



ISTANBUL PRINCIPLES FOR CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

6 PURSUE EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS AND SOLIDARITY

Civil Society Organizations are effective as development actors when they commit to transparent relationships with CSOs and other development actors, freely and as equals, based on shared development goals and values, mutual respect, trust, organizational autonomy, long-term accompaniment, solidarity and global citizenship.



Photo: Joshua Berson

Towards equitable partnerships: CoDevelopment Canada

CoDev creates partnerships between Canadians and Latin Americans for social change in the Americas.

CHALLENGE

CoDev was founded on the belief that development will only take place when citizens from the “Global North” take action in collaboration with change agents like women’s organizations and trade unions from the Global South. Such a partnership model provides Canadians with a direct link to people and Latin American civil society organizations working for justice, and allows them to support and learn from that experience and take action here in Canada. It also enables Canadians to see local people as actors or protagonists in their own development, not the helpless victims a more traditional charity model portrays.



RESPONSE



CoDev seeks out autonomous, democratic, and credible local civil society organizations (CSOs) with existing community roots and a vision of social change for equality. In Colombia, where working for human rights is a dangerous undertaking, CoDev began working with Colombian human rights organization, NOMADESC (Association for Social Research and Action) in 2003. At the time, NOMADESC was organizing communities around the privatization of water in their region. CoDev linked NOMADESC with Canadian unions also working on water, and a partnership was born. When NOMADESC moved to work more with rural communities on basic human rights education, CoDev and the Canadian partners followed. Currently, CoDev and three Canadian partners are supporting NOMADESC’s Human Rights Diploma program — a 16-week, university-recognized course that teaches basic human rights law and defence. Course participants, who are chosen by their communities, return to teach what they have learned and to develop local strategies to address human rights violations. One example of this kind of empowerment saw a local community organize a two-day march to the regional capital to demand the fulfillment of a 10-year old agreement made during the construction of a dam that destroyed their communities. The agreement had never been fulfilled and the community’s march led to meetings with the local authorities to demand their rights.

LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES

Beyond working with NOMADESC on its programs, CoDev also looks for ways to support its work and people by increasing its visibility internationally. When NOMADESC receives aggressive threats and asks for support, CoDev will issue urgent action requests and ask that Canadian partners write letters of support. In-country, CoDev also works to ensure that the Canadian embassy is aware of NOMADESC’s work and Canadian partnerships, thereby opening a direct channel for communication should the need arise. Such actions help



deepen the sense of solidarity between NOMADESC and CoDev, and allows Canadian partners to feel directly connected.

Moreover, CoDev employs a human rights perspective in all projects to ensure that human entitlements are attained and defended. Accordingly, with its partners, CoDev actively reflects on the principle of partnership and solidarity to increase the confidence of partners and the public in its effectiveness and authenticity. Building genuine partnerships and solidarity requires room for candid, fair, and ongoing dialogue to reach mutual goals and for mutual learning.

MAINSTREAMING/KNOWLEDGE SHARING



CoDev's flat structure is a unique organizational model that encourages collaboration and reflects an alternative power-sharing model.

CoDev works to deepen relationships, knowledge, and solidarity through partner exchanges, organizing visits to Canada of Latin American partners and taking delegations to Latin America. Canadians meeting with their partners in Latin America develop an increased appreciation for the challenges facing those partners and how they can support their work back in Canada. Delegation visits are always planned with Latin American partners and sometimes are designed specifically at their request. For example, in 2011, CoDev organized a group of occupational health and safety (OHS) experts to travel to Honduras to meet with CODEMUH, a women's organization working with maquila (sweatshop) workers. CODEMUH has been engaged in developing OHS legislation to take to the Honduran government and requested that Canadian partners come to Honduras to share their successes and challenges in this area.

Given that CoDev's work has always been grounded in the principle of gender equality and respect for women's rights, the majority of CoDev's Latin American partners are women's organizations or women within mixed organizations. Over the years, CoDev and their women partners have faced challenges to their commitment to gender equality due to the strong machismo culture of Latin America. Nevertheless, women partners have made progress that can be seen over the long term.

NEXT STEPS

Establishing equitable partnerships requires transparent and mutual agreements and mechanisms to hold each other accountable and establish trust. Currently, CoDev discusses its approach with potential partners before beginning a relationship and works to keep communication lines open. It also has mechanisms in place to evaluate the work of its partners, but not vice versa. Recognizing that this can be seen as a power asymmetry, CoDev is developing two new documents based on the Canadian Council for International Cooperation's Code of Ethics as a counterbalance — a dispute mechanism to engage in dialogue and resolve conflicts among partners and an evaluation document for regional partners to critique CoDev.



FURTHER INFORMATION

1996 CCIC International Cooperation Award

<http://www.codev.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/CCIC->

[International-Co-operation-Award-CoDevelopment-Canada.pdf](#)

2006 Our Times article CoDev Canada: The Little NGO That Could

<http://www.codev.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/CoDev-Our-Times-Article-Spring-2006.pdf>

Go here for more examples of how Canadian civil society is improving its development practice: <http://www.ccic.ca/IP-case-studies.php>