

## **CIDA International Cooperation Days**

### **Notes for Panel Discussion: 40 years of experience: What are the lessons?**

**Monday, November 17, 2008, 9:00- 10:30**

**Betty Plewes**

I am very pleased to have been asked to participate in this panel . When I told a colleague that we were asked to outline what we had learned about development in the last 40 years and do it in 8 minutes he suggested that perhaps the organizers were sending a message that they think what we have learned can be summarized in 8 minutes.

However the discipline imposed by the 8 minutes has been useful in synthesizing what I and other in civil society workers have learned in the 40 years of this development project. For me this is not just an abstract or academic exercise since my own professional, personal and political engagement spans this period of time.

In 1968, I went to northern Nigeria as a CUSO volunteer and teacher trainer – this was eight years after Nigerian independence and in the middle of a civil war. CUSO's motto at that time was "serve and learn" the aim was "to help the new nations reach self-sufficiency while increasing the volunteers knowledge of the world".

Last month I attended a Board Meeting of ACORD, a Nairobi based org, where after 30 years of operations the Northern organizations (among them 3 oxfams, IP, ) who owned ACORD voted to transfer legal ownership to a predominantly African membership. ACORD is now an Africa led and directed social justice organization working in 17 countries. This last step formalizes a new role for ACORD and contributes to what has been one the most dynamic trends over the last 4 decades - the growth and development of southern civil society and SCSOs.

Nor is it an abstract and academic exercise in terms of the challenges we are facing. Although over the past 40 years there has been progress in many areas – literacy rates, life expectancy and girls education globally the picture is very challenging. You all know the figures of global poverty and inequality

- 3b people live on less than \$2 per day
- 70% of adults living in poverty are women
- Increasing inequality – disparity in incomes
- 200m unemployed
- In Africa human development indicators going backwards

And add to this a global financial and economic crisis that is sweeping the globe - one which CSOS note was created in the north but whose impacts will most likely be felt most strongly in the South and continuing militarization and armed conflict

So it is imperative that we look at what we have learned in order to build approaches that can address these challenges

I have tried to draw out two key learnings from our experience as civil society organizations

- **We have deepened our understanding of the degree to which people change their own world**
- **We underestimated the degree to which people and states are constrained in pursuing their own development by the current global power structures**

### **People change their own world**

Development is about the poor claiming their rights and about the poor defining what they want to do with their lives and making that a reality. The role of CSO partners north and south is to support these processes.

Tony Tujan IBON

At the heart of the development project is creating and expanding democratic space for people as citizens to make decisions about their own lives and to hold their governments to account.

Civil society organizations are vehicles through which people come together to claim their rights and are an essential element of a democratic society. The way citizens come together to act on shared interests takes many organizational forms and they carry out a variety of roles.

This emerging understanding that citizen action in claiming rights is at the heart of the development process and the engine of state accountability has led CSOs (as well as some bilateral donors and UN organizations) to develop a rights-based approach one which brings together the streams of human rights, development and citizen engagement .

Beginning from a human right framework helps us develop approaches which

- Move from a charity approach, a donor recipient approach to one of justice. Justice necessarily requires changes in **relations** of power and accountability.

- Take a more holistic approach to development which recognizes the historical cultural, social, political, as well as the economic dimension of development processes
- Bring a more systemic analysis of why people's rights are denied and thus which addresses issues of power at different levels
- Support rights bearers as well as increase the capacity of duty bearers.
- Combine policy and advocacy work with development activities that create alternatives that meet the needs of the poor
- Are more comprehensive and recognize there are implications for all dimensions of policies of donor and recipient countries, including the promotion of investment, trade justice, economic and social inclusion, debt cancellation, diplomacy for peace, and efforts to sustain the planet's ecosystems.

. Taking a rights based approach helps us identify strategic roles for CSOs

- **Collaborating with** organizations and social movements that are formed by, or work in solidarity with, people living in poverty or who are otherwise marginalized.
- Supporting democratic governance in the South and internationally, through the articulation and coalescing of citizen interests
- **Gender Equality.** Advancing gender equality, with a particular focus on the rights of poor and marginalized women,
- **Citizens' Voices.** CSOs support the articulation of the voice and interests of citizens, particularly those who are poor and marginalized in policy making processes.

And defines roles for northern NGOs

Northern NGOs have a responsibility to support and accompany these process in southern countries, to create space in all levels of policy dialogue for southern voices, to mobilize northern resources , and to mobilize citizen action their own countries in the north to contribute to global social and economic justice and shared responsibility for the health of the planet's ecosystems.

How does aid fit into this discussion?

Aid can be an important tool for development and there are many examples of where it has contributed to CSO development. However as the 2008 Reality of Aid points out the true measure of aid's effectiveness is in its sustained impact on reducing poverty and inequality – its support for making progress in implementing human rights, in achieving gender equality, in deepening democracy and promoting environmental sustainability. On these measures, the Report documents deeply troubling trends and failure in reforms undertaken to date.

At the High Level Forum held in Accra in September CSO participants felt there was some progress in linking aid and development effectiveness debates and that the follow up processes offer important possibilities for expanding the discussion. At the Forum, Canada through CIDA played a significant role in promoting space for maximizing CSO engagement with the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness and in the HLF and significantly endorsed the Advisory Committee's Report

Canada supports the findings and recommendations of the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness. As we build a joint effectiveness agenda beyond Accra, there is an extraordinary opportunity to recognize and support civil society organizations as full partners in development....Canada strongly supports positive measures by civil society to strengthen their own effectiveness. Civil society contribution is fundamental to the achievement of development results, good governance and accountability.”<sup>1</sup>

- **We underestimated the degree to which people and states are constrained by global structures and institutions**

The current multilateral system took shape following the second world war and has not adapted well to a changed political environment

- Changing geopolitics relationships
- Calls for increased democratization of decision-making from southern governments and citizens movements
- The need to prioritize commitments to human rights and the environment.

Multilateral institutions reflect the power dynamics that dominate international relations and operate with a set of global economic rules that reduce the policy space for governments and citizens to choose the most appropriate economic policies and for states to uphold their obligations to meet their citizens' human rights.

Southern governments and csos world wide are calling for a renewed multilateralism whose institutions are more representative, democratic and transparent and where the promotion protection and fulfillment of human rights are central to their mission and operations.

So we have learned that

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<sup>1</sup> “Canada is Committed to Building a New Aid Relationship: A Canadian Statement for the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness”, September 4, 2008, accessible at <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/acdicida.nsf/En/NAT-95153928-R38>.

- People change their own worlds and change the world together and Citizen action is the driver of the development process and government accountability
- That CSO are vehicles for supporting and carrying out citizen action and are central in building democratic culture and promoting alternatives
- That rights based approaches offer the potential for more holistic and sustainable development processes
- There is an urgent need for a more democratic and responsive multilateral system

There are hopeful signs

- In 2008 there is a highly diverse and robust civil society connected globally through shared visions and new IT technologies
- There are elements of an emerging new development paradigm on which we can build which includes
  - The integration of human rights and development goals
  - A deepening understanding of the relationship between aid and development effectiveness
  - Recognition of inter-dependency to address global challenges such as climate change
  - CSOs commitment to look at it own development effectiveness.
  - Increasing understanding of the need to create an enabling environment for democratic participation nationally and globally
- There are a number of opportunities on the agenda to further explore these issues and which require CIDA CSO collaboration
  - The follow up processes to the Accra High level Forum including the development of a CIDA policy on support for civil society as development actors in their own right
  - The Open Forum Process of CSOs to examine their own aid effectiveness
  - The development of an implementation strategy for the Canadian Aid Accountability Act.
  - The current financial economic crisis is creating space for discussions of alternative relationships and institutions.

So now after 40 years we can reflect on how far we have come – perhaps not as far as we hoped when we began 4 decades ago – but some considerable distance as we now recognize how profound the changes need to be if we are to seriously address the causes of impoverishment and inequality and environmental collapse.

And most importantly : We are part of a global movement who act on the conviction that another world is not only possible – it is necessary for those who have learned from the past 40 years and for those whose futures depend on the choices we make today.

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