

Local ownership and development co-operation – the role of Northern civil society

An Issues Paper

This Issues Paper is a resource document for a CCIC/CIDA Dialogue on March 20/21, 2003, entitled "Local Ownership: Roles for Southern and Canadian Civil Society Organizations". The paper examines the possible role of Canadian civil society organizations in promoting local ownership of development agendas. It highlights issues in order to assist participants' discussions, leaving the field open for further analysis, examples, and recommendations.

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I. THE OWNERSHIP AGENDA: Policy References

The idea of ownership in development is hardly new, but since the mid-1990's "local ownership" and its variants have taken on particular prominence in the policies of bilateral and multilateral development agencies. Well-known examples provide reference points for the discussion:

- The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in its seminal 1996 statement *Shaping the 21st Century*, asserts that sustainable development "must be locally owned", and that development co-operation has to be shifted to a partnership model, where donors' programs and activities operate within locally-owned development strategies. Donors should "respect and encourage strong local commitment, participation, capacity development and ownership." The DAC then linked these arguments to a series of specific targets for poverty reduction, which formed the basis of the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2000.
- In a landmark proposal to the World Bank three years later, James Wolfensohn, President of the Bank, set forth his case for a Comprehensive Development Framework. Arguing for an holistic approach to development, he emphasized that developing countries "must be in the driver's seat and set the course," owning and implementing their development strategies. Like the OECD/DAC, he saw donors and the World Bank in a support role, working with governments, business and civil society.
- CIDA's recent statements on the effectiveness of Canada's development assistance echo these positions. Their intent is clear. The 2002 Policy Statement, *Canada Making a Difference in the World*, highlights local ownership as one of the principles of effective development. "Development strategies, if they are to be sustainable, must be developed

by recipient countries—their governments and people—and they must reflect their priorities," rather than those of donors. Participatory processes which engage civil society and the beneficiaries of aid are essential to establish locally owned priorities for development co-operation.

These references reflect the centrality of local ownership in the new comprehensive development assistance model. The prominence of the phrase is not matched by depth of analysis, explanation or scrutiny in the policy statements, however, nor by reference to the literature on the subject. The policy references are more metaphorical than analytical.¹

The literature directly addressing local ownership is, interestingly, modest in size; a much more extensive literature approaches the idea indirectly by analyzing related themes such as partnership, participation, and aid conditionality. The origins, conceptual assumptions, operational components and practical implications of the ownership agenda remain largely unmapped. This is especially so with respect to the role and relevance of CSOs, both Northern and Southern.

II. LOCAL OWNERSHIP: Basic Concepts

Analysts acknowledge that "local ownership" is not used clearly or consistently, and needs much better definition. Following is a summary of basic concepts winnowed from the literature.

In the development discourse, "ownership" does not have its conventional meaning, i.e., rights of exclusive possession. Nor is it used in the organizational sense, referring to the owners of a business firm, or to the members of a non-profit association. "Ownership" refers instead to relations among stakeholders in development, particularly their respective capacity, power or influence to set and take responsibility for a development agenda, and to muster and sustain support for that. Three main groups of such stakeholders are usually identified: governments of developing countries; communities and organizations in those countries, outside the government; and donors or multilateral development agencies and financial institutions.

Reviewing Finnish aid, Moore *et al.* argue that the ownership agenda directs attention to the inequalities in two vital sets of relationships within the development enterprise: internationally, between Northern and Southern or donor and recipient governments; and domestically, between the governments of developing countries and their citizens, especially the poorest and most marginalized. Imprecise as it may be, "local ownership" touches a real and important issue.²

It follows, then, that local ownership is high when

- i. intended beneficiaries substantially influence the conception, design, implementation, and review of development strategies;
- ii. implementing agencies are rooted in the recipient country and represent the interests of ordinary citizens;
- iii. there is transparency and accountability among the various stakeholders.

III. LOCAL OWNERSHIP: A Reality Check

Issues in development co-operation: Local ownership as the answer?

Within the broader system of development co-operation, analysts have identified several issues which the ownership agenda is intended to address:

- There is a widespread concern in both North and South that the intended beneficiaries of development strategies and activities feel little influence over or benefit from these.
- Is there enough political will, enthusiasm or commitment in developing countries—among elected officials, administrators and citizens—to ensure that development strategies have solid buy-in and support? These are considered essential to sustained action and success. So important is this issue that observers place it at the heart of strategies to reform development co-operation.
- There are serious asymmetries of resources, access and influence at all levels in the design and implementation of development agendas, from the global to the national to the local. Who sets these strategies is a critical question. On the international level, Northern insistence on policy conditionality is seen to limit the policy choices of Southern governments, especially among poorer aid-dependent countries. Domestically, implementing agencies are seen to shape development initiatives for their own purposes, excluding nominal beneficiaries such as women, people with disabilities, remote rural communities, and the urban poor.
- The roots of such problems are not sharply articulated in official statements. Analysts point to the historic dominance of donors and multilateral institutions in setting the terms of development debate and policy, and in implementing development projects; or, to the prevalence of governmental visions and actions in the South, all too often lacking real popular support.

Capacity development and governance in the ownership agenda:

The ownership agenda, and the problems it is intended to address, implicate both capacity development and governance.

- On the international level, governance issues are evident in the commentary above. The ownership agenda also raises questions about the impetus to reform governance in the South, and the depth of commitment to that. It highlights questions of capacity in poor countries to plan and implement comprehensive anti-poverty strategies, and to satisfy the requirements of financing institutions.
- Within developing countries, the same themes of governance and capacity development focus attention on participation and voice in public decision-making, especially by poor people. They highlight the openness and accountability of Southern governments to their own citizens, as well as the tension between this internal accountability and a competing external accountability to donors and creditors. They also pose questions about the capacity of civil society to perform its diverse roles. At issue are the depth of organizational resources and autonomy in citizens' organizations and their own

responsiveness, as they seek to represent their members or communities, provide much-needed services, and challenge their governments to be transparent and accountable.

Ownership and the role of donors:

Because of its focus, the ownership agenda is commonly seen to be important and progressive. Few if any voices challenge its value and validity. Disputes about ownership turn on what it looks like in practice, and its real or rhetorical importance in development assistance. Two broad positions can be identified:³

- Donors' public commitment to local ownership substantially changes the terms of debate about development assistance. The ownership agenda holds the potential, moreover, to change practice by shifting initiative and influence towards developing-country governments. New instruments such as PRSPs and sectoral programs are seen to be useful in doing so.
- Conversely, it is argued that conditionality compromises the ownership agenda at the international level, all the more so when it is not openly acknowledged and debated. Within the South, exclusionary politics based on class, gender, ethnicity, technocratic privilege or clientelism can have the same effect. If development assistance can support the rights of citizens to participate in the policy decisions that shape their lives, then popular energy and creativity can be encouraged and engaged.

With the background, let us now examine the implications for Northern CSOs.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR NORTHERN CSOs --

Promoting local ownership of development strategies:

Northern civil society is not prominent in the discourse on local ownership—it is not on the shortlist of stakeholders noted above, for example. It is the subject of much more commentary in the analyses of changing North/South roles within development co-operation as a whole, however. Two divergent views address the potential role of Canadian CSOs in promoting local ownership.⁴

On one hand: Canadian CSOs have several decades of experience (sometimes pre-dating CIDA) in development co-operation and in the evolving North-South relationship. Their links to the South have been broad and diverse, including working relationships with governments (and governments-in-waiting, such as liberation movements), regional bodies, civil society counterparts, and people in their communities. They have acted independently, and also within the framework of Canadian foreign policy, under the umbrella of CIDA's policy and funding. Canadian CSOs have been praised for their operational effectiveness and their responsiveness to the priorities and agendas of their Southern counterparts and the communities they serve.

On the other hand: The December 2002 OECD/DAC review of Canadian development assistance questions CIDA's work with Canadian civil society, especially those activities

supported by responsive programming. The report contends that CIDA and Canadian CSOs at times undermine institutional development in the South, with programming supply-driven by Canadian organizations and priorities. From sources closer to civil society, Northern NGOs have long been challenged to negotiate new roles within development co-operation, to maximize the value they bring to their work while acknowledging the leadership of Southern counterparts. Canadian organizations have been challenged to be more imaginative and adaptive, and more of a force in public education and policy in Canada.

Development co-operation among CSOs – changing North/South roles:

In most regions of the world and sectors of development activity, Northern CSOs have significantly reduced their operational roles, acknowledging the leadership of Southern counterparts on the ground and, increasingly, in program strategies and policy forums.⁵ This process has benefited from a stiff critique of the mythology of partnership. In the emerging division of labour, the focus of Northern CSOs has shifted to the not-insignificant job of securing and delivering funds; to accompaniment, solidarity, capacity development and support for risk-taking; and to interventions in policy and public education. This realignment has been uneven and piecemeal, and at times awkward, but the centre of gravity has clearly shifted. Important as they are, such changes do not nullify persistent asymmetries. These are evident in the influence that some of the larger Northern CSOs retain by reason of their access to funds and Southern CSOs' common reliance on these.

Challenges also remain in the domain of policy activism. CSOs have taken a prominent policy role in the last two decades, in local, national and global settings, including those of the aid system. Negotiating the North-South relationship on this terrain is complicated. Large NGO "families" such as OXFAM International command significant financial resources and expertise that enable them to make substantial policy interventions; at the same time, the real and symbolic importance of Southern leadership in policy processes is widely acknowledged. The strength of Southern leadership in the World Social Forum is just one obvious example of this trend. On a more modest scale, the pattern is also evident in the work of Canadian organizations.

V. LOCAL OWNERSHIP IN PRACTICE:

Against this background, what contribution might Canadian CSOs make to greater Southern ownership of development strategies and activities? A brief list of examples from current and recent practice offer a way forward, highlighting different aspects of Southern leadership, of capacity development, and of governance.

Renegotiating the role of Canadian NGOs in Africa -- collective dialogue and policy activism:

The Africa-Canada Forum, a group of more than forty Canadian CSOs active in Africa, has convened a dialogue with African counterparts. Over the past three years, the participants have focused on redefining development agendas and their respective roles. Canadian organizations have been challenged to promote a higher profile for African issues within Canadian policy.

There is a collegial interplay at work here: Canadians initiated the conversation, but the reference points are clearly established by their African counterparts.

Reshaping organizational strategy: Individual Canadian organizations have drawn on the advice of Southern counterparts and on their programming experience to reshape organizational mandates and practices. In the early 1990's, for example, Horizons of Friendship convened a structured dialogue with Latin American counterparts to recast its established role as a child sponsorship NGO. Latin Americans took a leading role in the collective redesign of Horizons to an organization supporting community mobilization and development.

Strengthening service delivery – enhancing the capacity of government departments: In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Health has successfully used the expertise of ORBIS, a Canadian NGO specializing in eye care, to strengthen its operations in rural areas. A program to enhance the preventive, diagnostic, therapeutic and organizational skills of practitioners and managers has for the first time made eye care available to people in remote rural communities.

Institutional development—exchanging knowledge and experience: Many Southern organizations—co-operatives, trade unions, professional associations, universities and colleges, philanthropic bodies—find the experience of Canadian counterparts to be a valuable asset, not as a "model" to be imported, but as a reference point in the exchange of ideas and knowledge on institutional development. To cite but one example: In the last year, a network of Brazilian anti-poverty activists based in public-sector enterprises has begun an exchange with Canadians working in community development. By doing so, they aim to strengthen their own organization and to explore ways of opening their institutions to community initiatives.

Prototypes of Program-Based Approaches: NGO practice offers useful lessons for donors' growing interest in PBAs. A 2002 case study financed by CIDA describes a twenty-year collaboration between a Zimbabwean NGO, ORAP, and its Canadian and other Northern counterparts. Over the years, this took on programmatic form, shaped by confident Southern leadership. Its evolution has been far from tidy and linear, however, with issues of capacity, accountability, governance and partnership prominent on the menu for deliberation and negotiation among the partners.

Global governance—support for Southern voices: Southern governments and CSOs active in international trade-policy and related forums have turned to organizations such as the Canadian Friends Service Committee and the ETC Action Group (formerly RAFI) for technical support in policy research. The Southern organizations are responsible for their own public positions; they draw on the Canadian CSOs' competence and a history of co-operation and mutual confidence.

Public participation in national development strategies/PRSPs: The role of civil society in this domain is very much a work in progress, reflecting the variability of both political space and civic capacity. Within developing countries, Southern CSOs have intervened in the design phase of PRSPs, acting as watchdogs to help hold their governments accountable, promoting budget literacy among communities, and advancing strategies. While not financing the consultation processes *per se*, NGOs such as Development and Peace, and churches such as the United

Church of Canada, have offered solidarity and financial support to their counterparts in countries such as Bolivia, Zambia and Kenya.

Supporting risk-taking and innovation: The CIDA-sponsored evaluation of Inter Pares' program in Peru recognizes the value of its longstanding accompaniment of a Latin American NGO, PCS (Project Counseling Service). In the aftermath of bitter civil conflict in rural highland communities, PCS has offered assistance to local initiatives in peacebuilding. In this instance, the Canadian organization sustained a tradition of accompaniment and mutual trust built up over more than twenty years, providing valuable moral and financial support to the frontline Latin American organizations working in a fragile social and political environment.

Capacity development: from practice to theory and organizational learning CDRA (Community Development Resource Association), based in Capetown, may be described as a civil society support organization. Its expertise in organizational development is a significant asset to community-based organizations and NGOs in Southern Africa. Drawing on its collaboration with NGOs like OXFAM-Canada, particularly its evaluations of their programs, CDRA has built a coherent and grounded analysis of capacity development. Through personal, print and electronic channels, the ideas generated by CDRA's own reflection have influenced practitioners far beyond South Africa's borders.

VI. SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

Workshop participants may wish to consider the following questions in their discussion.

In the context of promoting southern leadership and ownership of development strategies and activities,

- How have Southern CSOs defined their agendas for capacity development? What might Northern counterparts contribute to these? What might they gain?
 - As Southern CSOs choose how best to engage in the design, implementation and review of national strategies to reduce poverty, how may their Northern counterparts offer effective support?
 - Southern and Northern CSOs are active in policy arenas beyond their own borders, both regionally and globally. How might they build complementary roles to support each other in this work?
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ANNEX

Local ownership and development co-operation: A note on sources

A: POLICY REFERENCES

The three major policy references in the paper are: OECD/DAC, *Shaping the 21st Century* (Paris: OECD, 1996); James Wolfensohn, President, the World Bank, "A Proposal for a Comprehensive Development Framework -- A Discussion Draft" (Washington: mimeo, January 1999); CIDA, *Canada Making a Difference in the World: A Policy Statement on Strengthening Aid Effectiveness* (Hull, September 2002). The statements from the OECD/DAC are publicly available, while the draft by Wolfensohn is grey literature and less readily available. Also relevant is the Dec. 2002 report on Canada's development assistance program from the Peer Review process of the DAC, "Development Co-operation Review: Canada" (<http://webnet1.oecd.org/EN/document/0,,EN-document-67-2-no-3-37226-0---,00.html>, accessed Feb 25/03)

Charles Abugre, Director of the Ghanaian organization ISODEC, wrote a background paper for CIDA/CPB in 1999 entitled "Partners, Collaborators or Patron-Clients: Defining Relationships in the Aid Industry. A Survey of the Issues." (Hull: mimeo, 1999) This makes a useful complement to the policy statements. Abugre analyses of the challenges to the development co-operation system in the 1990's which led to proposals to reform aid and to create a new strategy for development assistance. He explains the centrality of the ownership agenda in the reform strategies. Some of the same ground is covered by Sobhan, below.

B: LOCAL OWNERSHIP: BASIC CONCEPTS

The development literature focusing on local ownership is fairly modest in size. Documents consulted for this paper include Joe Bolger, "Ownership: The Concept and CIDA's Experience," paper prepared for CIDA/Policy Branch (Hull: mimeo, 1994); Mick Moore *et al.*, *Ownership in the Finnish Aid Programme: Evaluation Report* (Helsinki: Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Department for International Development Co-operation, 1996); Stefan Molund, "Ownership In Focus?" Discussion Paper for a Planned Evaluation, SIDA Studies in Evaluation 00/5 (Stockholm: mimeo, 2000); Jan Willem Gunning, "The Reform of Aid: Conditionality, Selectivity and Ownership," paper to be presented at conference on "Aid and Development", Stockholm, Jan. 2000 (Oxford: mimeo, 2000); Idrissa Dante, "Ownership and Partnership in Africa's Development Strategy," Draft paper presented at conference on Aid Co-ordination and Donor Reform, (Nairobi: mimeo, Apr 2002); G.K. Helleiner, "External Conditionality, Local Ownership and Development," (Toronto: mimeo, May 1997); and Rehman Sobhan, "Aid Effectiveness and Policy Ownership," in *Development and Change* 33, 3, (2002), pp. 539-548 (Inst. Of Social Studies, Holland).

The Reality of Aid 2002 takes ownership and conditionality as its organizing theme. (*The Reality of Aid 2002*, www.devinit.org/realityofaid, accessed 23/03/03.) A chapter by Brian Tomlinson, "Promoting ownership and gender equality," reviews CIDA's experience in this area. Of these analyses, Moore *et al.* offer probably the most elaborate conceptual discussion, though they limit their study to aid projects supported by FINNIDA. Molund's paper explores ownership in the

context of recent programmatic approaches. Recent material by CIDA on Program-Based Approaches also includes useful commentary on ownership. A good example is the draft "Program-Based Approaches (PBAs): A Primer on CIDA Policy and Applications," (<http://remote4.acdi-cida.gc.ca/extranet/policy/swapsbboard.nsf>, accessed Feb. 23/03). This also draws on recent analyses of ownership and technical co-operation from a UNDP study on reforming technical co-operation.

C: LITERATURE RELATED TO LOCAL OWNERSHIP

Beyond this limited direct focus, authors commonly approach ownership through other doors in the development discourse. There is a huge literature on the international dimensions of ownership, linked to the dynamics of negotiation between North and South, particularly the role of the international financial institutions and issues of conditionality, debt, and trade and investment policies. The paper by Gunning (above) summarizes the analysis of conditionality at the end of the 1990s, for example. A recent critique of the development enterprise by David Sogge includes a chapter scrutinizing ownership and conditionality. (Sogge, *Give and Take*, London: Zed Press, 2002.)

The domestic aspect of the ownership agenda touches a similarly vast literature on governance, accountability, and participation in the South. Useful summary sources here include Mick Moore and James Putzel, "Thinking Strategically about Politics and Poverty," (Brighton: IDS Working Paper 101, 2000) and Robert Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts?* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1997). Because Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) implicate both international and domestic power relations, the rapidly-growing literature on this subject is relevant to the ownership agenda. Sample sources beyond official agencies include the Comparative Research Program on Poverty, www.crop.org and the World Institute for Development Economics Research, www.wider.unu.edu A recent contribution particularly relevant to civil society is that of Sarah Lister and Warren Nyamugasira, "Design Contradictions in the 'New Architecture of Aid'? Reflections from Uganda on the Roles of Civil Society Organisations" in *Development Policy Review*, 2003, 21 (1), pp. 93-106 (published in the U.K.)

Also relevant here is the discussion of "partnership". This is often explicitly linked to "ownership", as in the DAC document, *Shaping the 21st Century*. There is an extensive literature on "partnership" which is grounded in the debates and experience of civil society and thus particularly useful for examining civil society and local ownership. A good résumé of the issues is to be found in *IDS Bulletin* 31, 3 (July 2000), entitled "Questioning Partnership: The Reality of Aid and NGO Relations." The critique of partnership is one aspect of a broader analysis of changing North-South roles and relations among civil society organizations. David Lewis and Tina Wallace provide a good résumé of this debate in their edited collection, *New Roles and Relevance: Development NGOs and the Challenge of Change* (Bloomfield, Conn.: Kumarian Press, 2000)

D: CANADIAN CSOs

The place of Canadian NGOs and other CSOs in international development has been analyzed in sources such as Tim Brodhead and Brent Herbert Kopley, *Bridges of Hope* (Ottawa: North-South Institute, 1987); Brian K Murphy, "Towards the 21st Century: Reflections on the Future of Canadian NGOs," (Ottawa: mimeo, 1993); and Tim Brodhead and Cranford Pratt, "Paying the

Piper: CIDA and Canadian NGOs," in Cranford Pratt, ed., *Canadian International Development Assistance Policies: An Appraisal* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1994), pp. 87-119. The principal source of information and analysis on individual agencies' activities remains grey literature such as program proposals and evaluations. CIDA's files are particularly rich in this respect. Occasional papers from Canadian CSOs also provide valuable details.

Endnotes

- 1 References here are cited in Section A of the annex below, "A note on sources." Gaps in the references must be noted as well. The World Bank website, for example, lists three corporate priorities, 18 themes, and 95 sub-themes, none of which includes local ownership. (www.worldbank.org, accessed Jan 23/03.)
- 2 Section B of the annex summarizes the sources for this discussion of basic concepts, and for the following résumé of issues to be addressed by the ownership agenda.
- 3 These are syntheses of arguments in the literature in Sections A, B and C in the annex.
- 4 The points arise in the literature in Section D of the annex, in the sources on partnership in Section C, and in the DAC Peer Review noted in Section A.
- 5 The notable exception is humanitarian relief, especially in Africa. In this work, international agencies maintain a key operational presence.