** and **basic education**.

## **2. A Keynote Address by the Honourable Maria Minna, Minister for International Cooperation (delivered by Len Good, President of the CIDA)**

The Minister commended the CCIC for its contribution to *Reality of Aid 2000*, which "[as] an independent, international review, ... gives us the opportunity to see where we stand with respect to our own expectations, but also how we measure up against the achievements of other donor countries". The presentation emphasized the willingness of the Minister and the CIDA President to listen and to "reinforce consultations between CIDA and the Canadian development community". In the speech, the Minister suggested "we have solid policies on which to build.... Our dialogue should therefore be focussed on making our policies work even better in the field."

The Minister's speech addressed a number of significant issues for renewing Canadian aid (the full text is available on the CIDA website at <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca>).

**On increases to ODA:** The Minister stated her commitment to "do my best to convince the Finance Minister, and my other colleagues, that the time is right to re-invest substantially in ODA. I think we have a strong case to make".

**On tensions in the international development community and the need for debate:** "I've learned that the demands on the Canadian ODA program — including the relationship between our aid, trade, environment and other policies — have been known to create tensions between the various Canadian groups involved in international development. Tension doesn't bother me.... In fact, I think it's healthy. It makes all of us question our assumptions and patterns." She commended "CCIC for its contribution to the report [*The Reality of Aid 2000*]. Your analysis, along with the roundtables you've organized this afternoon, contribute to informed debate around ODA".

**On local ownership and taking a hard look at partnership:** "I've learned that the voluntary sector, both in the North and South, is taking a hard look at the concept of partnership, and that it doesn't hesitate to challenge donor agencies on the effectiveness of the partnerships we foster. I also know that this friendly challenge is being put to Northern NGOs by their Southern partners, in a constructive attempt to define what we all mean by 'local ownership'..." The Minister supports new ways of working such as the sector-wide approaches (SWAPS) the World Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF). Len Good added that the CDF brought together lessons of the last 20 years. The Minister's speech suggested that "They aim to reduce the burden on developing countries of meeting the administrative requirements of donors. They also put the role of developing-country partners in the right perspective: they're the real owners of the projects, and of their results."

**On civil society:** "A major element of the CDF approach is to involve civil society as a full partner in developing a common framework for action, and carrying it out. There is a challenge here — the fact that 'putting the developing country in the driver's seat' is usually taken to mean 'putting the government in the driver's seat', at least as a first step. Where government doesn't interact well with local civil society, this can pose a definite problem."

**On Basic Education:** The Minister intends to "champion" this issue. "There isn't a doubt in my mind that education, and particularly girls' education, can make a tremendous difference in fighting poverty and addressing key economic and social issues such as health, nutrition, fertility, income and productivity. It is the cornerstone of human, social and economic development". She highlighted several CIDA initiatives, and praised the work of NGOs in this sector. CIDA is in the process of preparing an education strategy that will ...focus on education not only as part of CIDA's first priority of meeting basic human needs, but also as an essential part of the Agency's approach to poverty reduction."

**On balancing priorities:** Despite her strong interest in education, the Minister advocated a mixed balanced approach to ODA. "Even if we focused all of our ODA on basic education, it wouldn't be enough to eliminate poverty. To paraphrase *The Reality of Aid*, when a school system is in trouble, you have to look at society at large, and ask serious questions of democracy, equity and governance. To eliminate poverty, I think you have to tackle both ends at once: focus on education and other social issues, but also promote growth with equity."

**On the private sector:** "The Canadian private sector is an important development partner. It represents a potential source of investment, finance, technology and knowledge for developing countries. As the *Reality of Aid* points out, ODA is most effective as a catalyst to end poverty rather than as an end in itself." The Minister noted that whereas ODA on a global scale has hovered around US\$50 billion for the past four years, private capital is edging towards US\$200 billion. "This points to an opportunity for Canada that we should not miss — to direct private capital for development where it is most needed. And if we were to lose the Industrial Cooperation Program — which gives us this opportunity — we'd be missing the boat." The Minister acknowledged that there are regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, that are not benefiting from this kind of investment. "But this is not an argument against the role of the private sector. Quite the contrary. If we want to eliminate poverty, we need to find ways to encourage more private sector involvement in Africa. Because, clearly, government alone can't end poverty."

**On tied aid:** "We recognize the relationship between untying aid and promoting greater responsibility, ownership and aid effectiveness in our partner countries.... We're looking for ways to increase the untying of aid to least developed countries, but we believe this has to be done in a multilateral context.... We would need to ensure transparency in the contract-awarding process. We would need to ensure that skills and knowledge stay behind once any one project is finished. The important thing for all of us is that Canadians keep providing their expertise... that Canadians stay connected to the developing world... that Canadians keep caring the way they do. So here, too, it is a question of balance — balance between working with Canadians and working with the international community. Both are crucial".

**On inter-departmental collaboration:** " I've been working with several of my cabinet colleagues, including Allan Rock on the issue of HIV. I will also be working closely with International Trade Minister Pettigrew, who, as you may know, was just named chair of the WTO Working Group on making trade work for developing countries. You can be certain I will bring my views — and yours — to the table. It's time that we took a more horizontal approach to cooperation, to recognize the contribution that other departments and agencies can make, and to work together to maximize all of our efforts".

**Importance of coordinated strategic approaches in CIDA:** Following his presentation of the Minister's speech, Mr. Good added some comments of his own and took questions and comments from the Roundtable participants. He suggested that CIDA "as an institution [has] been a little too project oriented...We need to see how projects can fit into approaches which are more top-down, more strategic, involving more participating governments, other donors, more NGOs, and make sure that we fit into a framework that is strategic." At the same time, in answer to concerns about CIDA's day-to-day managerial capacities, he said that CIDA needs to look carefully to see the extent of problems, "because all the strategic approaches in the world won't do you any good if you can't get the resources to the projects."

The discussion period focused on two main issues: the **role of private investment** and **policy coherence**. On the question of **private investment**, one participant challenged the notion that the \$200 billion in private capital flow mentioned in the Minister's speech plays a positive and complementary role to ODA. A small part of this flow is actually foreign direct investment, and very little of it is going to the poorest countries. Nonetheless, Mr. Good said he thought that the increased capital flows of the 1990s have been significant, showing that investors have recognized a greater "maturity" of markets in developing countries following 20-30 years of private sector development. Admittedly, the opening of [Asian Tiger] markets caused some problems, because their regulatory and financial systems were not quite ready for the change. " He suggested that international policy makers see a definite role for the state, "in terms of what the state can do well (structure of governance, social safety nets), but that the market and investment is what is obviously going to drive growth on a sustainable basis." It is not a substitute for ODA, but it is important.

Several participants raised questions about **coherence in government policy**, noting that trade and investment policies do not seem consistent with ODA policies. For example, the Export Development Corporation (EDC) has at times taken a different position from, and Canada's trade policies have an important relationship to development issues. Sometimes other government-funded initiatives seem to have an adverse effect on the environment and human rights whereas CIDA is supposedly promoting these as core values.

Mr. Good acknowledged that despite some efforts to develop coherence "we're not quite there yet." "There is not the kind of coherence across government departments that one, ideally, would like to see. But having said that, if you look at what government really is, what this is all about is a series of competing views and competing agendas." While CIDA has been seen historically as a bit "isolated" from some other departments, there is now a recognition that some government departments that used to have primarily domestic agendas (such as Energy and Environment) now have international agendas that interrelate with CIDA's work. "The process of developing coherence is slow, but we have to make it happen...It is a matter of being more strategic."

Commenting on trade issues and the recent WTO (World Trade Organization) meeting in Seattle, Mr. Good said "if the talks get back on track, I would hope that development issues and environmental issues become part of the agenda. "While acknowledging that there is "no plan" for building inter-departmental coherence, Mr. Good said that Minister Minna is working closely with Minister Axworthy on the human security agenda and with Minister Rock on health issues. Collaboration on education is more difficult because it is a provincial responsibility.

### **3. Launching *The Reality of Aid 2000* and a call for Renewing Canadian Aid Policies and Practices**

#### **3.1 Presentations by Brian Tomlinson (Policy Team, CCIC) on *The Reality of Aid 2000* and by Betty Plewes (President & CEO of CCIC) on a Canadian Taskforce for aid renewal**

The *Reality of Aid 2000* presents a sobering view of aid from OECD donors, including Canada, showing that aid has been reduced to its lowest level in 30 years, while the number of people living in absolute poverty has increased to more than 1.3 billion. The annual review of aid is prepared each year by a global coalition of NGOs who monitor the implementation of aid policies for poverty reduction in the donor countries and in the South. The book charges that there is "a deliberate turning of heads" from commitments made by donor nations, and calls for unambiguous and strategic focus on poverty eradication. A special theme in this year's *Reality of Aid* is basic education, widely recognized as essential to reducing poverty, yet not accessible to millions of children in developing countries.

Brian Tomlinson set out the key messages of the book and focused on four specific areas that are identified in the Canada chapter for improving Canadian aid practice:

- Focus on those living in poverty, directly improving their conditions and rights;
- Promote developing country ownership, finding new ways of working with developing countries;
- Engage Canadians in understanding and debating global issues; and
- Rebuilding Canadian aid resources and providing leadership for debt cancellation.

He concluded by calling for new efforts for NGO / CIDA collaboration on devising and implementing concrete strategies and ways to enhance the impact of scarce resources for ending poverty. (The Canada chapter is available on CCIC's web site: [www.web.net/ccic-ccci](http://www.web.net/ccic-ccci).)

Betty Plewes made a short presentation of a proposal for a small independent taskforce or advisory committee that would examine ways to focus, enhance and accelerate the implementation of poverty-focused aid programming, and would propose an action plan for renewing Canadian aid in the four areas laid out by CCIC's *Reality of Aid* chapter. The taskforce or advisory committee would work with the President of CIDA on proposals for renewal based on new collaborative models for North/South reciprocal partnerships for long-term human security. It would not be a stakeholder process. Rather, it would be composed of Canadian experts in international development, hopefully with some participants or input from the South. Ms. Plewes said that CCIC is encouraged by new political energy and attention on the part of the government for Canada's aid program and suggested that a taskforce might contribute synergy around some new directions for increasing impact on poverty reduction for Canadian aid.

#### **3.2 Discussion Points**

The recommendation that ODA in Canada and elsewhere be clearly focussed on the **goal of poverty elimination** was an issue for discussion. Although CIDA already has a list of 6 program

priorities that relate to poverty reduction, little information exists to measure CIDA's work in the six priority areas through the poverty lens. CIDA is currently working on improving its management of information on its projects and programs.

CCIC acknowledges that improvements in the poverty focus of aid will take some time. Some donor countries are beginning to **draw lessons** about the degree to which their programs have been focussing on poverty. Ways to improve donor impact on poverty reduction relate directly to questions of local ownership and roles for civil society, particularly those representing the interests of the poor. According to Mr. Tomlinson, "...[it] is not so much setting specific targets or picking specific countries, it's a question of process – how can we determine the role of aid with respect to developing country's priorities."

#### **4. A roundtable panel on local developing country "ownership" of poverty reduction strategies and programs and renewing Canadian aid [Chair: Len Good, CIDA President]**

##### **4.1. Remarks by Professor Gerry Helleiner (Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto)**

Professor Helleiner put his remarks on issues in local ownership in the context of messages from *The Reality of Aid* and Len Good's encouraging remarks on current thinking in CIDA. He suggested that aid funding is only part of the so-called aid crisis in recent years; the other half of the story is the crisis of aid effectiveness. He went on to say that "what is hopeful about the last decade or so is the widespread acknowledgement among donors, recipients, academics, NGOs, the private sector, as to the mistakes which have been made in recent years in the aid relationship... There is an international rhetoric that acknowledges it. It ... states firmly ... that local ownership is critical to the success of any development effort." Donorship has to end and be replaced by ownership. Professor Helleiner then raised the following important points during his presentation and the question/answer period:

**Definition of local ownership:** "Local ownership is to be understood as involving the widest possible participation of those who are supposed to be the beneficiaries, either at the macro level, at the sectoral level, or at the project level. The essence of ownership is that the recipients drive the process. They drive the planning, the design, the implementation, the monitoring, and the evaluation."

**On getting beyond rhetoric:** Professor Helleiner suggested that there is a "rhetorical consensus" about the ineffectiveness of aid. This can be found in the World Bank, the UNDP and the OECD. Even the IMF is talking about changing its enhanced structural adjustment facility (ESAF) to the "Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility". However, "unless there is local driving of the process in the aid relationship, one isn't going to get very far. ...Until one moves from the broad generalities to the specifics of programs and projects in individual specific places, it's all just so much hot air." The attitude of the recipients is clearly crucial as well. "In a sense, ownership cannot be given—it has to be taken, it has to be seized, it has to be a willingness on the part of the local government to just plain 'do it', and at the appropriate points to just say 'no'. Which is

really the only power they have to the donor, to say no. And I've seen that happen, and it's new. I think it's encouraging, but there is an awful long way to go."

**Canada compared with other donors:** "Canada has not led. Scandinavia, the Dutch, the new British government have led. They have altered their ways of behaving, they have pooled their funds and twisted other donors' arms--usually without success--to join them. I suggest we consciously join those who are leading, the so-called like-minded, and say so and put our money where our mouth is in the form of the pools to which we could contribute...."

**On "waving the Canadian flag":** Professor Helleiner acknowledged that it is much harder to demonstrate Canadian impact when one is following a long, slow process of building local capacity with local people in charge. We need to educate Canadians to be proud of our involvement with a wide variety of donors and recipients and with international projects of long-term global importance. A participant commented that their own experience demonstrates that Canadians expect quality programming and impact rather than Canadian visibility per se. She added that "what we often lack is the courage to take risks ourselves, and then we use the [public] as our excuse why we cannot do that."

**On trusting local governments that may not represent the interests of the poor:** "It's also of course possible that many of the recipient authorities are unable or unwilling to establish the minimum administrative and political conditions sufficient to establish credibility and trust on the part of the donors. In those cases, one inevitably has to find other ways through the system and the NGOs have traditionally fulfilled that role." Professor Helleiner recognized the dilemma in the case of projects that on the one hand have local government authorities "in the driver's seat", but on the other hand do not have a poverty focus. In such cases, "there is no easy answer". He suggested, "all one can plead is that one gets further with honest, frank dialogue," and pay attention to the detailed arrangements for the program and the role of civil society.

**On financial management capacity of the poorest countries:** "There is a genuine dilemma in the fact that most of the poorest countries that one would want to devote more resources to in order to address poverty directly are also those in which financial management capacity is at its weakest. What does that imply? One solution (traditional donor solution) has been to establish its own financial accounting systems, its own islands of accountability and success, which when removed leave no trace and are in the real sense unsustainable—building no capacity, leaving nothing behind, and involving no sense on the part of local ... that this has anything much to do with them. The alternative, which I think is feasible, and which has begun, is a long-term, conscious effort to build financial management capacity: auditors, accountants, and financial management systems."

**On realistic expectations:** "Donors and the IMF and the World Bank for reasons of their own have been prone to over-estimate future success and having thereafter failed, the country is labeled undeserving. It's bad for morale and it's unrealistic and does nothing for the building of trust and the transfer of ownership."

**On hope for change:** One Roundtable participant noted that the issues of ownership -- tied aid, donor coordination, and the limitations of northern technical assistance -- were raised 30 years

ago in the Pearson Report. Are we actually making any progress? Professor Helleiner agreed that the issues remain the same. They are rooted in the lack of any real sense of equality between donors and recipients. He quoted an aid observer at the time of the Pearson Commission: "There are obviously 2 sets of rules—mere equality of opportunity and engaging in dialogue cannot establish parity in decision-making." While little has changed Professor Helleiner does see signs of change. He cited progress in local ownership and donor coordination [see point (6) below]. "There are signs on the part of say a half dozen significant donors and a dozen or so developing countries of the poorest kind, that a new aid relationship is beginning to emerge... It's discouraging [to see] the speed at which progress takes place—if there's anything I've learned over the years it's that everything that's worthwhile takes longer to achieve."

During his presentation, Professor Helleiner made 10 specific suggestions for moving to local ownership of aid programs.

"We need a **clear statement from CIDA** ... which incorporates the ownership question front and centre, and states that the individuals who are to be the beneficiaries must lead the process in all dimensions, and that civil society, where appropriate and at whatever level is appropriate, is fully involved." As an example, Canada might use the case of Sweden in its policy on aid to Africa. This turned around the incentive system for bureaucrats in the aid system and altered the culture of behaviour.

Accept a **longer time horizon** as part of the transfer of ownership. "One cannot continue to insist on short-term results, and judge aid bureaucrats on the degree to which they can deliver fast results and move the money."

Conduct a **total review of technical assistance** activities and in particular those portions of it that are tied. Technical assistance should be reduced. "Much of it is not asked for, is not helpful, is donor-driven, and to some degree is a device for monitoring donor projects." For example, "there are 100,000 expatriates working in Africa on technical assistance projects. If this makes any sense at all—we all know what they cost—many Africans and I fail to see it. This is a rising source of tension and anger on the part of recipient governments."

Support **local capacity-building**. "In part this is a matter of using local consultants instead of foreign ones, but there is a great deal more to it than that. Capacity building of course must take place in civil society, in the private sector, in NGOs, not simply in central government but in local government as well."

**Accept risks** as a necessary part of the process. "One must face the auditor general, who does after all assess organizations like IDRC on the basis not simply of the way in which they account for their money but on the basis of whether they are an excellent institution." He suggested that one must accept that the costs and risks of achieving these changes are worth undertaking "because the costs and risks of continuing with business as usual is unthinkable".

**Place funds into pools** or "**baskets**" at the national or sectoral level, to be used under the leadership of the local government authority or whoever is responsible, in collaboration with donors. "That way you economize on the scarce administrative and managerial talent that is

found in all donor agencies, not just in CIDA." One example provided by Professor Helleiner was the Tanzanian case, where donors have agreed to pool some of their funds in at least three sectors (rural roads, health and education). "None of this was happening ten years ago. Ten years ago, Tanzania was run rife with the largest number of separate donor projects of any country in the world..."

**Improve donor coordination.** "The most effective way of [donor coordination] I have seen so far is through these SWAPS—sector level, sector-wide programs in which donors pool their funds and cooperate in their management. It would be better if they could do it at a higher level, and someday perhaps they will in modest amounts."

Provide **information to recipient authorities.** "In the Tanzanian case ... more than two-thirds of the aid flows to that country are unknown to the government. They have no information. It doesn't flow through their government...and the majority of donors, with very few exceptions, have refused or say they are unable to provide information. How on earth can local ownership exist in the absence of information on the part of recipient authorities as to what is going on in their own country? The funds flow directly to foreign private consultants, to the topping up of local salaries, to local NGOs, to local governments and a whole variety of ways."

**Untie aid.** Professor Helleiner acknowledged that it is not easy to untie aid, when there are often very real demands on the part of donors, both governmental and non-governmental, to wave the flag or show particular results in aid programs that may conflict with the needs in developing countries or with other donors. However, he said, "that doesn't mean you stop. It's a long and tortuous business, I know, but keep at it."

Establish **independent monitoring**, to check the degree to which agreements made between aid recipients and donors are in fact being fulfilled. "That has proven extremely difficult to do for anybody but an outsider and an independent."

#### **4.2. Margaret Hilson, Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA), responding to Professor Helleiner's presentation**

Ms. Hilson explained that her thoughts were truly fresh reactions as she was called in as a "pinch-hitter" and therefore unable to prepare in advance. She reflected on the fact that she and many familiar faces around the table have been engaged with aid for more than three decades.. Put in context, she suggested, "We still have yet to learn how to do what it is we're doing. I don't think I've ever felt, at any time in my career, such a sense of we still don't know how to do it right."

The issue of local ownership is not new; only the labels are different. From her health sector perspective, Ms. Hilson said, "We need to give our government more capacity... The **basket approach** is one really good way to do that. But I don't think you put all your eggs in that basket either. Because in lots of countries, the basket is still driven by donors, it's not always driven by the health sector trying to decide how they can best implement their programs."

At a recent donor meeting in Southern Africa on the issue of HIV/AIDS, Ms. Hilson was appalled to see how little **donor coordination** there was. "I thought, coming from an NGO, that the official donor agencies were actually starting to work in a much more coordinated way. But it's absolutely not true. It was a meeting of people who hadn't learned a lot from some of the mistakes that had been made, the approaches that had been taken. All of the donors had their own programs and their answers they had to give back to ... their own political masters..."

Ms. Hilson argued that traditional aid programs are unable to affect the kind of change that needs to take place in the case of, for example, the tremendous AIDS epidemic in Africa. She suggested that **local development has to get down to a very basic level –the community**. There is hope for change, she said, if "the community builds on the strength that it has within its traditional patterns of community life to make changes in its community to reduce the risks of its young people, of its women to the HIV infection." But she added, "we haven't learned how to truly work with communities." A roundtable participant observed that "'Local' is really a matrix of national down to household" and argued for more emphasis on household. **Decentralization** of funding provides space for local communities to become more engaged at district level with aid programming.

Ms. Hilson also suggested greater attention to **advocacy**. "I don't mean just Canadians advocating for change in CIDA—obviously that's one thing we as Canadians we need to do—I'm talking about international advocacy and the sharing of advocacy experiences." She suggested "there is lots of areas where the advocacy issue can make partnerships different from what there has been before. There is no giver and taker in this one—it's a more even exchange of issues."

**Debt** is another issue raised by Ms. Hilson. "I'm not an economist, but it does seem to me that when you've got countries that are paying a high proportion of their GNP to the North to repay debt, they wouldn't need our aid basket if we'd eliminate the debt. "

In closing, Ms. Hilson advocated that a **learning process** be put in place for all of the work that we do. "This is a challenge for NGOs and for CIDA."

### 4.3 Discussion Points on Local Ownership

Roundtable participants raised two additional issues.

One issue concerns what was termed "**desk-driven**" **development**. According to the speaker, after 10 years of "increasing worship of the notion of accountability," everyone involved in the aid program from the ministerial level down to the field workers are "quite frightened of moving outside the box" or doing anything that might risk having the minister hauled up on the floor of the House. This leads to "a very narrow, highly controlled aid program" which is "getting in the way and perhaps even preventing the notion of local partnership... If we're really going to look at the end result, we have to accept in a sincere way the **notion of results**, but also make it reasonable. ... [R]esults can probably not be found within a 2-3 year project...The fact is that people [in CIDA], who are concerned about criticism, in a system that really does not reward innovation, that notices error very quickly, are not inclined to take the jump."

Another participant challenged Professor Helleiner's notion that Canada has not been a leader in innovative concepts in ODA. "It isn't true also that Canada hasn't led—in fact, Canada has led in a number of areas—Margaret's organization, many of the NGOs, there's been great innovation. One problem is we haven't told anyone about it, in a global sense. Secondly, we often haven't moved beyond the innovation to scaling-up and making larger impact and larger investments." The speaker suggested that **Canada has a "comparative advantage"** in the areas of gender, human rights, civil society and democracy.

## **5. A Roundtable panel on basic education in Canadian aid policies and strategies** [Chaired by Esperanza Moreno, Deputy Director, CCIC]

### **5.1. Presentation by Rex Fyles, Oxfam-Canada:**

By way of introduction, Rex Fyles asked the group to reflect on the formative influence of primary education in their own lives. This is no less true in the south. He described the situation he witnessed for primary schools in rural Mozambique. "When you visit a school in rural Mozambique you find a small hut built of local materials (mud and thatch), the benches are made from hewn tree trunks, the blackboard is made from mixed mud and charcoal, white clay or ash is used as chalk. The teacher is a middle-aged man whose own education was interrupted after grade 6 because he was needed to teach others...[and]...has never received teacher training. He has not received his paycheck for months... Quite rationally he spends more time doing business and cultivating his own fields than he does in the classroom. Coming from Canada ... you are struck by 2 things: one, the eagerness of the children...at considerable sacrifice to themselves and their families to learn.... The second thing you're struck by is how anyone can learn anything under these conditions. The school and its teacher quite obviously will not be able to satisfy their students' thirst to learn."

The following are some of the key points raised by Rex Fyles in his presentation:

**Inequality in access to quality education is not an accident.** "There is an unavoidable and deeply disturbing sense that ... powerful individuals, corporations, governments and multilateral institutions have made a series of decisions that have resulted in condemning poor children to inadequate education...and it is simply unacceptable. The role the IMF has played in devastating the capacity of states and poor countries to provide education through its structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 1990s is well documented...."

**There is good news in education.** "The good news is that there exists a consensus, rhetorical or otherwise, internationally, that all school-aged children must have access to quality education, ... first formulated and agreed to by 150 governments at Jomtien in 1990, and re-affirmed by governments and international institutions in every major UN conference over the last 10 years. Governments North and South have promised to achieve this goal by 2015... The second bit of good news...is that progress has been made over the last 10 years with increasing primary school enrolment."

**The goal of education for all is achievable.** "Oxfam International and UNICEF estimate that it would cost 8 billion dollars a year to provide universal quality education. This is an extremely

modest and affordable price tag—especially when you understand it's less than one-half of what North Americans spend on toys each year [or] ... it is equivalent to four days of global military spending. The means exists but the will to mobilize those means appears to be lacking."

**It's not an exaggeration to talk about a crisis in education.** "We've seen some of this crisis in Canada over the last few years. In the South the crisis is in fact a catastrophe... [T]here are as many kids out of school in developing countries as there are kids in primary school in all of North America and Western Europe. So imagine travelling from Vancouver to Berlin and finding no primary schools. Furthermore, even those children that start school drop out before they have completed 4 years of education. So you add another 150 million primary school drop-outs to the 125 million who never made it to a classroom... Children who cannot go to school grow up and become adults who can't read and write. Oxfam International estimates there are currently 852 million illiterate adults—this is one in every 4 adults living in southern countries."

**There is a danger that the Dakar review process will be a lost opportunity.** "The upcoming World Education Forum in Dakar [April 2000], 10 years after Jomtien, is going to be an opportunity for countries and actors to assess progress made to date... The Dakar process...has not received the attention and support it deserves, and unless concerted action is taken now to prepare for it, may prove to be yet another lost opportunity for the international community to come up with a serious plan to meet the 2015 goal."

**A Global Action Plan is needed.** "Oxfam International *Education Now* campaign has now been joined by Education International, which represents 23 million teachers worldwide, Action Aid, the global march against child labour and a host of southern civil society organizations, to form a global campaign for education, calling for a Global Action Plan (GAP). ... The idea of the GAP is to enable all stakeholders to analyze the obstacles preventing their country from achieving universal primary education, to devise strategies and to set benchmarks by which states, donors and civil society actors can measure progress. ... The risk at this point is that if parties fail to prepare a concrete framework for action before the Dakar summit... we may find ourselves around the same table in 5 years or 30 years proposing the same obvious, common-sense solution to the same problem, only the problem will be worse"

**Canada can play a leadership role.** "Canada is a member of the Education for All steering committee directing the Dakar process. Canada has shown leadership in pushing for the formation of the G-20 group devoted to looking into reforming the International Monetary Fund. The Canadian government...has a fairly good reputation for consulting and involving civil society actors into government and multilateral processes at the international level, and that's obviously an important component of the Global Action Plan. [But] at the same time, Canada, like the majority of other OECD countries, has not shown particular leadership to date with regard to its own ODA support to basic education."

Mr. Fyles made 4 suggestions for the short-term action:

- 1) That the Canadian government send a high level delegation to the Dakar Forum to demonstrate its commitment, with ministerial representation from Minister Minna.

- 2) That the Canadian delegation include representation from Canadian civil society.
- 3) That the Canadian government make new commitments to basic education in its next budget, to improve its performance and strengthen its credibility prior to the Dakar meetings.
- 4) That Canadian parliamentarians encourage Finance Minister Martin to pursue comprehensive reforms to the IMF, and deeper and faster debt relief to Highly Indebted countries.

## **5.2. Response by Marilyn Blaeser, Education Policy Specialist, CIDA.**

In responding to Rex Fyler, Ms. Blaeser called attention to some changes affecting basic education in the last 10 years: "We are in a fundamentally different world in the last decade than the world we lived in 1990 when the *World Education for All* Jomtien strategies were set forth."

She gave three examples. "The first is **the poverty and debt trap**, which has grown to insurmountable proportions in many developing countries. It's no exaggeration to say that many of the countries could have achieved basic Education for All goals had they been able to divert the debt servicing costs into basic education... We recognize that donor projects alone cannot address the issue; they must be complemented with strategic debt reduction strategies."

The second issue is **HIV and AIDS**. "In Zambia alone, 3 teachers are dying daily—over 1000 per year... In a country where the trained teachers are a precious and scarce resource, AIDS is crippling the efforts to achieve basic education for all... In the face of such dire statistics, it is clear that the educational process and planning cannot proceed effectively without closer coordination with other sectors and with all partners."

The third example is **globalization**. "This is producing winners and losers around the world, and is intimately linked to education, both for countries and for individuals. Ironically, the impact of market forces and adjustment policies too often serve to divert education resources away from those who need them most. It may be an unintended consequence but it is devastating for education for all. Now that the governments worldwide have affirmed that basic education is a right and a priority to every child, not a privilege for the elites, we cannot allow access to quality education to be limited to those who can afford to pay." Ms. Blaeser She endorsed the notion of sector-wide approaches designed and owned by the developing countries to harness resources that are necessary to put into basic education.

Regarding the **Dakar World Education Forum**, Ms. Blaeser said the proposed Framework for Action "will set forth the new EFA targets and strategies for the next decade and beyond... This framework will, I believe, have a major influence on the plans and policies of developing countries." She said it would incorporate some of the new trends in sector-wide approaches and working together with communities and civil society. "I intend that the results of the Dakar forum will be reflected in our own CIDA education strategy, which will be launched next year."

Ms. Blaeser explained that, in her view, "consultation, sharing and partnership are of critical importance. **Education is everyone's responsibility**. Progress will only come if everyone's energy, synergy, resources and commitment can be channeled both in Canada and in developing

countries. ... Canada's efforts to assist developing countries in basic education will need to draw on the richness of our own capacities in education: in the schools, in the school boards, and in the provincial ministries of education, as well as our traditional partners and people we are currently working with: NGOs, the private sector and universities."

Ms. Blaeser acknowledged the important work on education currently being done by **Canadian NGOs** and their overseas partners. She cited several examples of quality programming in basic education and commended OXFAM for its internationally coordinated Education Now campaign. Within CIDA the Africa branch in CIDA has made progress in implementing innovative programming. In the face of significant challenges, she called for joint action by governments, civil society, and particularly NGOs. "**Advocacy** is an important agenda...Canada is challenged in bringing together the synergy and best experiences and efforts for all of our potential partners to move across our own borders and beyond our boundaries. We need to take risks and develop a plan...I hope that the [CIDA] education strategy will energize the Canadian community to work together in how we can help developing countries improve their education for all."

### **5.3. Discussion Points on Basic Education:**

One of the points were raised in the discussion following the presentations was Canada's own history of **changing priorities and targets** for ODA and scarce attention to tracking progress on these historical commitments. One participant reminded the group that the 1986 Weingard Report said that basic education, especially for girls, should be a Canadian priority.

Given that, according to *Reality of Aid 2000*, only 2.9% of Canada's ODA is spent on basic education, and not much more on health, some participants felt that the track record is very poor. One person observed that "this is not just a five-year commitment, but rather it's going to involve long-term engagement." Several participants were impressed with the level of **consensus** reached on the issue of primary education. There is a significant opportunity for moving forward and seeing specific progress.

Another issue discussed was the **role of NGOs in education**. There is an assumption that only government should do primary education, but as one speaker noted, "that doesn't really conform to the history of the world or even the history of this country. A hundred years ago, a lot of primary schools were not run by governments, they were run by parents who formed their own school boards and brought their own teachers in and set their own curriculums and so on." It was suggested that we take lessons from successful examples, such as the non-formal primary education program supported by CIDA and the Aga Khan Foundation in Bangladesh. The role of NGOs in promoting innovative pedagogy was also mentioned.

On the other hand, some participants raised important **complexities** that an education strategy will face. For example, one speaker noted the problems faced when those attending primary school fail to find meaningful work. "If children are in schools which then foster a sense of failure by pushing them out and by lowering their self-esteem, better not to be in school. Rather than 'human capital development', we find many school-leavers wandering the streets unemployed..." Another speaker noted "there are other issues in the economic sphere or

competition with drugs and crime—in the eastern Caribbean for example, very high drop-out rates among young men and male students. It's not happening in a vacuum. There are many other things competing and making it uneconomic and not strategic to stay in school." In the education strategy and in our interventions **the link between education and economic security** is essential.

From a pedagogical perspective, one participant recalled the scope of basic education. "You cannot approach basic education without talking about early childhood education. You have to talk about adult education. You have to talk about family. You have to talk about teacher training. You cannot do basic education without a commitment to **local languages**."

There is also a downside, said one speaker, to the role of education in fostering a sense of strong **cultural and ethnic identity**, as it can often be a **basis for conflict**. "Hence, in many developing countries education has become a lightning rod for criticism for governments. And governments are disengaging from spending ever-enormous sums into a system that really doesn't have all that much benefit for itself, when there are a lot of youngsters in the streets unemployed."

Another issue raised was education in situations of **armed conflict**. This has been a challenge for NGOs because "education is not fundable as a humanitarian response in emergency situations" yet some children find themselves in displaced camps for many years.

One person mentioned the complex issue of **power** over education policies, in the context of gender, class, and cultural relations. "The social conditions, the economic conditions, the infrastructure conditions need to be there if education is going to take place. The kids can't be hungry in their classrooms—they're not going to learn." Another mentioned the competing demands and challenges for "ownership" of the education agenda.

A point was raised about the **wariness of donors** in the past regarding basic education. Funds for so-called "software": textbooks, teacher training, material supplies, etc. are recurrent costs, which go on year after year. There are also many **competing interests** such as the environment, population, social development, etc. Even if education is recognized as a basic right, there are other fundamentals that also demand attention and support. As one person put it, "What do you do first, do you feed the child and make sure he's immunized?"

CIDA will also face some hard decisions in planning its education strategy. What concretely will be supported? Purchase of textbooks? Promotion of girls' enrollment in schools? Curriculum reform? Teacher training? Enhancement of infrastructure? Development of new methods of delivery?

Education is a prime candidate for **untied aid**. Although there is a lot of capacity, interest and expertise in education in Canada, "the fact of the matter is that there is great expertise in the South, and so we have to confront these new conditions and find some new ways of working."

## 6. Wrap-up session and concluding remarks.

In the final part of the Roundtable, participants reflected on the implications for action. The discussion revolved mostly around the following points:

**Is the glass half empty or half full?** Given the discouraging statistics on ODA, poverty and education and the lack of progress in achieving "local ownership" over some 30 years of international development, several people took a pessimistic view, arguing that nothing short of sweeping changes would be able to alter the state of affairs. One participant suggested, "if there is some forward motion it might not register on a security motion detector." On the other hand, some recent examples of positive changes, of growing awareness and consensus, and of innovative projects was a source of inspiration for the optimists in the group. As one noted "we have an opportunity in Canada now, but there is also an opportunity internationally to move ahead in a certain direction that did not exist as much before." At least one person, however, took a third approach, asking if the substance in the cup is "even drinkable".

**The importance of long-term engagement** was a clear lesson for several participants. Several speakers alluded to this during the day, noting that significant results cannot be expected from short-term support. In a similar way, **sustainability** of financing programs such as basic education was seen as a major challenge, because "education systems just keep on eating up money." However, one person challenged the notion that education or health care can be economically sustainable – in Canada or overseas. Such programs will always require government funding.

**The aid critique should apply to NGOs as well as to CIDA.** The critique regarding local ownership and education applies not only to bilateral and multilateral donors but also to NGOs. NGOs need to improve their effectiveness, coordinate better with other donors, build local capacity, and learn lessons from past experience. Several speakers mentioned the need for joint reflection and action between governmental and non-governmental actors.

**Competing demands for aid dollars mean that strategic choices must be made.** Oxfam's call for 8 billion dollars for education may be possible, but given that it represents 1/6 of the total DAC ODA expenditures, some other items may have to be sacrificed. In addition, choosing the best type of intervention will require more analysis based on past experiences and "best practices" either by Canadian actors or those in other countries. One participant questioned whether all donors should be in basic education, or all donors should be in agriculture, or human rights. Does Canada have some "comparative advantages" in making ODA choices?

Some **ideas for follow-up** were mentioned, complementing CCIC's proposal for a Task Force summarized in section 3 above, Gerry Helleiner's recommendations in section 4, and Rex Fyler's suggestions in section 5. One suggestion was to create affinity groups, for example around basic education with programming NGOs and CIDA, to discuss the division of labour and best ways to move forward.

**The political moment represents an important opportunity for change.** Both optimists and pessimists seem to agree that several factors have "opened the door" for significant change to

ODA: the existing international "rhetorical consensus" on the need for change, the existence of innovative plans and programs in some donor countries, increased transparency and contact between governments and NGOs, statements by the Canadian government that it is prepared to reinvest in aid, and new leadership in CIDA and the Ministry of International Cooperation. However, Betty Plewes cautioned the group that this opportunity must be seized urgently and forcefully, otherwise it will pass. "I don't think the doors will magically open, I think we have to storm the doors. I'm still on the big picture and hopeful about the big change. If it's not going to happen within the next 10-12 months, and we have some major shift in Canadian aid, then...we're not going to have another opportunity like this."

## **Roundtable Participants**

### **Parliamentarians**

Ms. Jean Augustine, MP

Dennis Gruending, MP

Mr. Svend J. Robinson, MP

The Honourable The Very Reverend Lois M. Wilson, Senator

### **NGO/Academic/Consultant/Private Sector**

Jack Baker, Alliance of Manufacturers and Exporters, Canada

Dr. John Batten, Director General, AMREF

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Laura Breuer, Unitarian Service Committee of Canada

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Mohammed Chikhaoui, OXFAM-Québec

Marc Dolgin, World University Service of Canada (WUSC)

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Rex Fyles, Oxfam Canada

Joe Gunn, Co-Director of Social Affairs, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

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Gerry Helleiner, University of Toronto

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Gerald Schmitz, Library of Parliament

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**Observers:**

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Nancy Drost, CARE Canada

Maija Kagis, Canadian Society for International Health

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Ann Wardrop, Canadian Executive Services Overseas

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