

## **A New Deal For Canadian NGOs and Civil Society**

### New Deal

Canadian NGOs are looking for a “new deal” with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in the wake of controversy about decisions taken on program funding for Canadian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) whose programs with partner groups in developing countries rely on public support.

The appeal for renewed and reaffirmed partnership between CIDA and Canada’s CSOs follows sharp debate in the House of Commons when it was revealed Canada’s aid minister Bev Oda set aside the advice of her senior officials in determining whether to provide funding to support the program of a prominent church based coalition KAIROS, claiming that the proposal had failed to meet CIDA’s standards.

The controversy has created uncertainty about the reliability of standards applied at the aid agency when determining whether programs will be approved for funding support. Uncertainty has been heightened with changes at CIDA’s Partnerships with Canadians Branch.

The recently introduced changes pit Canadian CSOs against each other in competition for funding opportunities based on agency initiated “calls for proposals”, replacing more comprehensive program funding mechanisms for Canadian NGOs with decades of verifiable results and track-records in their support for developing country partners working to improve livelihoods of people living in poverty.

### Restore Confidence

A new cooperation model is needed to affirm basic principles, shared by both CIDA and the CSO sector, in order to restore confidence in the standards that will be applied at the Agency to assess CSO programs for funding support.

CCIC is calling for a new “Cooperation Agreement” to be negotiated with CIDA, which will take account of the value added roles of civil society groups working in development, and which reference key accountability elements such as Canada’s Official Development Assistance Accountability Act, CCIC’s Code of Ethics and Operational Standards, and the newly agreed “Istanbul Principles” endorsed by civil society groups, including CCIC, at a 2010 global summit of the “Open Forum on CSO Development Effectiveness” held in Turkey.

### Cooperation Agreement

The Council has published a draft text of a proposed “Cooperation Agreement” which should guide its relationship with CIDA and CIDA’s relationship with the NGO sector.

## Shared Principles

The First section of the three part document cites shared principles including:

- The institutional *independence and autonomy* of civil society development actors
- Respect for *local ownership and CSOs' "right-to-initiative"* as a necessary condition of development effectiveness
- Working together to *achieve best practices* in programming, policy and evaluation
- The *centrality of human rights approaches* to reduce poverty and promote development
- A focus on *capacity building and learning*
- *Sustainable* development strategies that benefit future generations
- Programs that advance *the rights of women* and girls and which are *disability inclusive*
- Civil society's contributions to *better, more transparent & accountable governance*
- Key need for informed and sustained *public engagement in Canada*
- *Policy dialogue* –inclusive transparent and participatory – as key for development impact
- Civil society's capacity and proper role to conduct *advocacy to influence public policy*

## Who Does What?

The Second and Third sections focus on the appropriate roles and undertakings of the parties to a new Partnership Agreement: the Canadian Council for International Cooperation and CIDA.

The Canadian Council for International Cooperation commits to:

- Promote a high standard of transparency and accountability to Canadians when it comes to the work of CSOs;
- Promote civil society innovation and good practice based on solid evaluations of civil society efforts;
- Bring its members "to the table" in a collaborative effort to help CIDA develop an appropriate policy framework for CIDA on relations with civil society groups;
- Ensure Canadian CSOs remain well informed on government policy issues and facilitate effective consultation processes with the sector for development effectiveness;
- Provide timely responses and updates (as able) to CIDA, as requested, on relevant policy matters
- Acknowledge the government's role in implementing policy;
- Aid and facilitate international CSO and multi-stakeholder processes (as able) focusing on development effectiveness; and
- Support and promote a strong, professional and accountable Canadian CSO sector.

CIDA commits to:

- Transparency, voluntary access to information and accountability to Canadian constituencies;
- Work with CSOs to develop a policy framework for relations with CSOs, informed by the ODA Accountability Act, CCIC's Code of Ethics and the Istanbul Principles;
- Respect the independence of CCIC and its members including especially their right to comment on government policy and advocate for policy change;
- Review financing modalities at Partnerships with Canadians Branch to ensure consistency with CSO partnerships, principles of development effectiveness, CSOs right-to-initiative;
- Consider appropriate funding modalities for CCIC recognizing its role as pre-eminent central body and its commensurate responsibilities;
- Consult regularly and openly with CSOs on development policy and directions as well as regular senior level meetings with CCIC;
- Facilitate regular consultations between CSOs and other government departments as applicable;
- Provide sufficient and timely information to CCIC, its members and their southern counterparts to enable solid input on country and thematic program planning; and
- Consult with CCIC and its members (as appropriate) in finalizing government positions on international policy issues in multilateral and regional for as well as include relevant CSO representatives in delegations.