

A Summary of the Discussion Paper: CIDA, Civil Society and Development¹

Introduction and Rationale

1. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are recognized as important players in development. CIDA has a long history of support to CSOs in developing and transition countries and of collaboration with Canadian CSOs on program delivery and policy development. This reflects Canada's domestic experience as a democratic and pluralist society, and builds on values shared by Canadians.
2. CIDA's current policy suite includes frequent references to civil society, but there is a felt need today for a more explicit policy on civil society that speaks to the value of CSOs as agents of change and development, and as CIDA partners, and defines a CIDA position on what constitutes effective aid from that perspective. CIDA's recent review and renewal of partnership programming with Canadian civil society and private sector organizations calls for filling the current policy gap by producing a CIDA policy on civil society.
3. This discussion paper is intended to identify and explore some of the issues that such a policy should address and to suggest some initial directions for discussion within CIDA, with CSOs and with other development partners. It is intended to help build a common Canadian understanding of civil society within CIDA, and with CSO stakeholders in Canada and internationally.
4. The policy should take a results-oriented perspective, such that its recommendations support the achievement of development results, including results such as poverty reduction, empowerment of the poor, realization of human rights, improved government policies, more accountable government, donors, and CSOs, and a stronger, more sustainable civil society.
5. The document takes the engagement of Canadians in development cooperation as a legitimate objective that need not be in contradiction with the pursuit of development results. It takes as a premise that CIDA should manage Canadian engagement in such a way as to maximize its impact on development results.

¹ This Summary was written by Sylvie Perras, Coordinator of CCIC's Africa Canada Forum, to enable discuss of important analytical points and options posed in the original draft Discussion Paper (February 26, 2008). The findings, interpretations, conclusions and opinions expressed in the Discussion Paper are those of the authors (Réal Lavergne and Jacqueline Wood with inputs from CIDA's Expert Group on Civil Society) and do not necessarily represent the views, policies or position of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The authors are also not responsible for the content of this Summary. CCIC is responsible for any misunderstandings of the original text. The Discussion Paper is available from CCIC on request.

Areas for Considerations in a CIDA Policy

A) Civil Society and Development

6. “Civil society” is often thought of as one of three social spheres, along with the private sector and the state. Civil society, from this perspective, is the social space in which citizens organize themselves to promote shared objectives and values, and is usually seen as essential to the proper functioning of a democratic society and to the enrichment of a country’s institutional foundations.
7. CSOs operate on the basis of shared values and beliefs, and relationships of social solidarity with their primary constituencies – the diverse groups of people they serve or represent. This responsiveness to different primary constituencies is what explains and legitimizes the extensive diversity of CSOs in terms of values, goals, activities, and structure, and helps to define their legitimacy as development actors in their own right.
8. Civil society organizations produce results in a variety of ways, including the following:
 - Delivering direct development and humanitarian benefits to the most vulnerable
 - Promoting peace and building security
 - Pursuing democratic governance and promoting accountability
 - Forging networks and linkages
 - Advancing development practice
 - Developing capacity and empowering the poor

B) CSOs as Development Partners

9. CIDA is called upon to enquire into the relative effectiveness of different aid channels including the employment of private sector or civil society “Executing Agencies” on contract to deliver services, direct funding for government programs in developing countries, or working in partnership with CSOs on a cost-sharing basis. This paper is concerned with the last of these three options.
10. The notion of partnership involves a model for bringing development actors together on the basis of shared values and objectives, shared resources and shared accountability, which offers potential advantages for enhancing the quality of aid managed by CIDA including:
 - tapping into ideas about effective, often innovative ways of contributing to development;
 - accessing additional resources, knowledge, expertise, and sometimes long-standing linkages with target communities or organizations;
 - expanding CIDA’s repertoire of action in fields or geographical areas;

- targeting people or sectors that may be neglected by developing country governments understanding the institutional realities of local CSOs to inform CIDA's programming and policy negotiations with host governments based on local realities; and
 - building a domestic constituency of informed and engaged Canadians across the nation.
11. CIDA has a long history of working in partnership with CSOs, and provides considerable aid funds to these partnership arrangements, approximately 20% of CIDA's total disbursements in 2005/06. CIDA's CSO partners may be Canadian based or from developing countries, or they may be international CSOs. Currently, CIDA funding to and through CSOs tends to flow mainly via Canadian CSOs. It is estimated that approximately 83% of CIDA's CSO funding first passes through a Canadian CSO whether as Executing Agencies or as partners.

C) Civil Society Strengthening

12. It is Canada's experience that a strong civil society is integral to social, economic and democratic development. Civil society may be supported as one of three social spheres in much the same way as public or private sector development is supported. Such an approach is in keeping with Canada's pluralist ideal of a balance of government, private sector and civil society engagement in any country's development, and is also comprehensive in considering all three spheres. While individual CSOs can be partnered with to achieve specific development results, strengthening civil society is also a valuable development objective in and of itself. One way for CIDA to invest in strengthening civil society is a capacity development approach in all CIDA-supported initiatives to promote institutional development and learning by doing while also securing development results. Among such results is a stronger civil society and CSOs, which CIDA may choose as the primary objective of an initiative.
13. A second option is to intervene in a more general way to promote a more favourable enabling environment for CSOs in developing countries. This could involve the use of funding and diplomacy to encourage the promotion of human rights (of assembly, information and others), networking/convening, sector-wide training or capacity development, regulatory reform, promotion of philanthropy or other independent sources of financing, consultation, etc.

D) Canadian Engagement

14. Canadians are most actively engaged in international development through partnerships with Canadian CSOs. CIDA's partnerships with CSO in all branches involve more than 500 Canadian CSOs. Canadian CSOs are usually partnered themselves with developing country organizations. Canadian CSOs thus play an intermediary role between CIDA and developing country CSOs, usually based on long-term relationships of solidarity with these counterparts.

15. Statistics Canada indicates that Canadian CSOs involved internationally raised over \$731 million in 2003 from gifts, donations and other non-governmental sources. To these financial contributions can be added contributions of voluntary time and expertise, and the dedication and commitment that Canadians bring to the task.
16. CIDA's support helps to sustain a rich institutional base of international cooperation, whereby Canadians with a wide range of interests, cultural background and expertise, can contribute to development in their own ways. Canadian CSOs add value to Canadian development cooperation due to their knowledge, experience and networks of counterparts in the South and internationally. They also reinforce the expression of Canadian values internationally such as the importance of democracy, human rights, justice and pluralism.

Principles

17. Building on the above understanding of reasons for engaging with CSOs and on recent discussions around the issue of civil society and aid effectiveness, it is possible to identify a number of principles that CIDA might take into account in defining a policy on civil society, based on lessons of experience in Canada and internationally. Some of these principles can be found in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and these provide a useful though not exclusive reference point. This paper proposes the following principles:

Recognition of CSOs as Development Actors with their own Specificities

18. Recognizing the importance of CSOs as development actors in their own right implies recognition that they may have independent agendas for change worth supporting in ways that complement the roles of government and the private sector. The specificity of civil society suggests that what makes for effective government or private sector programs may not apply to the same degree for civil society. The diversity of civil society needs to be emphasized, and has important implications for programming of aid to or through CSOs. CSOs reflect a multiplicity of concerns and contribute to development in diverse ways that require space for entrepreneurship and competing ideas. The concept of civil society also covers a wide diversity of organizational types, including informal actors (or informally organized actions), such as social movements or single-issue associational groupings. Realities differ considerably from country to country, in terms of the roles that CSOs are equipped to play most effectively, the environment in which they are able to form and operate, and their potential contribution to development relative to the state or the private sector.

Local Ownership and Alignment

19. The Paris Declaration calls for local ownership, country leadership and alignment of donor priorities to those of host-country partners. It calls also for making use of country systems wherever possible. While the Paris Declaration focuses on donor-government relationships, the same principles can be applied to relations with developing country CSOs, where the relevant ownership, leadership, priorities and systems are those of these CSOs and of their

primary constituents. Alignment in this context means alignment of Northern CSO efforts with the priorities and strategies of their CSO partners in developing countries, and alignment of developing country CSOs with those of the populations they serve or represent. It may also, but not necessarily, mean alignment of CSO initiatives with government priorities and strategies.

Balancing Short-Term and Long-Term Results

20. All development cooperation involves tradeoffs between delivering concrete development results of benefit to the poor in the short-term, and longer-term benefits to be derived from investments in capacity development, or in addressing the structural causes of poverty. Similar tradeoffs exist when it comes to support of CSOs, where focus on short-term results often leads to support for short-term projects with immediately tangible benefits but insufficient attention paid to results associated with the long-term and often non-linear processes necessary for enduring social change. Awareness of these tradeoffs and of the need for greater attention to capacity development and associated processes of change is key to achieve long-term and sustainable results.

More Comprehensive Approaches

21. The Paris Declaration calls for better coordination and better harmonization of aid in support of country systems and strategies, and harmonization of donor efforts under program-based approaches (PBAs). Enhanced coordination and harmonization may involve CSOs engaging as partners in existing sector programs under government leadership, and being supported by donors in that capacity. In other cases, it may mean CSOs taking a more holistic perspective and pooling their own efforts with other CSOs, and donors harmonizing their support for these efforts. It may also involve the adoption of coordinated or joint donor mechanisms of support for CSOs and for civil society strengthening in a country as a whole.

Managing for Results and Accountability

22. Management for results is long-standing CIDA practice. It is also one of the Paris Declaration principles, as is mutual accountability, which speaks to the relationship of shared accountability between donors and recipient governments.
23. CSOs face a complex web of accountability that includes accountability to their funders, to the public, to their boards, to their peers, and, most significantly, to the individuals and organizations they work with or represent who are their primary constituents. Ultimately, these primary constituents are the communities and individuals who are the intended beneficiaries of aid. Results-based management is most effective when used in a way that promotes CSOs' accountability to these constituents, while promoting learning and integrating lessons into decision-making.

Policy Discussion Topics

24. The purpose of this discussion paper so far has been to build a common framework for understanding the subject matter of civil society and CSOs, and principles that could guide CIDA. This section suggests an initial series of topics and issues that a policy might seek to address, building from the base of the previous sections' framework and principles. A limited number of questions are posed under each topic with a view to generating reflection and discussion that can inform CIDA's policy directions. Readers are invited to share their answers to these questions or to pose alternate questions, and to comment on the form or content of this discussion paper overall.

A) Canadian Leadership – Making Civil Society a CIDA Priority

25. Canada is recognized internationally as a nation with a healthy interplay between government, the private sector and civil society. International trends beginning in the late 1990s through to the Paris Declaration in 2005 have led to increased attention to reinforcing the state as a development partner of sustainable development. This trend led to a relative decline in the attention that CIDA has accorded to CSOs and civil society development.

26. Within CIDA, a policy decision to accord increased attention to civil society would imply a decision to systematically integrate civil society analysis into CIDA's decision-making tools – including analysis of the status of civil society, its relationships with other spheres, of CSOs' roles and of the constraints and opportunities they face in filling them – in all countries of CIDA engagement, particularly in countries of concentration. It would also imply the need to engage in similar analysis in most CIDA interventions, regardless of programming channel.

27. As areas of comparative advantage are being identified, Canada may be well placed to adopt CSO programming and civil society strengthening as a niche area. As chair of the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness, CIDA is rapidly enhancing its status as a champion of support for the role of civil society and CSOs in development.

28. *Questions for Discussion:*

- Should CIDA build on its experience of working in partnership with CSOs to further strengthen the Agency's capacity and comparative advantage in civil society policy and programming? If so, how should this manifest itself?
- How can civil society support be given greater prominence in CIDA's priority sectors?
- How strong a leadership role should CIDA continue to play internationally on civil society and aid effectiveness?

B) A Multi-Prong Approach to Civil Society – General Directions

29. In restating and refining its policy approach to civil society, CIDA may wish to consider three distinct but overlapping programming dimensions or approaches:
- Partnership programming through Canadian CSOs, including Canadian engagement
 - Direct support to developing-country intermediary organizations or CSOs
 - Investment in civil society strengthening.

Canadian Partnership Programming and Canadian Engagement

30. Recent thinking about local ownership and alignment leads to suggestions that support should increasingly go directly to Southern CSOs. For CIDA, there are both advantages and disadvantages to working with Canadian CSO partners as opposed to working directly with developing country CSOs. On the negative side, Canadian CSOs sometimes give the impression of being “supply-driven” rather than pursuing local ownership and alignment with the priorities of their developing country counterparts.
31. On the positive side, Canadian CSOs are better equipped than CIDA to engage in direct relationships of accompaniment with developing country CSOs, and they provide an intermediation service both for CIDA and for the developing country partners involved.
32. CIDA already supports some 800 organizations through its responsive programming and core support mechanisms. An increase in direct funding relationships with developing country organizations could present an enormous additional administrative burden, particularly at field-level, to reach the same number as those reached via Canadian CSOs.
33. Another reason to maintain strong support to Canadian CSOs is to engage Canadians in international development. The challenge lies in being strategic in engaging Canadians in ways that most effectively contribute to development results, whether directly or indirectly.

Mechanisms for Direct Support of CSOs in Developing Countries

34. There is an important distinction to be made between making use of Canadian CSOs as intermediaries, and use of inter-mediation bodies based in developing countries. For donors, intermediary bodies are a way to reduce their transaction costs of direct support to Southern CSOs though other considerations do come into play (e.g. local reach, cultural and political appropriateness, capacity development, networking, administrative simplicity). These costs may also be reduced by combining intermediary funding mechanisms for small and community-based CSOs with program support and core support of larger partners.
35. A challenge for donors is access to a broad and diverse base of CSOs, including those outside of capital cities, and informal civil society actors. Ways of reaching these actors may require working through formal intermediary CSOs with a demonstrated direct link to broader civil society. Donors can also look beyond traditional non-government development organizations to other civil society actors likely to have a strong constituent base and strategic niche expertise.

Civil Society Strengthening

36. A major issue in all CIDA civil society programming is the degree of emphasis that should be placed on civil society strengthening, as opposed to more immediate development results. This can be achieved by making capacity development considerations an objective in all or most CIDA civil society interventions. Informally, this seems already to be the case because many CIDA investments are designed with capacity strengthening of individual CSOs, families of CSOs, or CSO umbrella organizations as their main goal. However, there may be a case for an overarching policy statement in this regard.
37. An option which requires more exploration in CIDA is to direct CIDA investments not at individual CSOs but at civil society as a whole. This could include efforts such as:
 - Support for CSO resource centres that provide goods and services to civil society such as training and consultancy services, resource materials, computers and internet connections, training and conference rooms, and fora for exchange and collaboration.
 - Promotion of CSO self-regulation for intra-CSO accountability.
 - Peer monitoring initiatives for accountability and joint learning.
 - Support for formal and informal CSO networking and linkages at all levels.
38. CIDA's investments in civil society strengthening could also be directed not at CSOs, but at governments, the policies and behaviour of which condition the environment in which CSOs form, operate and interact with each other and with other development actors. Efforts to strengthen this enabling environment could target for example: the legal and judicial system; mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights; CSO-specific legislation and regulations; systems for multi-stakeholder dialogue; promotion of philanthropy.
39. *Questions for Discussion:*
 - How can CIDA determine the best balance of support that it provides through Canadian CSO partners and directly to CSOs in developing countries, to best achieve development results?
 - What effective ways can CIDA maximize the benefits of its support to Canadian CSOs in order to promote Canadian engagement which mobilizes additional contributions and growing commitment by Canadians to development objectives over the medium and long-term?
 - Within developing countries, how can CIDA determine what balance should be sought between working with different types of CSOs to ensure the achievement of development results, including: support to large, proven CSOs; support for smaller CSOs through intermediary organizations or other means; core support; project-based support?
 - Should CIDA make an explicit policy decision to systematically invest in capacity development in most or all initiatives involving Southern country CSOs? Should it establish strengthening civil society as a whole as a corporate objective?

C) **Enhanced Coordination and Harmonization and the Role of Responsive Funds**

40. The trend today is towards more comprehensive approaches, and there has been much criticism internationally of project-based approaches to development. Applied to partnership programming with CSOs, this suggests that CIDA's CSO partners should be encouraged to work more closely with each other and with other development actors in developing countries, including CIDA. Like other donors, CIDA does not currently offer systematic incentives or conditions for its own CSO partners to work more collaboratively. Some of the most remarkable examples of coordination among CSOs come from CSOs' own efforts.
41. However, donors are making efforts to coordinate and harmonize their own civil society support mechanisms, such as baskets (pooled funds, for instance, to support large-scale programs or to provide core funding to one CSO), while they may also engage a range of other mechanisms. Core donor funding to CSOs is an approach in keeping with a more comprehensive and holistic perspective on development and one that also recognizes CSOs as development actors with their own plans, priorities and approaches.
42. Recognizing CSOs as distinct and highly differentiated development actors with their own specificities suggests that the Paris Declaration emphasis on coordination and harmonization may be more appropriate for government-led programs than for civil society-led initiatives. For CSOs, participatory and iterative approaches may be more appropriate than efforts at large-scale coordination and scaling-up.
43. This suggests that CSOs can be supported as independent development actors in their own right, with legitimate priorities and strategies developed in the spirit of local ownership with their primary constituents. Acknowledging CSO diversity suggests an important role to be played by responsive programming to tap into the ideas, energy and resources of potential CSO partners, including in relatively small-scale initiatives through which new or innovative approaches can be developed and piloted. Responsive mechanisms are also a means to encourage CSOs, including Canadian CSOs, with a wide range of interests and expertise to engage in international development.
44. Such programming may be more costly than programming to scale, as the initiatives involved may often consist of smaller initiatives and the CSOs involved may require relatively high levels of technical support.
45. *Questions for Discussion:*
 - Are there ways that CIDA can encourage CSOs to collaborate and work together for greater impact where this makes sense?
 - Should CIDA policy suggest working with other donors and Canadian CSOs to provide core support for key CSOs in the South and otherwise strengthening civil society in those countries?
 - Would a statement be useful reaffirming the value of responsive programming and core support for CSOs, specifying the conditions under which such mechanisms continue to have value?
 - Does CIDA need a policy on how to manage transactions costs with reference to CSOs?

D) Country and Sector Concentration

46. CIDA, along with many other donors, is seeking greater focus by concentrating its efforts in a limited number of countries and sectors. There are however some tension between a rigid application of the “focus” concept and the pursuit of civil society development results.
47. Recognition of CSOs as development actors in their own right implies that CSOs may come to CIDA with sound and strategic initiatives that may fall outside of CIDA’s countries or sectors of concentration but are nonetheless worthy of support. Understanding that local ownership means CSOs should as a first order of priority align with their partners’ priority sectors, and work as best as they can within their partners’ systems, has similar implications.
48. Further, Canada’s objective of engaging Canadians in international development means that CIDA may be called upon to support Canadian CSOs’ work in countries and sectors in which they have historically been engaged and may have existing linkages and expertise with partners on-the-ground. Canadian CSOs also play an important role in responding to humanitarian crises in any country when such needs arise. Supporting Canadian CSOs’ work in countries that are not among CIDA’s countries of concentration, such as India or Cuba, also allow Canada to maintain a presence even when there is limited or no bilateral investment.
49. In reconciling these tensions, CIDA has in the past tended to adopt a balanced and differentiated response. In the bilateral branches the Government’s country development strategies have led to CSO funding primarily in countries and sectors that CIDA has identified as a priority. In Canadian Partnership Branch, support has been provided for partners’ independent initiatives, within certain parameters, while partners have been encouraged to further concentrate their efforts, and to coordinate their efforts with those of other development actors.
50. *Question for Discussion:*
 - Should CIDA retain this balanced approach to reconcile the tension between its need to increase focus, while also upholding the principles suggested in this paper, or should it consider enforcing a more or a less focused approach to all of its CSO programming? What would represent an appropriate balance between focus and the need to seize opportunities of high development potential by working through Canadian partners or Southern CSO partners?

E) Dialogue and Learning

51. As part of its partnership review and renewal process, CIDA is taking steps to improve its own capacity in the field to better coordinate, communicate and consult with Canadian CSO partners active on-the-ground. Integrating dialogue and knowledge-sharing into CIDA’s relationships with CSOs can: expose CIDA to CSO approaches, and vice versa; provide CIDA with opportunities to learn about peoples’ experience of development on-the-ground; help to maintain constructive relationships between CIDA and CSO partners, even as particular programming arrangements change.

52. *Question for Discussion:*

- Should a CIDA policy on civil society explicitly establish the desirability of dialogue and mutual learning as a feature of CIDA partnerships with CSOs?

F) Accountable and Results-Based Programming

53. There are a number of ways in which the practice of results-based management could be improved so that it is not simply used as a mechanism to ensure compliance with budget, activity plans and reporting requirements. Rather, it could be employed to monitor progress toward results, to learn from the findings, and to make decisions based on these lessons, all of which can increase the likelihood of results being achieved.

54. CIDA and its CSO partners also need to implement results-based management in a way that contributes to CSO accountability to their primary constituents by being responsive to their timelines, expectations and learning processes. Ways need to be found and encouraged to capture important qualitative, capacity development and other process-related results.

55. An important step for CIDA to address accountability and results in the context of its civil society work will be to develop an Agency accountability framework to support the aggregation of civil society development results, possibly with a menu of results and indicators to which civil society initiatives might contribute, all taking into account the Agency's Management, Resources and Results Structure.

56. To strengthen CIDA's own accountability and transparency with CSO partners, Canadian Partnership Branch has already undertaken important steps to establish clearer and more consistent funding practices. This, and additional recommendations from the Agency's partnership review and renewal, such as developing an accreditation process, are anticipated to further address CIDA and CSOs' accountability relationship.

57. *Question for Discussion:*

- What would CIDA need to put into place (processes, tools, other) to support application of results-based management in a way that is appropriate to CSO development results?