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Canada's next step to increase aid effectiveness agenda falls short

Ottawa — Canada's new approach to engage Canadians and organizations in international development might be a good thing, but it is the first time most Canadian international development organizations have heard about it.

On July 22, Minister for International Cooperation Bev Oda announced *Partnerships with Canadians*. Heralded by the minister as the next step in "Canada's aid effectiveness agenda," the new approach aims to increase aid effectiveness, reduce administrative burdens on its partner NGOs and engage more Canadians through a *Global Citizens Program*.

"The aims of the initiative are laudable, but the outcomes are disappointing," says Gerry Barr, President and CEO of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) representing 90 Canadian non-profit organizations, working both in Canada and overseas. "CIDA's NGO partners deliver its programs and have long standing relationships with people and organizations in the South. Unfortunately for this review, the government did not consult its NGO partners."

Barr says while a review was urgently needed, the directions outlined by the Minister leave many questions and concerns. "The devil is in the details and this announcement is short on those," says Barr.

The year-long review of the Canadian Partnership Branch (CPB) mandate announced in a news release includes *Partners for Development Program* and the *Global Citizens Program*. It was announced that CIDA will allocate half of the *Partner in Development's* estimated \$200-million budget to CIDA's 20 countries of focus and 80 per cent will focus on its three priority areas: sustainable economic growth, children and youth and food security.

In the last 10 years, the government has shifted CIDA's priority sectors five times. Barr says an inordinate focus on priorities countries or sectors undermines CIDA's responsiveness.

"If Canadian NGOs are forced to arbitrarily drop countries or sectors every time the political winds change in Canada, it undermines the local ownership by the people we were meant to help and our effectiveness," says Barr.

How the goals of transparency, timeliness and predictability in funding will be achieved is not clear, as guidelines and details about the program have yet to be released. Over the last three years, CCIC members have been subject to changing interpretations of funding guidelines, an unclear policy environment, and prolonged delays in proposal reviews.

Barr says a clause stipulating that proposals must be consistent with Canadian government policy, including foreign policy, is also worrisome.

“Increasingly we have seen partisanship at play in decisions about development assistance,” says Barr. “The only policies that should matter where decisions about aid are concerned are the ODA Accountability Act and the principles of aid effectiveness.”

The *Global Citizens Program* announced as part of the new approach aims to increase public engagement in international development through public awareness, education and knowledge sharing and youth programs. This program provides a welcome opportunity to bring a coherent approach to increasing the meaningful participation of Canadians in global development but program focus, details and funding were not provided.

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