

**STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIPS
FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP
CCIC BRIEFING PAPER #4**

In order to bring about the changes required to eliminate poverty, and promote global justice and sustainable development, stronger democratic support and action by citizens is required. Canadian civil society organizations (CSOs) are a very significant expression of the commitment of Canadians to development and global social justice.

When citizens engage in the work of organizations, they do so to be a part of a broader effort, to increase their influence, to strengthen their voice and to support collective action for change. These forms of engagement complement the formal political processes through which citizens elect their representatives to legislatures. Through CSOs committed and engaged people in varied and diverse communities across the country act with others based on values of international solidarity, compassion and global citizenship.

CSOs are the main implementers of public engagement programs on global issues in Canada. They inform and raise awareness about global issues, create opportunities for people to experience local realities in developing countries, and help to facilitate citizens of the north and south working and acting together to change the conditions that perpetuate poverty and injustice. Citizens engage with global issues through giving and volunteering, participating in overseas placements, engaging in public policy dialogue, promoting ethical consumption and investment and many other activities.

Partnerships with CSOs have been distinctive elements of Canada's approach to development cooperation. CIDA has for many years supported a wide range of civil society actors and constituencies in their efforts to nurture and strengthen public engagement on global issues - particularly through responsive partnership programming. The 2005 *International Policy Statement* (IPS) acknowledged the importance of active involvement of Canadians and advancing values of global citizenship. A more influential global role for Canada and Canadians requires a commitment to rebuild the capacity to play such a role through strengthened relationships with civil society and a more vigorous policy framework and strategy for public engagement.

Unfortunately, the policy frameworks, long-term program relationships, and the overall infrastructure for public engagement have been in a state of continuous decline over the past decade. This paper suggests that it is time for renewal and to reassess the complementary roles that CIDA and its CSO partners can take to regain a place of leadership for Canada in innovative and comprehensive public engagement strategies.

1.0 RATIONALE

Many development practitioners in the north and the south have stressed the importance of having informed and committed citizens as part of an overall strategy to eliminate poverty. A knowledgeable public can provide support for government policies and programs to address poverty. They can also take action individually and collectively to address poverty and injustice and to promote sustainable development. Public engagement plays a key role in informing and shaping public opinion as well as empowering people to take action.

1.1 Public Engagement and Global Citizenship

Public engagement¹ refers to a set of processes and experiences, which enable people to move from basic awareness of international development priorities and sustainable human development, through an understanding of the causes and effects of global issues, to personal involvement and informed action. It encourages their full participation in the world wide fight against poverty, and adds a global dimension to their understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship helping Canadians become global citizens.

The concept of global citizenship embodies a set of principles, values and behaviours through which sustainable and democratic development can be realized the world over. It implies the participation of individuals in public life, deliberating and acting for the common good, with regard for both local and global consequences. The concept of global citizenship is in many ways a natural evolution of what it means to be Canadian in a complex and rapidly changing global environment.²

1.2 CIDA, Canadian CSOs and Public Engagement

Throughout the 1970's and 80's Canada, through CIDA, was seen as a world leader in what was then called "development education". But over the past decade its activities have suffered from an inconsistent approach, limited funding and piecemeal implementation. There is no coherent agency-wide policy framework and strategy and no consistent criteria for evaluating impact. There is no focal point in CIDA for overview, monitoring, evaluation, and coordination of the Agency's public engagement activities. The ripple effects of the budget cuts of 1995 have considerably reduced the national and regional infrastructure to implement and support public engagement activities. In short, the current approach to public engagement in CIDA is narrowly focused, small scale, short term and project oriented. Changing citizen's attitudes and behaviours require long term perspective and strategies. With CSO partners crippled by the burden of short-term project to project funding, and without a coherent definition and approach to public engagement within CIDA many activities are fragmented and "one-off" in nature.

¹ This phrase broadens previously used terms such as development education, global education, and public education in order to incorporate action elements of global citizenship in addition to awareness building.

² CCIC, *New Horizons: Engaging Canadians as Active Global Citizens*, 2004, accessed at http://ccic.ca/e/docs/002_cda_corps_promoting_global_citizenship.pdf, page 2.

There are nonetheless some important structures to be built upon. Three decades of public engagement work by Canadian CSOs has produced considerable social capital: informal and formal networks; shared knowledge; skills and experience; long term north-south partnerships; and committed volunteers and social activists. Despite reduction of government support there remains strong evidence across the country of committed and dynamic public engagement activities and initiatives. The amazing public and media response to the current Make Poverty History Campaign is a clear example of Canadians desire and willingness to be involved in creating a more just world as opportunities emerge. Clearly the energy and momentum is present to harness in the creation of a strong national vision and strategy for public engagement – a strategy that acknowledges and builds upon existing strengths and competencies, and strives for complementarity of roles for CIDA and Canadian CSOs as working partners in building active global citizenship in Canada.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

In its 2004 issues paper, *New Horizons: Engaging Canadians as Active Global Citizens*, CCIC recommended that CIDA take a whole-of-agency approach and develop a coherent public engagement policy framework and strategy:

“CIDA should develop a new public engagement policy framework and strategy focused on a vision of active global citizenship that takes a long term perspective, an integrated approach with a focus on priority constituencies, and a systematic approach to monitoring, learning and sharing best practice.” (p. 3)

In addition and from a partnership perspective, CCIC recommends:

1. Partnership is accepted and developed as a key concept of the new public engagement policy framework.

Canadian CSOs are the main implementers of public engagement programs and CIDA should strive to create an enabling environment for effective programs. Both CIDA and Canadian CSOs should find ways to increase the involvement of Southern partners in public engagement strategies.

2. The development of clear roles for CSOs in policy dialogue on global issues.

Building on the work of the VSI and the Accord signed between the voluntary sector and the government of Canada, CIDA should provide opportunities for, and support to, the participation of CSOs in policy dialogue.

3. The elaboration of clearer roles for CIDA and CSO partners in public engagement activities. Building on the long experience of CIDA/CSO relationships we suggest the following roles.

2.1 CSO Roles

As primary implementers of public engagement activities CSOs will:

- Develop and implement programs;
- Coordinate and collaborate, where appropriate, with others active in the same field (geographic or sectoral);

- ❑ Involve southern colleagues in programs;
- ❑ Commit to learning and sharing best practices; and
- ❑ Explore, develop and expand opportunities for active citizen engagement that include
 - Participation in policy dialogue
 - Giving and volunteering
 - Ethical consumption and investing
 - Opportunities for international/domestic exchanges
 - Learning opportunities
 - Other opportunities for action

2.2 CIDA Roles

As a funder, endeavor to provide an enabling environment which includes:

- ❑ A comprehensive policy framework and strategy focused on global citizenship;
- ❑ A focus on priority constituencies, e.g. educational system, media, youth;
- ❑ A focal point within CIDA for coordination, monitoring, and learning;
- ❑ Development of a knowledge/resource center on public understanding of best practices in engaging citizens on global issues;
- ❑ Strengthening of regional infrastructure and capacity; and
- ❑ Increased and consistent long-term funding.

3.0 CONCLUSION

Global citizenship hinges on Canadians recognizing that they are members of a community of peoples who share a single planet. The challenge is to build Canadians' understanding that they have a stake in the well being of that planet and its people. Opportunities must be taken to debate issues of collective concern and to participate in meaningful action.³ Through public engagement programs CIDA and its CSO partners have an important role to play in strengthening active global citizenship which will provide support for government policies and programs as well as individual and collective action to address poverty and promote social justice.

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³ CCIC, *Global Citizenship: A New Way Forward*, 1996, page 6.