

Effectively Engaging Canadians as Global Citizens

Public Engagement Position Paper

The Inter-Council Network

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The Inter-Council Network (ICN) is a dynamic network of provincial and regional member-based Councils for International Cooperation committed to social justice and social change. Rooted in communities across Canada, we are leaders in public engagement at a local and regional level, and are recognized for bringing regional knowledge and priorities to the national level.

In this position paper we outline a definition of good public engagement and provide a brief contextual history of public engagement in Canada and Europe. We then present four key positions and subsequent recommendations for the improvement of public engagement efforts. These recommendations are directed at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), as well as to the international development sector in Canada.

Inter-Council Network Public Engagement Position Paper

A. Introduction

Effectively engaging Canadians in the fight against global poverty, structural violence, environmental degradation and a range of other international development issues is of fundamental importance in the search for sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by humanity. This position paper addresses the need to develop a common understanding of the important role that public engagement activities play in the lives of Canadians and populations around the world.

This paper presents the vision and experiences of the Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation (the Councils), and the 400 organizations we represent. For close to forty years the Councils have adjusted, refined and improved our public engagement practices as our knowledge and experience has increased. The collective knowledge gained through four decades of experience has led us to produce recommendations on how to make public engagement more relevant in supporting Canadians' participation as global citizens.

This position paper contributes to the wider discussion of public engagement that is currently taking place in multiple sectors, and proposes recommendations to improve our efforts to engage Canadians in the critical work of eliminating global poverty. In this position paper we outline a definition of good public engagement and provide a brief contextual history of public engagement in Canada and Europe. We then present four key positions and subsequent recommendations for the improvement of public engagement efforts. These recommendations are directed at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), as well as to the international development sector in Canada.

B. Definition of Public Engagement

Public engagement can be defined as those activities and processes which enable individuals and organizations to traverse along a continuum from basic understanding of international development practices and the underlying principles directing those practices, through to deeper personal involvement and informed action on sustainable human development around the world. By engaging individuals and organizations in the global fight against poverty, the rights and responsibilities of Canadians are articulated and individuals and organizations can become active global citizens.¹

The Councils support the use of "global citizenship" as an umbrella concept for the range of public engagement activities being carried out by civil society organizations (CSOs). Global citizenship suggests the development of citizens who have the knowledge and capabilities to be actively involved in the world. Foundational knowledge of global citizenship includes understanding:

- that we share a common humanity with all others;
- that diversity is essential for life;
- that citizens have rights and responsibilities;
- that there are local and global implications of such citizenship;
- that we have agency and therefore power to make positive change; and
- the importance of multiple perspectives, and the ability to reflect critically on a diverse range of views and information.

¹ This definition incorporates components of CIDA's Public Engagement Strategy and Action Plan (1999) and the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) briefing paper, "Strengthening Civil Society Partnerships for Public Engagement and Global Citizenship".

Good public engagement is a key contributor to democratic citizenship and to the wider social justice commitments that millions of Canadians continue to enact in communities across the country. Through our collective efforts CSOs aspire to build an engaged public that understands that another world is possible, and that works towards achieving this. Global citizenship remains a powerful path toward democratic, inclusive citizenship by people committed to justice for the poor and marginalized throughout the world.

C. Context of Public Engagement

In Canada, recent research suggests a majority of Canadian citizens are interested in international development issues, and in playing a significant role in the world. For example, a recent study conducted by the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation (ACGC) found that a majority of Canadians (and Albertans within Canada) are strongly committed to understanding and taking action about global issues². This study also suggests that Canadians need assistance in getting good information, creating spaces where they might critically engage with the diverse and wide range of information available to them, and to discern appropriate actions that might serve to end global problems. This suggests a need to engage Canadians in an organized fashion.

The Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) (2008)³ identifies the important role that civil society organizations play in both international development and in informing Canadians about international issues of global poverty. Canada has made commitments through the *Paris Declaration* and the *ODA Accountability Act* that international development and the development agenda must be founded on democratic ownership, social diversity, human rights, gender equality and accountability to the poor and marginalized. Canadians have innovative ideas and important knowledge about poverty, justice and development, and have come together forming CSOs to become informed and to take action. These CSOs are ideal places where the important work of global citizenship can be supported.

In Europe, development education, global education and public awareness have been a priority since 2001. Although EU support for global education dates back to 1988, it is during this past decade that key strategizing has occurred. In 2002 the Europe-wide Global Education Congress was held in Maastricht, the Netherlands, bringing together the four quadrants of the EU (governments, parliaments, regional and local authorities, and civil society) for discussion. The result of the Congress was the *Maastricht Declaration on Global Education*, which included the following key outcomes for global education, all of which could be translated directly into policy:

- a) provision of a framework statement on the importance of global education in Europe and broad consensus on the need to strengthen global education
- b) political statements made by key figures on the centrality of global education in Europe to achieve goals in global poverty eradication and sustainable development
- c) acceptance of the term *global education* as a generally useful umbrella term and that a working definition⁴ was produced

² "Perceptions of Global Poverty Poll" conducted with Angus Reid Strategies, 2009.

³ Tomlinson, Brian. (2008). A Discussion paper on CIDA, civil society and development: A CCIC response and proposals for a CIDA policy on civil society and development. CCIC, June 2008.

⁴ Global education is education that opens people's eyes and minds to the realities of the world, and encourages them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all. Global education is understood to encompass development education, human rights education, education for sustainability, education for peace and conflict prevention and intercultural education, all of which encompass the global dimensions of education for citizenship. (Source: As contained in the *Maastricht Declaration on Global Education 2002*; developed at the

d) commitment by Southern participants to create a “South Caucus on Global Education” for further North-South and South-South dialogue.

Each year since 2002 the various nationally-based and pan-European development coalitions and consortiums have hosted conferences, symposiums and workshops with key global education stakeholders to continue strategizing best ways to move forward on a pan-European global education agenda. Each event, from the 2005 *Brussels Conference on Development Education* to the *Effectiveness in Development Education and Awareness Raising Conference* under the Czech Presidency in May 2009, continues to build upon the recommendations and actions of on-going global education and public awareness work in Europe. A primary focus for the EU has been to support new Member states and emerging Member states in establishing their own development education and overseas development assistance (ODA) programs. As stated at the Czech Conference: “The role of development education and awareness-raising has been acknowledged as being essential for the EU to live up to its European as well as international commitments to development”.

Within the EU, coordination of global education programming falls under the purview of the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD); the Global Education Network Europe (GENE), a European network of national agencies for the support, coordination and/or funding of global education in Europe, facilitated by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe, and the Development Education Exchange Europe Project (DEEEP)⁵. DEEEP is currently on its third three-year phase to work on its mandate to develop European public engagement for the eradication of poverty through education and reflection.

Awareness-raising and DE should be integrated into the curricula of the formal and informal educational systems throughout the current and future members of the Union. Such programmes, aimed at all levels and ages of society, are necessary to foster the greatest possible North-South solidarity.

- from the European Conference on Public Awareness and Development Education for North-South Solidarity's approved set of recommendations (DEEEP 2007)

D. Positions

Position #1: Public Engagement is integral to development work

There are few places in the world where the pervasiveness of globalization is not evident through its intensified connections and interactions. Local social, economic and environmental problems are increasingly being understood as global challenges with a need for global solutions. As the lines between local and global blur, the understanding that we are all members of one human family, sharing the same basic rights, becomes increasingly evident. It is in this context that public engagement seeks to frame issues of global poverty and injustice as less about “them” and more about “us”.

international meeting of Global Education Week by national coordinators in Cyprus in 2002. Cited in Congress proceedings and edited by O'Loughlin & Wegimont, 2003, p. 13).

⁵ DEEEP is a program initiated by the Development Education Forum of CONCORD in 2005, funded by the European Commission, and managed by a consortium of three of the largest development education NGOs – Unità e Cooperazione per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (UCODEP) in Italy, Centre de formation pour le développement et la solidarité internationale (ITECO) in Belgium, and the Development Education Association in the United Kingdom.

Through public engagement Canadians come to understand the global issues that connect their local experiences with others throughout the world, but they require more than awareness; they require authentic channels for action. Levels of engagement resulting from the public engagement efforts of CSOs vary from supporting foreign aid, to donating to charities, to pressing for changes locally and globally, to getting directly involved in international development. Good public engagement supports a process where individuals transform their attitudes and behaviours and take actions for positive change in ways appropriate to their own lives. It moves Canadians towards democratic engagement in the world through building social and political relationships that are diverse, equitable and respectful of the rights and dignity of all, including those who are marginalized. Public engagement can mobilize Canadians to act for the reduction of global poverty and is a powerful tool towards creating global citizens who seek to address the foundations of global poverty and create a fair and just world.

It is vital to situate and strengthen public engagement as a foundational part of Canada's international development efforts. Canadian organizations cannot effectively support their partners in the South without using public engagement. Current international development trends suggest the need to engage in reciprocal relations of justice across traditional North-South boundaries if there is to be any movement toward either global justice or poverty eradication. According to the OECD and the Maastricht Congress on Global Education in Europe to 2015 there is a critical political necessity to support public engagement as a prerequisite for addressing global development issues and practices. The *Paris Declaration*, the *Accra Agenda for Action* and the *Official Development Assistance Accountability Act* place aid effectiveness and accountability as a priority for the Canadian government, and as such, public engagement must be recognized for its contribution to our development objectives and valued appropriately.

Recommendations

There needs to be increased value and support for public engagement as an integral part of international development. Support for public engagement should be demonstrated in the following ways:

- CIDA should engage in ongoing and meaningful consultation with public engagement practitioners in the development and implementation of a federal public engagement policy and strategy.
- CIDA should provide increased, multi-year funding for a range of public engagement projects throughout Canada.
- The international development sector should devote greater resources to public engagement.
- The international development sector should make efforts to better understand and demonstrate the links between public engagement and development work.

Position #2: Public engagement requires multiple approaches

The diversity of our population, ethnically, socially, culturally and linguistically across our varied geographies, necessitates multiple approaches to engage Canadians effectively. Public engagement activities and approaches need to take into account these factors to ensure a broad spectrum of Canadians are engaged in the fight to reduce global poverty.

There are many ways to implement public engagement. The approaches to engaging Canadians are diverse, and so must be the methodologies. When developing good public engagement, it is useful to consider a three-dimensional approach incorporating width, depth and height, where:⁶

- Width refers to approaches designed to reach a wide number of people, often over a short period of time. An example would be a national campaign to raise awareness on malaria.
- Depth refers to deeply engaging a small number of participants, often over a longer period of time. For example, a long-term global citizens mentorship program for youth.
- Height refers to initiatives designed for new audiences or to add more meaning. This dimension could include engaging groups not typically targeted by public engagement or by using innovative, non-traditional modes of engagement.

Irrespective of the approach taken, all public engagement activities should:

- Raise awareness of global/international development issues and offer models toward social justice;
- Enable change by helping individuals and groups understand that a change in their choices and actions can have a positive impact on our world; and
- Encourage action by providing individuals or groups with the tools and resources they need to become active global citizens.

Public engagement may be seen as a continuum for moving individuals from basic awareness, to understanding, to personal involvement and informed action. This continuum of learning is not a linear process and people reach different stages at different points in time. Public engagement at its best is a transformative process and creates change, ranging from incremental to substantial. Reaching individuals wherever they are located on the continuum of public engagement is important in addressing global poverty.

Recommendations

Public engagement should target diverse audiences through multiple approaches. This should be addressed in the following ways:

- The value of multiple approaches when engaging Canadians in issues of global poverty should be explicitly outlined in policy and practice of both CIDA and international development organizations.
- Public engagement practitioners should take an active role in engaging ethnically, socially, culturally and linguistically diverse populations throughout the country.

Position #3: Public engagement requires principles of good practice

Many public engagement activities in Canada are innovative and effective, but there are always opportunities to improve. The implementation of standards would improve the practice of public engagement and demonstrate positive results and outcomes. Through our experience we have learned that there are a number of factors that increase the effectiveness of public engagement activities. These factors are similar to what constitutes good development internationally.

⁶ This approach is described in a CCIC document titled: *Toward Good Practice in Public Engagement: a Participatory Evaluation Guide for CSOs* by Michael Stephens, 2009. The document includes case studies by ACIC and MCIC.

While public engagement requires multiple approaches, there are key standards that need to be met. These standards should include:

- **Relevance:** Implementation of appropriate activities that are pertinent and of interest to participants. This is particularly important when reaching out to new and non-traditional audiences.
- **Sustained and Long-Term:** Public engagement activities are built over time and learning is gleaned through experience and evaluation. Better results can be achieved through a strategy for engaging Canadians that is developed with multi-year timeframes.
- **Action:** Participants should be provided with a clear message of how they can participate in global poverty reduction and the steps they can take to implement positive change. Opportunities need to be created for deeper engagement and sustainable action.
- **Diverse Participation and Partnership:** Canadians from a variety of sectors and locations (i.e., private sector, educational sector, youth, Diaspora groups and mass media) should be included as participants and partners.
- **Multiple Approaches:** The diversity of experience, education, level of engagement and learning styles necessitates the use of many different types of public engagement.
- **Collaborative Ownership through Participatory Planning:** All stakeholders should be involved in the planning and implementation of public engagement activities.
- **Evaluative and Reflective:** Measures of impact and change and mechanisms to reflect need to be incorporated into activity design from the outset so that success is gauged, lessons learned can be documented, and necessary adaptations incorporated into future activities.
- **Innovative, Creative and/or Engaging Design:** The use of non-traditional means of engagement (including new media, simulations, art, and popular education techniques), different methodologies and various foci are necessary to raise awareness in populations previously excluded.

Recommendations

Standards of good practice should be identified and shared to support effective public engagement in the following ways:

- Include a section on good practices in CIDA's public engagement policy.
- Develop a public engagement training course for the voluntary sector training program implemented by the Canadian Partnership Branch.
- Provincial and Regional Councils and international development organizations should promote these standards in their capacity building collaboration with their partners and members.

Position #4: Evaluation and research are important to demonstrate public engagement effectiveness

In order to build capacity to engage Canadians as active global citizens, it is essential that we not only document good practices and set standards, but also that we develop long-term strategies to measure their impact. We know that there are many organizations using innovative practices to evaluate the impact of their public engagement work. However, measuring collective impacts is challenging. Public engagement is often not quantifiable and does not lend itself to quantitative results over the short term, and attributing ownership to changes in knowledge and behaviour is not easy. Additionally, there has been little done in the way of developing a baseline that would enable practitioners to know that changes have occurred. While practitioners acknowledge that measuring impact is central to improving efforts, there are few accessible tools and strategies that enable organizations to easily evaluate results in public engagement.

Notwithstanding difficulties, individual organizations are measuring their results, and many are using innovative methods and tools. As a general rule, conventional evaluation models ask us to think about our projects in terms of accountability, efficiency, and quantifiable gauges of effectiveness. Results that are consistent, logical, and which can be isolated and measured are given precedence over more variant, unintended and interconnected outcomes. These models make it easy to neglect to involve the project's various stakeholders in the development of the evaluation framework and the evaluation process, leaving many of the meaningful, qualitative, and indirect outcomes experienced by these stakeholders unreported. There needs to be a more systematic approach to research and evaluation in order to determine the impact of our collective work. Participatory research using alternative strategies for evaluation has provided examples of how public engagement can be measured, but leadership is essential to show evidence of change.

The Provincial and Regional Councils are in a key position to provide leadership in the area of public engagement evaluation and research. The Councils have the reach (together representing more than 400 organizations across the country) and the experience of sustained practice to take a leadership role in evaluating, measuring and analyzing public engagement activities at a regional and national level.

Recommendation

As evaluation and research are important to demonstrate public engagement effectiveness, it is recommended that the following be implemented:

- Longitudinal studies that develop baselines documenting the evidence that Canadians are being engaged as active global citizens should be conducted. Subsequent studies should be used to measure impact of public engagement activities.
- An action research initiative with a community of practitioners led by the Provincial and Regional Councils to document, reflect, analyze, and share learnings on effective public engagement should be pursued.

Conclusion

By their nature, the Provincial and Regional Councils have a strong capacity for impact throughout the country. Through their connections to communities and organizations across Canada, they work to promote international solidarity from coast to coast, in the biggest cities and smallest towns. As a network, our concerted actions to engage the public on development issues and challenges support the development of a common vision of international cooperation that links populations to populations. Supported by our members as a whole, our actions in public engagement go well beyond fundraising activities or the promotion of our member organizations; our public engagement lies at the heart of our programs and reveals the extent of the global challenges in building a better, united world.

Summary of Recommendations

1. There needs to be increased value and support for public engagement as an integral part of international development. Support for public engagement should be demonstrated in the following ways:
 - CIDA should engage in ongoing and meaningful consultation with public engagement practitioners in the development and implementation of a federal public engagement policy and strategy.
 - CIDA should provide increased, multi-year funding for a range of public engagement projects throughout Canada.
 - The international development sector should devote greater resources to public engagement.
 - The international development sector should make efforts to better understand and demonstrate the links between public engagement and development work.
2. Public engagement should target diverse audiences through multiple approaches. This should be addressed in the following ways:
 - The value of multiple approaches when engaging Canadians in issues of global poverty should be explicitly outlined in policy and practice of both CIDA and international development organizations.
 - Public engagement practitioners should take an active role in engaging ethnically, socially, culturally and linguistically diverse populations throughout the country.
3. Standards of good practice should be identified and shared to support effective public engagement in the following ways:
 - Include a section on good practices in CIDA's public engagement policy.
 - Develop a public engagement training course for the voluntary sector training program implemented by the Canadian Partnership Branch.
 - Provincial and Regional Councils and international development organizations should promote these standards in their capacity building collaboration with their partners and members.
4. As evaluation and research are important to demonstrate public engagement effectiveness, it is recommended that the following be implemented:
 - Longitudinal studies that develop baselines documenting the evidence that Canadians are being engaged as active global citizens should be conducted. Subsequent studies should be used to measure impact of public engagement activities.
 - An action research initiative with a community of practitioners led by the Provincial and Regional Councils to document, reflect, analyze, and share learnings on effective public engagement should be pursued.