

**DETERMINANTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY
AID EFFECTIVENESS:
A CCIC DISCUSSION PAPER**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I INTRODUCTION

Donors have been constructing a new aid architecture based on lessons in aid effectiveness drawn from past decades of development cooperation. To date, donor strategies for aid effectiveness have single-mindedly focused on donor-government relationships. They have also implied that the principles in the *Paris Declaration*, a 2005 expression of donor commitments to aid reform, are applicable to all development actors, including civil society organizations. The purpose of this discussion paper is to explore the universality of the *Paris Declaration* principles in relation to the development roles of civil society organizations.

The paper attempts to distinguish between the foundations for effective official donor cooperation and those that shape CSO international cooperation. Civil society organizations are development actors in their own right. An understanding of their roles in pursuit of poverty reduction, equality and justice is essential for clarifying CSO effectiveness.

In international cooperation, it is argued, at their most effective, CSOs mobilize resources and build international relationships in solidarity with efforts of poor and marginalized people to claim their rights and hold governments accountable. CSOs are expressions of active citizenship. The centrality of CSOs in building democratic culture and promoting alternatives, however, is seen to be in tension with a narrow donor interpretation of “ownership” in the *Paris Declaration*. While civil society is largely missing from the *Declaration*, the assumption that civil society can be simply subsumed under the *Declaration*’s principles and commitments may undermine key conditions that make CSOs effective development actors.

II A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

CSO support for current donor reforms to strengthen their aid effectiveness is guarded. They raise three key questions: Aid effectiveness for what purpose? Aid effectiveness for whom? Aid effectiveness as measured by whom? Increasingly CSOs are adopting a human right framework in their answers to these questions.

According to the *Declaration* the intended purpose of donor reforms is to help meet goals for poverty reduction, including the Millennium Development Goals. However, the *Declaration*’s aid effectiveness agenda focuses, not on conditions for effective poverty reduction, but on institutional reforms in government for a more effective and efficient *aid system*, with the seeming assumption that government actions alone will reduce poverty.

Most CSOs welcome the role of aid in strengthening of Southern governments in poor countries to meet their human rights obligations for health care or education for their citizens. But they suggest that a truer measure of aid effectiveness should be how aid resources actually affect the conditions that sustain dehumanizing poverty and inequality. Unfortunately, the *Paris Declaration* objectives and assessment indicators for donor commitments do not address this question. An alternative framework is required.

CCIC, together with other civil society networks around the world, have argued for rights-based obligations as a normative and organizing framework for monitoring donor progress in the aid system. This approach underscores the primacy and application of internationally-agreed to human rights instruments, including the Right to Development.

Actions to counter poverty are inherently political. National political will, strategies and institutional capacities on the part of government are certainly essential, but governments alone (often under the influence of economic and political elites) are often insufficient. These limitations have been compounded by the external insertion of commercial, security and political interests of donors and transnational corporations, who limit political space for alternative government policies in poor countries. Political and social movement organizing, by those living in poverty or otherwise marginalized in their society, is essential to their efforts to claim their rights. One of the central implications of using a human rights framework for aid effectiveness, then, is the need to take into account these links between sustainable development change and the efforts of engaged citizens.

III CSO ROLES AND CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Where do civil society organizations fit in citizens' efforts to reduce poverty and claim rights? CSO roles are inevitably defined by their diversity, which in turn is reflected in widely differing organizational values, objectives, intervention sectors, organizational structures, interests and resources. But at their heart, *effective* CSO roles, if understood within a rights framework, promote citizen participation and democracy and reflect the values of seeking socio-economic justice and connecting as global citizens.

Evolving substantially over the past 30 years, strategic CSO roles are located largely, but not exclusively, among Southern CSOs (SCSOs), others are shared North/South roles in international cooperation, while others focus on Northern CSOs (NCSOs). While there are certainly role distinctions between CSOs in the North and the South, there is also increasing overlap as a result of the globalized CSO activities, their convergence into networks, and the (sometimes controversial) expansion of some large NCSOs as Southern development actors.

The most important **CSO strategic roles** identified are:

1. Collaborating in solidarity with poor and marginalized citizens;
2. Articulating and coalescing of citizen interests for democratic governance in the South;
3. Advancing gender equality, particularly the rights of poor and marginalized women;

4. Expanding space for citizens' voices, particularly in the South, in policy dialogue;
5. Stimulating innovations grounded in the realities of where poor people live and work;
6. Building capacity in various areas relevant to social change;
7. Networking and learning, leveraging CSO knowledge and CSO policy perspectives;
8. Mobilize and leveraging Northern financial and human resources; and
9. Promoting expressions of global citizenship and exchange for global social justice.

According to CCIC's *Code of Ethics*, partnerships "should be vehicles for long-term accompaniment that support the rights of peoples to determine and carry out activities that further their own development options". Southern CSOs have identified challenges in such North/South partnerships affecting SCSOs' effectiveness as development actors. The core challenge is the profound imbalance of power in favour of the Northern CSO and official donor. A rights approach to aid effectiveness implies abandoning a "charity model" of Northern "giving", in favour of mutual solidarity and respect for the autonomy of SCSOs.

What then are some of **the challenges for effectively supporting rights and justice** through partnerships, as seen by Southern CSOs?

1. Northern CSO project modalities and sector priorities limit Southern CSO autonomy and legitimacy, with scarce financing for SCSO democratic processes and advocacy for rights.
2. Weak Southern CSO institutional capacities coexist with challenging socio-economic, political and conflictual situations, and with major infrastructure deficiencies.
3. Restrictive Southern government legal conditions imposed on legitimate SCSO roles are compounded by NCSOs, subject to "anti-terrorism" reporting / financing restrictions.
4. Opportunities are limited for effective influence and *critical* monitoring of government policy by SCSOs, with donor/government dialogue taking place behind closed doors.
5. SCSOs are often confronted with insensitivity and lack of understanding of local needs, culture and knowledge on the part of Northern CSOs and donors.

IV CONDITIONS FOR IMPROVED EFFECTIVENESS IN CSO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Most Northern CSOs make institutional choices through their funding modalities with Southern counterparts. In doing so, this paper argues, they should be guided by assessments of effective contributions to poverty reduction and justice by Southern counterparts, taking into account a rights-based approach. There is no assumption that NCSO choices are currently being made along these lines. Clearly there are important dynamics of power at play between NCSOs and SCSOs, as there are for official donors. Three major areas for reform shape the possibilities for more effective NCSO support for counterparts in the South.

1. Quality North/South CSO relationships should reflect rights-based principles that maximize SCSO capacities to claim “ownership” over their own development politics with local constituencies, governments and multilateral institutions.
2. Internal NCSO operating procedures should be consistent with the principles, reducing the impact of Northern “operational imperatives” and staff presumptions on working relationships and structures of democratic accountability with Southern counterparts.
3. CSO aid effectiveness is highly contingent upon official donor influence on the ability of NCSOs to respond effectively to SCSO-determined needs and approaches. A one-size-fits-all logic of “alignment” with donor/PRSP “priorities” or artificial “harmonization” with donor operational policies at a country level may ignore SCSO priorities.

The **principles**, drawn from CCIC’s *Code of Ethics*, as well as 30 years of CSO experience, include a negotiated shared vision, a mutual respect for diversity and difference, honesty and transparency in commitments and obligations, a climate of mutual trust and equity in the working relationship, and a commitment to share knowledge. The key to effective CSO engagements for global justice and reducing poverty and contributing to global justice will be efforts to put these principles into practice.

While each CSO relationship is unique, the paper identifies some **indicators of NCSO practice** that suggest partnerships based on equality, solidarity and mutual respect:

- ❑ Mutually-acceptable signed agreement(s) in compliance with CSO Codes of Conduct;
- ❑ Negotiated levels of funding and the timely release of funds;
- ❑ Increased levels of SCSO institutional funding, with greater flexibility in accountability;
- ❑ Information sharing a regular part of the operating context for the NCSO and the SCSO;
- ❑ Demonstrated efforts to rely on Southern expertise and Southern-directed CSOs;
- ❑ NCSO solidarity policy initiatives, responsive to SCSO policy and advocacy roles; and
- ❑ Increased NCSO support for Southern-directed CSO networks, coalitions and alliances.

NCSO institutional operations will contribute to aid effectiveness in the South if the organization is:

- ❑ Articulating a clearly understood institutional (rights-based) mandate and values;
- ❑ Adhering and assessing goals and approaches against relevant Codes of Conduct;
- ❑ Addressing potential tensions between NSCO revenue generation / profile and values;
- ❑ Devoting significant resources, including staff time, to North/South learning and training;
- ❑ Facilitating, not imposing, development processes, taking direction from SCSOs;
- ❑ Providing more un-earmarked core support to long-term trustful SCSO relationships;
- ❑ Implementing accountability to minimize compromising “downward” accountability;

- ❑ Facilitating coherent policy messages in collaboration with Southern counterparts, including Southern-led networks and coalitions; and
- ❑ Encouraging risk-taking and leadership for North/South empowerment, sensitivity to local context and conditions.

Donors policies and practices have a significant influence on the potential quality of CSO relationships and thereby their effectiveness as development actors. CSOs have identified a number of donor reforms in aid practices that would improve CSO capacities to structure effective and principled working relationships with counterparts and constituencies.

- ❑ Respect CSOs as development actors in their own right, not subsidiary to donor priorities;
- ❑ Provide a mixture of funding options, with substantial priority for responsive funding;
- ❑ Assure long-term predictable funding, permitting core and program support of SCSOs;
- ❑ Limit donor imposed competition for resources, particularly between NCSOs and SCSOs;
- ❑ Engage CSOs systematically on poverty-reduction strategies, including budget support;
- ❑ Enable CSOs as democratic facilitators of government accountability to poor communities;
- ❑ Implement and simplify operational requirements, permitting NCSOs to structure equitable SCSO partnerships for autonomous CSO locally-controlled development efforts.

V CONCLUSIONS

At their best, CSOs create bridges between local civic actions and national/global civil society aspirations that are responsive to the realities where poor and marginalized people live. They cannot, and must not, replace the responsibility and human rights obligations of government and citizens. At the same time, CSOs, as expressions of active citizenship, should not be considered subsidiary to government development plans.

On the surface, CSO aid effectiveness principles could seem to fit with those in the *Paris Declaration* – ownership, alignment, harmonization, mutual accountability. However, the implementation of the *Declaration* is largely carried out by donors and a few officials in the central governments of the poorest countries. Current donor practices in harmonization and alignment, with aid conditionality, will limit the achievement of real local “ownership”.

The goals for civil society, by contrast, are more closely aligned with the principles of democratic culture which requires respect and encouragement of pluralities of views, policy and development alternatives. Democratic culture in the South would be limited if constrained artificially by super-imposed donor/local government strategies for harmonization of all external and local development CSO actors. Donor and CSO approaches to effective development cooperation may sometimes be in tension. But it is a tension that CSOs will argue is at the heart of democratic practice, upon which the sustainability of results from donor development interventions depends.

CSOs themselves must take leadership, acknowledging that their practices must continue to evolve and change. The paper suggests some avenues for these changes. The solution, however, may not be a few civil society-oriented paragraphs into the *Paris Declaration* with the assumption that CSOs could then align themselves with the *Declaration* principles and commitments. The challenge is a deeper one to both CSOs and donors to reflect on actions to end poverty consistent with human rights obligations and approaches.

DETERMINANTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY AID EFFECTIVENESS: A CCIC DISCUSSION PAPER

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1.0 INTRODUCTION: AID EFFECTIVENESS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Over the past ten years, donors have been constructing a new aid architecture based on the lessons in aid effectiveness drawn from past decades of development cooperation. This architecture was recently summarized in the March 2005 *Paris Declaration*. The *Declaration* articulated a set of aid effectiveness principles and donor commitments (with specific targets) to implement the principles. Donors seemingly have reached their own consensus² on the most important principles and practices to improve the effective delivery of aid for poverty reduction:

1. **Ownership** by partner countries, exercising effective leadership over their development policies, and strategies;
2. **Alignment** by donors to partner countries' national development strategies, institutions and procedures;
3. **Harmonize** donors' actions and make them transparent;
4. **Results** are measurable; and
5. **Mutual Accountability** by donors and partners for development results.

Official donors have been largely responsible, with some limited inclusion of Southern recipient governments, for establishing these principles and the related commitments in the *Paris Declaration* and in their own aid policies. To date, official donor strategies for aid effectiveness have single-mindedly focused on donor-government relationships. Donors, however, have also implied in the *Paris Declaration* that its principles are applicable to all development actors,

¹ This paper has benefited immeasurably from detailed and perceptive comments on an earlier draft by a number of staff and colleagues associated with CCIC. The author very much appreciates those who took the time to read and comment. While many suggestions have influenced the final paper, the author alone remains responsible for its content and the conclusions reached. The goal of this "discussion paper" is to stimulate debate; it should be read very much as a work in progress. CCIC is eager to receive further comments and reflections from readers, which should be forwarded to btomlinson@ccic.ca.

² While it is true that some recipient governments and CSOs participated in developing this consensus at the 2005 High Level Meeting in Paris, it is unclear the degree to which recipient governments have shaped either the principles or the commitments. CSOs present at Paris in 2005 are listed as participating in the consensus, but at no point did they endorse the Paris Declaration. The origins of many of these principles can be traced back to the 1996 DAC document, *Shaping the 21st Century*, which was created solely by aid ministers from the donor countries. See a brief history in de Renzio and Mulley, 2006.

including civil society organizations³. Recently, there has been a growing donor policy discussion, and among some civil society organizations in the North, on how CSOs development efforts might be included in the commitments of the *Paris Declaration*. But will inclusion in the *Declaration's* principles and approaches make CSOs more effective development actors?

The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to contribute to this emerging debate by testing the universality of the *Paris Declaration* principles in relation to civil society organizations. In doing so, the paper does not take the implications of the *Declaration's* principles for civil society actors as its starting point.⁴ Rather the paper attempts to distinguish between the foundations for effective official donor cooperation and those that shape CSO international cooperation. An understanding of mandates for civil society, development actors in their own right, is an essential starting point for clarifying CSO effectiveness.

The paper first briefly questions the donors' notion of "aid effectiveness" and posits that aid effectiveness should be considered within a framework of human rights obligations for all development actors. It then clarifies the goals and roles of CSOs in promoting poverty reduction, equality and justice. In doing so, it looks more closely at the principles and practices that CSOs have identified as guides for improving the effectiveness of their support for these goals. The DAC estimates that in 2004 CSOs contributed US\$11.3 billion to international cooperation initiatives.⁵ But CSOs do not organize these initiatives in a vacuum; they are strongly affected (positively and negatively) by donor and government policies. The paper

³ There are countless "Civil Society Organizations" involved in development. This paper is focusing on a sub-set of CSOs, in both the North and the South, which relate either directly or indirectly to the system of international development assistance, and whose mandate is broadly to contribute to poverty reduction in the South. This sub-set tends to be formally organized and registered citizen organizations (such as NGOs, associations, cooperatives, trade unions, faith organizations, cultural, professional and educational institutions) rather than informal community-based neighbourhood organizations or social movements, although the former grouping may well work with the latter in meeting their mandate and goals.

The paper largely ignores roles of humanitarian actors – local and international cooperation CSOs – in humanitarian assistance and responses to complex conflict and post-conflict situations. The emphasis is on CSOs working in partnerships in those developing countries less affected by conflict and humanitarian emergencies. This is recognized to be a considerable gap (one that is also in the donor literature on aid effectiveness) as international CSOs play increasingly significant roles in humanitarian emergencies. There is a considerable literature on Good Humanitarian Donorship for donors and on codes of conduct to guide actions by CSOs working in humanitarian assistance, which ideally should be taken into account for a more comprehensive picture of issues in CSOs' aid effectiveness.

⁴ CCIC and other CSOs have recently set out a number of these concerns. See Brian Tomlinson, "The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Donor Commitments and Civil Society Critiques", A CCIC Background, May 2006, for a review of CSO concerns with the aid effectiveness agenda as set out in the Paris Declaration (http://ccic.ca/e/docs/002_aid_2006-05_paris_declaration_background.pdf). A recent paper by CARE International and Actionaid also provides an excellent in-depth overview of many of these same concerns [CARE and Actionaid, 2006].

⁵ There is no comparable estimate for Canada. CIDA reported to the DAC that Canadian CSOs contributed US\$640 million to development cooperation. These amounts do not include Canadian government sources. CCIC estimates that the total Canadian CSO contributions from all sources to international cooperation is approximate Cdn\$1.3 billion in 2004, or 50% of CIDA total disbursements that year.

therefore concludes with a discussion of an enabling policy environment that might further facilitate CSO effectiveness.⁶ The discussion returns in the conclusion to the relevance of the *Paris Declaration* principles to civil society as development actors.

CSOs are expressions of active citizenship. In international cooperation, CSOs mobilize resources and build international relationships based on solidarity with efforts of poor and marginalized people to claim their rights and hold governments accountable. This paper argues that these efforts are most effective when they reflect and encourage “local ownership” as political and societal processes that engage citizens who are often excluded. The centrality of CSOs in building democratic culture and promoting alternatives, however, is in tension with the narrow interpretation of “ownership” in the *Paris Declaration*. While civil society is largely missing from the *Declaration*, the assumption that civil society can be simply subsumed to the *Declaration’s* principles and commitments may undermine key conditions that make CSOs effective development actors.

2.0 EFFECTIVE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

While CSOs welcome aspects of donor commitments to improve donor effectiveness, CSOs question the current criteria for judging the effectiveness of aid as expressed in the *Paris Declaration*. CSO support for donor reform agendas is, consequently, guarded and raises three key questions: Aid effectiveness for what purpose? Aid effectiveness for whom? Aid effectiveness as measured by whom? Increasingly CSOs are adopting a human right framework in their answers to these questions.

According to the *Declaration* the intended purpose of the reforms proposed is to help meet goals for poverty reduction, including the Millennium Development Goals. However, the *Declaration’s* aid effectiveness agenda focuses, not on conditions for effective poverty reduction, but on institutional reforms for a more effective and efficient *aid system*. Donors acknowledge that their broad aim is to improve the operations of an aid system, i.e. the conditions that affect the delivery of increased financial and human resources from official donors to Southern government counterparts.

CSOs argue that, in fact, there is no consensus on development approaches. The perception of “consensus” is the result of a convergence of policies, program objectives, and conditions linked to harmonized donor aid. However, donor aid is still determined largely by donor officials, now more often in dialogue with select government officials in the South [CARE and Actionaid, 2006], with very limited participation or engagement of other development actors in society.

In the name of “aid effectiveness”, the *Paris Declaration* locks donors’ bilateral programs into a centralized and exclusive relationship with Southern state actors. These state actors are often very sensitive to the political interests of only the wealthy and the elite. The economic policy, governance and accountability conditions, coordinated by economists at the World Bank and the IMF, have been effectively integrated into “aligned and harmonized” donor official aid programs

⁶ These conclusions build on a series of briefing papers prepared by CCIC on strengthening civil society partnerships as a contribution to a process for renewing a policy framework for partnership with civil society currently being developed by CIDA. These papers can be found at <http://ccic.ca/e/002/aid.shtml>.

at the country level [Eurodad, 2006; Actionaid International, 2006]. Most CSOs welcome the role of aid in strengthening of Southern governments in poor countries to meet their obligations for health care or education for their citizens. But, despite donor rhetoric on the centrality of “local ownership” for effective aid, their aid conditions continue to shape all facets of development in these countries and undermine the rights of citizens to determine their own development policies and directions of governments.⁷

The true measure of aid effectiveness, as suggested by CSOs at the 2005 Paris High Level Meeting, must be how the terms attached to aid resources actually affect the conditions that sustain dehumanizing poverty and inequality for poor and marginalized peoples [Tujan, 2005]. Unfortunately, the assessment indicators and criteria elaborated by the World Bank and the DAC for donor commitments in the *Paris Declaration* do not address this question [DAC, 2005]. An alternative framework is required.

CCIC, together with other civil society networks around the world, have argued for a rights-based approach as a normative and organizing framework for international cooperation. This approach underscores the primacy of internationally-agreed to human rights instruments, including the Right to Development. While the focus here is on international cooperation, a rights approach must be comprehensive with implications for all dimensions of policies of donor and recipient countries, including the promotion of investment, trade justice, economic and social inclusion, debt cancellation, and efforts to sustain the planet’s ecosystems.

In a rights framework, civil society organizations argue that human rights obligations of states should establish the principles and standards for monitoring donor progress in the aid system [Reality of Aid, 2004]. The 2000 UNDP Human Development Report affirmed this approach by calling for a “rights ethos for aid” as the basis for empowering people in the fight against poverty [UNDP, 2000, pp. 12, 119]. Understanding the effectiveness of aid in international cooperation cannot therefore be separated from this “rights ethos”.

As the work of Amartya Sen demonstrates [Sen, 1999], success in ending poverty will ultimately be achieved when the rights of the vulnerable and the poor are recognized in the face of highly unequal cultural, social, economic, and political power relations at all levels. With women forming the majority of the poor and vulnerable, issues of gender equality and processes for women to claim their rights are central to poverty reduction.

While based on international legal codes and covenants, the rights framework is dynamic one and continues to evolve. It has emerged out of many decades of struggles by peoples’ organizations – women’s movements, indigenous nations, gay and lesbian networks, workers and labour organizations, fishers and farmers’ organizations, and human rights defenders. Human rights are essentially active and should not merely be “promoted” or “protected”, but are to be practiced and experienced. They have implications for the actions of all donors, governments, and non-state actors in their commitment to end poverty. [Foster, 2003, pp. 7-8]

⁷ It is important to note that a few donors, DFID in the UK and NORAD in Norway, have developed policies on reducing and eliminating imposed economic policy conditions such as privatization attached to their aid and in World Bank projects. However, to date these policies have had limited influence on other bilateral donors, the World Bank and IMF.

One of the central implications of using a human rights framework for aid effectiveness is the recognition that effective and sustainable development change will not take place in the absence of engaged citizens. Actions to counter poverty are inherently political. National political will, strategies and institutional capacities on the part of government are certainly essential, but these conditions are insufficient for a sustained impact. Political and social movement organizing, on the part of those who are living in poverty or otherwise marginalized by their society and government, is essential to their efforts to claim their rights. The right to association, along with substantial participation by citizens in strategies to claim rights, therefore, is a crucial measurement for understanding the effectiveness of civil society organizations in reducing poverty. The capacity of citizens to take advantage of these rights is strongly affected by inequalities, vulnerabilities and poverty. As noted above, the commercial, security and political interests of donors and transnational corporations for many years have affected the political space for governments in poor countries to meet their obligations to citizens.

Citizens working together on shared priorities for development change takes many forms – building citizen awareness of rights, creating opportunities for citizens to participate in CSOs, organizing local development initiatives, and collaborating with CSOs and social movements to advocate and claim rights, nationally and globally. CSOs are an essential facet of a robust democratic political culture. Consideration of aid effectiveness of civil society organizations must, therefore, be situated within this rights-based framework.

This next section describes a range of diverse roles and challenges to effectiveness currently experienced by CSOs, North and South, whose mandate is one of solidarity, in support of efforts of poor and marginalized people to claim their rights. It sets the stage for section 4 which outlines some principles and approaches to international CSO collaboration that might strengthen CSOs own effectiveness, given the roles required of them, and the challenges they face.

3.0 CSO ROLES AND CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

3.1 Identifying Strategic Roles for CSOs in International Cooperation

The roles of civil society organizations in development action for poverty reduction and promotion of rights cannot be reduced easily to a few functional statements. These roles are inevitably defined by the profound diversity of CSOs, which in turn is reflected in widely differing organizational values, objectives, sectors of intervention, structures and resources. They differ in terms of representativity and linkages to constituencies, varying geographic locale and scope, narrow to broad and complex statements of mandates, varying degrees of skill and capacities to make change, and widely differing access to international partners.⁸ But at their heart, CSO roles cannot be separated from the dynamics of citizen participation and democracy.

⁸ Michael Edwards suggests that it is impossible and likely unhelpful to disaggregate this diversity when trying to assess CSO impacts and identify the key roles of CSOs because such impact is bound up in complex layers and global and webs of global and national civic action. Better, he proposes to assess impact by asking “whether NGOs [sic] did the right thing on the really big issues of our times” and to worry less about separating CSO roles at the micro level. [Edwards, 2005, p. 6] Edwards and others suggest that these big-picture systemic impacts globally relate to 1) changing the terms of debate on globalization, 2) putting poverty reduction and inequalities on the global agendas, 3) addressing issues of debt cancellation, 4) highlighting the need for reform of international institutions of governance, and 5) asserting an intellectual commitment to human rights as basic principles for development.

While there is great diversity in the contributions of CSOs to poverty reduction and the capacities of the poor to claim their rights, there are nevertheless some important dimensions of CSO work that characterize the most effective contributions. Understood from a rights perspective, effective CSO roles derive from strong democratic, participatory values, values of socio-economic equality and a strong sense of global citizenship. These different CSO roles have evolved substantially in the experience of CSOs over the past 30 years. CSOs roles have been deeply affected in recent times by the impact of the politics and technologies of globalization on possibilities for global relationships of solidarity [Lavergne and Wood, 2006, p. 5]. Some strategic roles are located substantially, but not exclusively, among Southern CSOs, others are shared North / South roles in international cooperation, while others focus on Northern CSOs.⁹

3.1.1 CSO Strategic Roles

1. **Collaboration and Solidarity.** CSOs contribute to development by collaborating with organizations and social movements that are formed by, or work in solidarity with, citizens living in poverty or who are otherwise marginalized. These organizations, overwhelmingly based in the South, bring together citizen action in self-help groups, in support of grass-roots people-centred development, and promote a democratic culture of participatory civic values.
2. **Democratic Governance.** CSOs support democratic governance in the South, through the articulation and coalescing of citizen interests [Lavergne and Wood, 2006, p. 22]. Southern CSO work helps mobilize innovative citizen participation in governance at all levels of their society, by promoting the mediation and aggregation of disparate interests within and between communities.
3. **Gender Equality.** Advancing gender equality, with a particular focus on the rights of poor and marginalized women, is a critical and requisite element in effective strategies to make progress against poverty. Women-centred civil society organizations, in particular, undertake and promote culturally-sensitive women's programming in the South. These organizations draw the attention of both donors as well as Southern and Northern CSOs to key gender equality issues, otherwise missing from their day-to-day programming in all areas of development. [AWID, 2006]
4. **Citizens' Voices.** CSOs support the articulation of the voice and interests of citizens, particularly those who are poor and marginalized in policy making processes. The interaction of Northern and Southern CSOs can reinforce an expanding space for democratic policy dialogue in the South by consciously facilitating the inclusion of domestic change agents from different levels of society. This interaction can also nourish capacities in Southern CSOs to follow more closely policy dialogue processes and build popular support for their advocacy.

⁹ Several commentators on an earlier draft suggested separate lists of roles for Northern and Southern CSOs. While clearly there are role distinctions between CSOs in the North and the South, as this paragraph attempts to argue, there is also increasing overlap as a result of the globalization of CSO activities, their convergence in networks, and the (controversial) expansion of some large Northern CSOs as CSO development actors in the South. Further analysis perhaps is required that takes into account more complex North/South CSO dynamics.

5. **Stimulating Innovation.** CSOs have developed and help scale up innovative approaches to development, particularly in the social services sectors, and forms of social entrepreneurship and income generation, that are grounded in the realities of where poor people live and work. CSOs are risk-takers, often operating in complex situations where outcomes are inter-related and challenging to predict, meeting the needs of people otherwise poorly serviced by government or the aid system. While sometimes stimulated by shared program lessons by Northern CSOs, these innovations are largely rooted in the experience of Southern CSOs. For example, some Northern CSOs have shared lessons to encourage Southern counterparts to move beyond direct service provision towards approaches that empower poor communities to organize to claim their rights. [CARE and Actionaid, 2006, pp. 52-54; Lavergne and Wood, 2006, p. 29]
6. **Capacity-Building.** Both Northern and Southern CSOs work with local CSOs, with national or grassroots mandates, and sometimes local government and national ministries, providing opportunities for learning and training in various areas relevant to social change. Northern and Southern CSO linkages bring exposures to new knowledge and approaches through access to different expertise and networks for ongoing capacity development.
7. **Networking and Learning.** CSOs facilitate information exchange, networking and learning within and across Southern regions and countries, as well as North / South. Northern cooperation CSOs can facilitate information exchange with Southern counterparts for the latter's own capacity building processes and to support participation in complex international policy processes. North / South partnerships create space for leveraging CSO knowledge, based on micro-level development experiences, into macro-level policy discussions, at national, regional and global levels. CSO networking also facilitates identification of shared CSO policy perspectives upon which to engage and challenge official policy makers.¹⁰
8. **Leveraging Resources.** CSOs mobilize and leverage Northern financial and human resources. Canadian CSOs annually raise more than Cdn\$700 million from the Canadian public and leverage an additional Cdn\$400 million from official Canadian and multilateral sources.¹¹ Resources transfers by Northern CSOs are potentially flexible, able to target a variety of areas of work for high impact (in the context of high risk), geographic locations where poor people live, or development approaches disregarded by other development actors, in which the small or medium-sized project still plays a crucial role.
10. **Promoting Global Citizenship.** Canadian and other Northern CSOs are a significant expression of the commitment of Northern citizens to development and global social justice. CSOs are the main implementers of public engagement programs on global issues. They

¹⁰ ODI researchers suggest that CSO partnerships and networks can serve six roles as conveners to bring people together: *filters* to decide what information merits attention; *amplifiers* to make "little known or little understood ideas more widely recognized, facilitators to help members, citizens implement their activities more effectively and efficiently; *community builders* to promote and sustain the values and standards of the individuals or organizations within them; *investors or providers* to provide resources to other organizations. [Court, *et. al.*, 2006, p. 36]

¹¹ See Brian Tomlinson, "Funding International Development: Revenue Trends for 60 Canadian CSOs, 1994 – 2004", accessible at <http://ccic.ca/e/002/aid.shtml>. The leveraged \$400 million is a projection based on the trends for these 60 members. See also Lavergne and Wood, 2006, p. 15.

inform and raise awareness about these issues, create opportunities for people to experience local realities in developing countries, and help to facilitate citizens of the North and the South working and acting together to change the conditions that perpetuate poverty and injustice. [CCIC, 2006c]

3.2 Challenges in North / South CSO Partnerships for Effective Impact

Southern CSOs (SCSOs) have identified a number of challenges arising from international partnerships that affect SCSOs' ability to effectively achieve results and impact for their chosen goals. Not least among these is the predominance of intellectual leadership and content in aid architecture reform originating in the North, rather than the South, for both donors and CSOs [Lwanga-Ntael, 2005, p. 3; Tembo, 2003, p. 9]. From a Southern CSO point of view, the core challenge for an effective North / South CSO engagement in support of poverty reduction continues to be the profound imbalance of power in favour of the North in the structuring of CSO and donor relationships (often termed "partnerships" by the Northern counterpart).

The most effective relationships, from a Southern CSO perspective, are those based, not on a "charity model" of donor-recipient giving, but on mutual solidarity. The former revolves mainly around the terms for the provision of resources from the North to the South. The latter respects the autonomy of Southern CSO actors, allowing greater scope for transparency in the relationship, and more effective and equitable processes for negotiating and monitoring goals and progress, in the spirit of mutual accountability [Brehm, Vicky (2000), p. 56, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland, 2002]. However, it is also recognized that one of the principal challenges in achieving these conditions is the complex demands that result from the ways in which Northern CSO (NCSO) must manage and account for their financing.

Northern CSOs should no longer be acting on their own, intervening directly in communities in the South. Sustainable results for poverty reduction will only be realized through establishing and maintaining relations with Southern civil society organizations (and sometimes government bodies¹²).

This guiding principle has been the reality for most Canadian international cooperation CSOs for more than 15 years. In order to articulate this commitment, the CCIC Code of Ethics, developed and implemented by more than 90 Canadian CSOs, was recently updated to add a set of "partnership principles" and operational interpretations that should guide CCIC members in making their relationships with other civil society organizations most effective. Partnerships, according to CCIC, "should be vehicles for long term accompaniment that support the rights of peoples to determine and carry out activities that further their own development options" [CCIC, 2004].¹³ Partnerships are formed on the basis of shared objectives, resources and accountability [Laverne and Wood, 2006, p. 13]. But what are some of the current challenges for Northern and Southern CSOs in achieving this goal?

¹² It is important that Northern CSOs not supplant national CSOs in working with Southern governments, as these governments seek the resources and capacities that global CSO families, such as Oxfam or Save the Children, are able to command.

¹³ CCIC is not unique in establishing a Code of Conduct. BOND, the platform for UK CSOs, recently reviewed NGO approaches to assuring quality in their development relationships and the various codes of practice that have been developed in various jurisdictions to govern such CSOs. [BOND, 2006]

3.2.1 Northern CSO Project Modalities Limit Institutional Autonomy and Legitimacy

While individual projects can be an effective means to define and realize particular NCSO goals, they are usually only one aspect of a SCSO's work. Unfortunately, all too often, such projects drive and structure the focus and potential relationships of this SCSO. Moreover, NCSOs' priorities are often driven by the sectoral priorities of Northern donors. Many SCSOs, as they strengthen their institutional capacities, want to have options for financing that goes beyond "projects". They benefit most from financing that respects the Southern institution's need for flexible and integrated programs that have legitimacy in the eyes of their constituencies, particularly those in poor and marginalized communities [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland, 2002; Lavergne and Wood, 2006, pp. 9-10 for a discussion of the continued relevance of small projects]. The most difficult areas of work for SCSOs to finance are often those relating to democracy and development, capacity for advocacy and the promotion of rights.

SCSOs will be most effective at all levels if they can build their work iteratively, rooted in the dynamics of their relationships with domestic constituencies that have a stake in their work and mandate. A related concern that can compound the challenge of constituency-building for SCSOs has been the recent dynamic in which the largest and most powerful NCSOs seek to expand and "domesticate" their "NGO brand" in developing country local markets through local offices managed by staff from the developing country and through direct relationships with government. These efforts can sometimes stunt or undermine the autonomous growth of local SCSOs [Edwards, 2005, p. 7; Menocal and Rogerson, 2006, 20; CARE and Actionaid, 2006, p. 45]. More broadly, many SCSOs receive little serious engagement or financing for NCSO "downward accountability" and "building mutuality" in the development and assessment of shared projects or programs.

3.2.2 Weak Southern CSO Institutional Capacities in a Challenging Environment

Many SCSOs, particularly those working closest to people and communities in poverty, are challenged by their institutional capacities for organizational management and change. These organizations are expected to develop effective programs with governments, with donors, and with NCSOs in increasingly complex social, economic and political environments. Additionally, they are expected to operate effectively in a context of major deficiencies in local infrastructure. While local connections with communities can be clearly a CSO strength, often SCSOs are very specialized (by sector or locale) and have little experience learning and presenting perspectives beyond the specifics of their local realities. Many Southern CSO commentators continue to highlight significant shortfalls in SCSO capacities to engage in policy process with governments, donors and the international community [Menocal and Rogerson, 2006; CARE and Actionaid, 2006].

The capacity building support SCSOs do receive relates often to better management of the Northern-driven project system than their institutional needs. Southern service delivery CSOs have been challenged, more recently, to develop advocacy capacities to complement or shift from direct service delivery (still an overwhelming requirement in many circumstances) to also undertake a rights approach that strengthen community organization and empowerment to claim rights [CARE and Actionaid, 2006, p. 34]. Alternatively, it may be more effective to retain a distinction between CSOs with a service delivery mandate and CSOs seeking societal reform and changes in the structures of injustice. Determining an appropriate approach is highly context specific, and emerges from the dynamic of Southern CSOs in the country concerned.

3.2.3 Restrictive Legal Conditions on Expanding Southern CSO Roles

Most SCSOs support an enabling legal and regulatory environment in their country providing it respects the independence of CSOs in the country concerned. In some developing countries, however, legislation is promoted as a means to restrict legitimate CSO activity that might challenge the government concerned. In these cases, legislation is drafted with little input from CSOs. Since September 2001, Northern CSOs have faced reporting and financing restrictions arising from “anti-terrorism” legislation, with serious implications for the quality of their Southern partnerships. More broadly, CSOs underline that a basic democratic political culture is essential to allow the exercise of citizenship. The ability of poor and marginalized people to claim their rights is constrained when governments impose restrictions on the freedom of the press to expose information relevant to citizens’ interests or limit their freedom of association. Both of these political rights are crucial for a democratic society.¹⁴ [Tembo 2003, p. 5; Wild, 2006, p. 10]

3.2.4 Narrowing Political Space for Policy Interventions by Southern CSOs

Consultative processes in some Southern countries for developing broad poverty reduction plans by governments (PRSPs) have recently created some opportunity for input by CSOs. But many SCSOs have experienced a narrowing of space for ongoing policy influence and critical monitoring of government performance.

Donor efforts to contribute to the strengthening of government capacities to deliver services and implement policies for their populations have been welcomed by most CSO observers. But donor negotiations with select government officials to support central budgets, with wide-ranging implications for poor people, take place behind closed doors, and under rules and technical and policy conditions largely imposed by the donors.

Local CSOs also report fewer opportunities to meet and influence donors who now suggest that the new aid architecture should direct SCSOs to work exclusively with their own governments [CARE and Actionaid, 2006, p. 30]. SCSOs and related social movements, representing popular organizations with critical perspectives on government and donor policies, have been sidelined by their governments. These governments, in these situations, point to already agreed “aligned” national agreements on policies and budget priorities among donors, government and selected NCSOs and SCSOs. Local SCSOs beyond the national capitals, even if interested and engaged in policy processes, often lack access to relevant information and the means to travel hundreds of kilometers to participate in last-minute policy consultations. The latter tend to be dominated by a few NCSOs with a local presence and some national SCSOs. [CARE and Actionaid, 2006, p. 36]

¹⁴ Since 2001, anti-terrorism laws in the United States, Canada and other developing countries has placed new restrictions and reporting requirements on Northern CSOs that affect the terms of North/South civil society partnerships.

3.2.5 Insensitivity and Lack of Understanding of Local Needs, Culture and Knowledge

The internet has created tremendous opportunities for the exchange of information and the day-to-day management of relationships over many thousands of kilometers. But SCSOs face significant challenges in accessing timely information about donors and their NCSO partners. Rather than ongoing dialogue, SCSOs are often confronted by already established assumptions, on the part of their Northern counterparts, about the most important issues and approaches to reducing poverty in their country as well as about their context and needs as a Southern CSO. SCSOs often raise a related challenge of accountability when NCSOs claim legitimacy in representing Southern policy interests in Northern countries or in international forums, at which it is far more difficult for SCSOs to be regularly present. But also, some smaller and medium-sized NCSOs face capacity challenges in translating their field-based knowledge into relevant policy messages in the North, while respecting the integrity of their Southern partnerships.

4.0 CONDITIONS FOR IMPROVED EFFECTIVENESS IN CSO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Clearly CSO relationships for development cooperation can take different forms, not all of which should be considered “partnerships”, which is the focus of this background paper. More recently, processes associated with globalization have contributed to a blending of different forms of CSO engagement – institutional partnerships, CSO coalitions, and loose networks and alliances. This blending, with varying degrees of Northern CSO involvement, has increased the overall impact of CSO global initiatives [Brehm, 2000, p. 53]. These expanding global CSO forums and networks increase the opportunities for CSOs to seek common cause, to scale up effective approaches, or to coalesce policy perspectives for common advocacy and policy interventions. While such blended forms of engagement are important, individual CSOs remain the reference point for much of the discussion of conditions necessary for NCSO effectiveness in addressing some of the challenges laid out by SCSOs.

Most Northern CSOs, not unlike official donors, must make choices in selecting and determining funding modalities with Southern counterparts. In doing so, this paper argues that they should be guided by their assessment of effective contributions to poverty reduction and justice by Southern counterparts, taking into account a rights-based approach. But this is not to suggest that CSO choices are necessarily being made along these lines. Clearly there are important power and political dynamics at play for Northern CSOs, as there are for official donors. There are three major considerations shaping the effectiveness of NCSOs supporting counterparts in the South.

First, the quality of North / South CSO relationships must nourish SCSOs with capacities to claim “ownership” over not only their own development dynamic with their constituencies, but also with regard to the determination and implementation of national policies. In this regard, CSOs understand “ownership” as an ongoing political process inherent in any society. Unfortunately, the *Paris Declaration* focuses largely on institutional processes of government and sets of benchmarks that ignore this more dynamic and political understanding of local ownership as involving engaged citizenship.¹⁵ This brings into question, therefore, whether there is a shared understanding of the ownership principle.

¹⁵ Donors largely accept the often limited consultations associated with PRSPs as imperfect participation in setting national priorities, but associate themselves with the priorities established in the PRSPs as the basis for their country programs [de Renzio and Mulley, 2006].

Second, for many NCSOs, internal operational structures and procedures have evolved in response to the changing context and demands for accountability in the Northern donor country. This can lead to reproducing official development cooperation partnership models and objectives. However, increased effectiveness for rights-based partnerships requires NCSOs to reflect upon the assumptions and impact of these “operational imperatives” for their roles and methods of working with Southern counterparts, and on issues of accountability in these relationships. The diversity of CSOs, and the importance of this diversity for democratic culture, suggests that a “one-size-fits-all” approach to reform may in fact limit SCSO effectiveness as democratic development actors. While Northern and Southern CSOs can definitely improve upon and expand forms of collaboration along with practices informed by solidarity, these processes are likely to be effective if they follow an institutional logic based on a particular history of relationships. CSO effectiveness will be undermined if they are compelled to fit into a donor-imposed logic of “alignment” with donor / PRSP “priorities” or into an artificial “harmonization” with donor operational policies at a country level.

Finally, CSO aid effectiveness is highly contingent upon the ways in which official donors are able to influence the quality of CSO partnerships and the ability of NCSOs to respond effectively to SCSO-determined needs and approaches. Thus, donors (and Southern governments) also play a very important role in establishing an enabling environment for CSO to reach their full potential in effectively reducing global poverty and realizing human rights through development cooperation.

We explore each of these three areas in turn.

4.1 Principles that Define Quality Partnerships

The principles of partnership in CCIC’s Code of Ethics identify many of the qualities that define the potential for empowering North / South relationships that will result in more effective development interventions by Southern counterparts [CCIC, 2004, p. 3].¹⁶ Many of these principles are similar to some of those described in the Paris Declaration to which the donors have committed. However, the diversity of direct North / South engagements of civil society organizations provides a different terrain to test the relevance, successes and challenges in putting these principles into practice. Section 4.2 will suggest different actions and approaches, many of which NCSOs are already implementing, to put principles into practice. These NCSO experiences provide a learning opportunity for donors assessing, at a High Level Meeting in Ghana in 2008, their own progress in implementing aid effectiveness principles.¹⁷

¹⁶ The CCIC partnership principles are complemented in what follows below by additional southern CSO commentary [Brehm, 2000, pp. 14, 57; Tembo, 2003, pp. 3-4; CARE and Actionaid, 2006, p. 19; ACFOA, 2002, p. 9; Menocal and Rogerson, 2006].

¹⁷ In the Canadian context, CCIC has begun to collect information on its members’ self-certification on their compliance with the partnership principles in the Code of Ethics. CCIC will be assessing issues for Canadian CSOs as they continue to adapt their programming and will be providing opportunities for learning to improve their partnership practices. CCIC has collected a number of members’ case studies, which demonstrate different aspects of CSO aid effectiveness. See for example Brian Tomlinson, “Telling our Stories, an Overview of Policy Lessons”, in CCIC, *Telling our Stories, Drawing Policy Lessons from Development Experience*, 2006, accessible at http://ccic.ca/e/docs/002_capacity_bldg_stories_overview.pdf. See also the CCIC/CIDA 2003 Dialogue on Local Ownership, Lessons on Aid Effectiveness from Civil Society at <http://ccic.ca/e/002/aid.shtml>. Recent CIDA institutional performance evaluations of CCIC, Development and Peace, Inter Pares, among others, highlight different aspects of these principles in practice.

In summary effective CSO North / South partnership relationships are characterized by:

- ❑ A **shared vision**, negotiated in a context of mutual support and solidarity, beyond specific programs or projects.
- ❑ A **respect for diversity** that also clearly identifies shared roles and objectives, while negotiating differences arising from respective organizational mandates and the autonomy of each counterpart.
- ❑ **Respect and honesty** in working relationships, based on a continued commitment to understand and appreciate each others potential and limits.
- ❑ **Transparency**, with a clear commitment to work in ways that maximize accountability to each other for the commitments and obligations undertaken together (financial and otherwise).
- ❑ A **climate of mutual trust** that is the result of both striving for equity in the practice of the relationship and the commitment of time, through multiple forms of engagement with each other.
- ❑ A **sharing of knowledge** that is built on a commitment to devote human and financial resources to appropriate forms of mutual learning.

4.2 What might be some indicators that these guiding principles are being put into practice?

As noted, each relationship will be unique, but there are some signal actions and institutional policies that suggest progress in a partnership relationship based on equality, solidarity and mutual respect [CCIC, 2004, p. 4; also Department of Foreign Affairs, Finland, 2002, pp. 12-15]:

- ❑ **Mutually-Accepted Signed Agreement(s)**. These agreements outline negotiated objectives, expectations, roles, responsibilities, and contributions. Where relevant, there is an explicit CSO agreement and demonstrated compliance with CSO Codes of Conduct or Ethics.
- ❑ **Negotiated Levels of Funding**. Such negotiations should take account of the goals and objectives of the shared program / project, levels of funding that are commensurate with the capacities of the SCSO, which include a conscious strategy to involve other counterparts (North and South). There is a commitment to the timely release of funds, while being respectful of the funding capacities and accountabilities of the NCSO.
- ❑ **Increased Institutional Funding**. Increased levels of institutional (non-project) funds for SCSOs, based on mutual agreement that shared goals and institutional capacities would benefit from such core funding. Such initiatives in core funds could be accompanied by greater flexibility in reporting and shared accountability to relevant stakeholders, including direct engagement of SCSOs with Northern donors.

- ❑ **Sharing Information.** There are clear efforts for open communication to share information about the mandate, activities relevant to the partnership, and the operating context for the NCSO and the SCSO. There is also negotiated and mutually agreed regular contact and forms of engagement that respect each others' work priorities and program development.
- ❑ **Relying on Southern Expertise.** There is increased use of Southern experts, consultants and staff in local programs, with clear participation of the SCSO in their selection and terms of reference. (NCSOs with offices in the South have negotiated this presence with counterparts and relevant CSO actors in these countries, avoiding conduct that overwhelms country level policy processes and that compete with or direct resources away from increased capacity for local CSOs.)
- ❑ **Solidarity Policy Initiatives.** Solidarity policy initiatives by the Northern CSO include actions that affect and / or increase the impact of Southern CSO counterparts on conditions of poverty and rights of poor people in the South. This may involve, but is not limited to, support for legal services for SCSOs, support for engagement in appropriate policy networks with the investment of human and financial resources, responsive support for policy programming and advocacy roles by SCSO, sponsorship of direct involvement of staff or volunteers from SCSO in Northern / global policy processes, including dialogue with Northern aid and other officials of government.
- ❑ **Supporting Southern-Directed Networks.** There is increased NCSO support for Southern-directed networks, coalitions and alliances at national, regional and global levels. Such support complements the strengthening of individual CSOs through improved opportunities for *Southern-directed* capacity building, training, policy discussions with Southern governments, international donors and NCSOs. Contributions, both financial and human resources, for joint umbrella forums for policy dialogue with relevant stakeholders, including donors and government, would indicate efforts to create contexts for more equal participation and policy dialogue.

4.3 Internal Operational Issues that Affect Northern CSO Effectiveness

There are a number of areas of NCSO institutional operations that have been highlighted that can affect aid effectiveness in the South [ACFOA, 2002; Jacobs, 2004; Edwards, 2005; Wild, 2006]. NCSO aid effectiveness is not only the result of the quality of their North / South relationships, but is also a product of organizational principles, policies and institutional strategies that provide the values, structures and behaviours that inform and shape more equitable development practice. These can be summarized in the following points:

- ❑ **Mandate and Values.** The mandate and values of the organization are clearly articulated and understood by volunteers, staff and constituencies. Increasingly, the approach of an effective NCSO reflects a focus on addressing the conditions creating poverty and inequality and may actively be exploring a rights-based approach to its work. In projecting their organizational mandate and values in North / South relationships, they accept the need to reflect upon and compromise institutional bureaucratic interests and power imperatives to be true to values that reflect a rights approach.

- ❑ **Codes of Conduct.** The organization adheres to relevant Codes of Conduct or Ethics and assesses programs and approaches against these Codes.
- ❑ **Revenue and Values.** The organization (governors and senior management) addresses potential tensions between pressures and incentives to increase institutional revenue and the values / organizational imperatives to meet its mandate effectively. The organization has strategies to mobilize new sources of funding, which might lessen dependency on donors and provide greater flexibility in pursuing mandates and objectives.
- ❑ **Learning.** The organization devotes resources, including staff time, to learning processes and training, with high priority to achieving gender equality results through these efforts. The organization undertakes systematic processes for knowledge-building and learning with its Southern counterparts and is able to work with this knowledge internally and in its external relations. In doing so, it is bridging the micro / macro divide, understanding how to draw policy lessons from its organizational experience and relationships.
- ❑ **Facilitators of Development.** The organization’s staff responsible for field activities acts as facilitators of development cooperation processes, taking direction from Southern counterparts, rather than act as direct implementers of field programs. Such staff respects the right of SCSOs to undertake institutional activities, such as membership meetings, without the presence of NCSOs, acting under the guise of “partnership”.
- ❑ **Trust in Relationships.** The organization understands the importance of trust, solidarity, time and humility in its relationships, providing increasingly core resource support to long-term sustained relationships with counterparts, and maximizes the use of local expertise and CSOs in developing and implementing its programs.
- ❑ **Transparency and Accountability.** The organization has clear transparent accountability mechanisms, through which it facilitates the communication of relevant information to multiple stakeholders and constituencies, minimizing the compromising of “downward” CSO accountability to Southern counterparts and constituencies. NCSOs should also strive for balance and efficiency in its demands on partners for reporting, taking account the scale of financial contributions and reports prepared for other major donors. Wherever realistic, accountability mechanisms should be negotiated in advance, recognizing the impact of Northern (and Southern) charity laws and government-imposed reporting requirements on NCSOs.
- ❑ **Policy Collaboration.** The organization is committed to facilitating coherent policy messages in collaboration with Southern counterparts, by increasing its relationships and support for relevant networks, alliances and coalitions, and sharing relevant programmatic experience to scale-up, and build mutual capacities of the participating members. In doing so, the NCSO is committed to networks where leadership is assumed by SCSOs and it is also supporting autonomous networks in the South that are consistent with its mandate.
- ❑ **Practices for Empowerment.** The organization recruits and encourages leadership, staffing resources and volunteers that are committed to a vision and practice of empowerment in its North / South partnerships, encourages risk-taking with sensitivity to local context and conditions, and promotes on-going internal reflection and learning to improve practice.

Addressing internal issues can only take Northern organizations part-way in their efforts to be more effective. External factors and players, notably the policies and practices of donors, are also critical to ensuring effective engagement by CSOs in the South.

4.4 A Donor Enabling Environment for CSO Effectiveness

Donors have a significant influence over the potential quality of CSO relationships and thereby their effectiveness as development actors. This influence is the result of donors' command over resources, their roles and aid modalities within the countries concerned. CSOs have identified a number of donor reforms in aid practices and architecture that would enhance the capacities of CSOs to structure effective and principled working relationships with counterparts and constituencies.

- ❑ **Respecting CSOs as Development Actors.** Donors must respect and collaborate with CSOs as development actors in their own right, understanding that CSO autonomy (even when it might be inconsistent with donor and developing country government priorities and programs) is the foundation for CSO promotion of active citizenship, innovation and alternatives engaging people living in poverty [CCIC, 2006b; CARE and Actionaid, 2006, pp. 58, 68].
- ❑ **Priority for Responsive Funding.** Donors should provide a mixture of funding options that include substantial responsive funding for CSO-determined programming priorities. In doing so, they would structure funding recognizing the importance of diversity and citizenship engagement for sustained progress against poverty, and the related importance of autonomy for CSOs to hold governments and donors accountable to their commitments and human rights obligations. Donor initiatives to pool in-country funding for local and international CSOs are an important innovation. However, they should not be seen as exclusive channels for donor funding of CSO as “another sector”, replacing current responsive funding mechanisms. Such an approach would also result in a reduction in CSO diversity and autonomy. If not managed by an independent board with strong CSO participation in governance, they will continue to side-line CSOs about whom a particular donor or government might have a concern [CARE and Actionaid, 2006, pp. 41, 43; CARE, 2004].
- ❑ **Assuring Long-term Funding.** Donor funding for CSOs must include long-term predictable funding for institutional strengthening of CSOs, which would include CSO-determined capacity development priorities, networking and coalition building, and policy development and promotion. Currently donors such as CIDA do not match rhetorical recognition of the importance of such activities with practical operational guidelines that permit core and program support in these areas.
- ❑ **Limiting Competition for Resources.** Donors should avoid funding criteria and processes that encourage competition for resources among CSOs since these are often unnecessarily divisive. Donor sub-contracting to CSOs to manage in-country programs should encourage joined-up proposals involving both NCSOs and SCSOs, where both sides see a long-term mutual advantage. Currently such country-level processes pit the two against each other, where NCSOs have significant technical comparative advantage. More broadly, donors should give priority to long-term core financial support for broad institutional partnerships with CSOs with a long-standing “track-record”. At the same time consideration should be given to mechanisms that give opportunity to newer smaller organizations that bring new and innovative ideas into the sector.

- ❑ **Engaging on Poverty-Reduction Strategies.** Donors must direct their officials at country level to encourage engagement with CSOs in cross-sector forums for policy discussions related to poverty reduction strategies and priorities. These should include discussions on terms for budget support programs and donor country priorities for their aid programs. These engagements should not be limited to broad planning processes, but also include regular opportunities to assess performance and accountability to past donor commitments. Donors should also encourage CSO debate in the North on donor roles, international policies and aid effectiveness issues.

- ❑ **Holding Governments to Account.** Donors should provide support CSO roles to hold governments to account for policies affecting poverty, including macro-policy commitments, or government-defined poverty reduction plans. Donors should enable and provide resources for CSO democracy building efforts so that poor communities can act together to claim their rights from all levels of government. This emphasis on CSO roles in support of democratic accountability should not preclude the continued importance of direct donor support for CSO strengthening in their service delivery roles, given the realities facing millions of poor people who are still excluded from government services.

- ❑ **Operational Relationships.** Donors need to review their operational relationships with NCSOs to simplify requirements, particularly those that undermine the capacity of NCSOs to support autonomous CSO locally-controlled development processes. Consideration should be given to long-term core and programmatic funding, requirements for accountability, reporting and evaluation that do not exclusively and rigidly relate to donor needs and interests, and options for core funding of Southern counterparts. Operational rules should not add to the burden of power inherent in relationships based on transfer of resources, in which Southern CSOs have little recourse.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

CSOs have for many years argued in favour of “local ownership” – a central principle in the *Paris Declaration* – as essential for creating sustainable change for the poor. But for CSOs “ownership” is not only a matter for government, and not a static “blueprint” for engineering social change, but rather is a dynamic and continual, and often political, process involving active citizenship deliberating and repeatedly shaping appropriate policy outcomes.

At their best, CSOs are active in the pursuit of poverty reduction goals create bridges between local civic actions and national / global civil society aspirations that are responsive to the distinct realities where poor and marginalized people live. They cannot, and must not, replace the responsibility of government, and its legitimacy in the politics of representative democratic institutions, to act as the primary duty bearers for the progressive realization of rights. At the same time, CSOs, as expressions of active citizenship, should not be considered subsidiary to government. They are important development actors in their own right and an essential reference point for governments in their interaction with citizens.

Civil society organizations engaged in international cooperation, in Canada and elsewhere, mobilize resources and build international relationships to support the needs of poor populations, pioneer innovation, put forward alternative policies and promote democratic governance. They undertake this work in sometimes very difficult contexts, responding to the complex and cross-

cutting vulnerabilities and inequalities experienced by the majority of citizens in poor countries. They do so also, with varying degrees of effectiveness, in situations in which the priorities and effectiveness of local government are highly uncertain, and often determined by the political pressures of privileged elites, not to mention the commercial, security and political interests of external donors and transnational corporations.

Having taken a rights-based point of departure, this paper identifies some overarching roles and challenges for CSOs, in both the South and the North. There are a number of principles that define effective CSO partner relationships – shared values, autonomy, respect for diversity, transparency – which should be negotiated and implemented in a climate of mutuality and solidarity. CSO relationships are further characterized by their diversity and foundation in notions of “solidarity”, in which Northern CSOs increasingly should be aligning themselves with the expressed interests and needs of diverse but particular groups and organizations of citizens in the South.

On the surface, the principles that drive CSO aid effectiveness could seem to fit with those that are the foundation for donor commitments in the *Paris Declaration* – ownership, alignment, harmonization, mutual accountability. However, the goal of the *Declaration* is to align donor support with pre-determined plans for poverty reduction (PRSPs), largely mediated by officials and departments in the central governments of the poorest countries. Donor commitments to harmonization and alignment in the *Paris Declaration* in fact serve to limit and reduce the principle of “ownership”.

The goals for civil society international cooperation, by contrast, are more closely aligned with the principles of democratic culture which require respect and encouragement of pluralities of views, policy and development alternatives, non-discrimination of marginalized citizens, providing capacities to realize their own interests and express their own views. While CSOs are taking advantage of the possibilities that globalization provides for networking and coalition-building to “harmonize” programming priorities and policy initiatives, CSO relationships are deeply rooted in the local expressions of citizen interests in individual countries. Democratic culture in the South would be limited if constrained artificially by superimposed donor / local government strategies for harmonization of all external and local development CSO actors. Donor and CSO approaches to effective development cooperation may be in tension. But it is a tension that CSOs will argue is at the heart of democratic practice, upon which the sustainability of results from donor development interventions depends.

Recently donors and civil society have pointed to the fact that civil society is largely missing from the *Paris Declaration*. The solution may not be to just write a few civil society-oriented paragraphs into the *Declaration* with the assumption that CSOs could then align themselves with the *Declaration* principles and commitments. This Discussion Paper, drawing from commentary among CSOs in the South and North on CSO effectiveness in development efforts, demonstrates the complexities in the application of an abstract set of principles to reform of CSO practices. On the other hand, the paper also demonstrates that CSOs themselves must take leadership, acknowledging that their practices must continue to evolve and change. The paper suggests some avenues for these changes. In the coming months, as donors and recipient governments will be working to assess progress towards the *Declaration* commitments, leading to a High Level meeting in Ghana in 2008. The challenge is to CSOs to reflect on the implications of their actions to end poverty consistent with human rights obligations and approaches.

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