

Delivering Results



Introduction

Inter Pares was founded in 1975. Our feminist analysis informs our understanding that unequal power structures are at the root of underdevelopment, and that transformative social change is required for true positive development. The following is a summary of the relevant section of our full submission to the International Assistance Review (IAR).

The “how” of international development is a critical component of Canada’s international assistance. In Inter Pares’ experience, there is a strong and inextricable relationship between programming results and delivery mechanisms.

It is our belief that a feminist lens includes the “how” and that process is as important as outcomes. A feminist international development assistance would emphasize collaboration and learning. It would allow program focus, design and implementation in a way that gives decision-making power to those who are most affected and those who will be most intimate with implementing the program. This approach would also accept that complexity is a key feature of social change and development outcomes.

Recommendations

Global Affairs Canada should embrace long-term funding commitments (10+ years) on the understanding that social change takes time and commitment.

In our experience, development outcomes take time and the trajectory of change is not always predictable. A long-term approach is compatible with a feminist lens that examines

power dynamics and seeks to shift the balance in favour of those who are marginalized. Transforming power relations requires time and commitment. It took our counterparts in the Philippines more than 14 years of pointed advocacy to pass the Reproductive Health Law. Various counterparts who have been part of the Burma pro-democracy movement for decades could not have predicted the 2015 national elections in their country resulting in Aung San Suu Kyi as the de facto leader.

Furthermore, a time-frame of 10+ years would take a program approach, which is more sustainable and effective than a project approach; a program approach is more capable of addressing underlying issues of underdevelopment and root causes. A long-term program approach allows Canadian CSOs to better establish relationships, including with southern CSOs who are often the most experienced in their thematic area. In Inter Pares’ experience, stronger relationships with Southern CSOs, has meant a better ability to manage risk and more effective interventions due to deeper knowledge of the context.

Canada’s international assistance should be responsive and flexible

The importance of responsiveness in Canadian assistance cannot be overstated – Canada’s responsive program was seen as amongst the most innovative in the world. Like other Canadian CSOs, the relationship between Inter Pares and its southern CSO counterparts is a key component of our development effectiveness. Long-term engagement with partners enables sustainability, the building of expertise, trust

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and consequently decreases risk. This leads to better development programming.

Responsiveness can nurture Northern and Southern CSO relationships. It allows Canadian CSOs to focus on areas appropriate to their expertise, and ultimately deepens Canadian contributions to development outcomes in a variety of thematic and geographic areas. Funding diverse, responsive programs is an investment in future geographic and sectoral strategies.

Responsive programming also respects local ownership of development, a central tenet of the aid effectiveness agenda¹. It can cultivate and strengthen nascent social justice movements and actors working at the grassroots in the South. These movements are critical to keeping their own governments accountable – a precondition for lasting change in a variety of areas and an important governance and democracy outcome in its own right.

One of Inter Pares' main methodologies is to establish relationships with Southern CSOs and support their social justice actions in a diverse range of areas. A key lesson learned is that it leads to sustainable development outcomes. This occurs through strengthened southern institutions; a greater level of expertise through programming in areas where we and our counterparts have knowledge and experience; a reduced level of risk and greater accountability through the establishment of trust and understanding of where our counterparts weaknesses lie; and a diverse range of geographic and sectoral programming, allowing Inter Pares to scale up programs when the opportunity or need arises. All of our geographic desk-funded programs have emerged from an original investment in valuing responsive programming (often funded through Partnership Branch in one of its earlier incarnations as a place where the government of Canada nurtured Canadian CSO partnerships and programs).

Responsive program is necessarily flexible, and flexible funding arrangements have a number of benefits. They allow those directly implementing the programs to address changing circumstances and mitigate risk. They allow programs to take advantage of unexpected but legitimate and sometimes significant results. Flexibility in timeframe is equally important.

Canada's funding for international development should be predictable; serious changes are required in the Calls for Proposals mechanism

At the moment and for the past few years, Global Affairs Canada funding of partnerships with civil society has been very unpredictable. There is no indication of when there will be future calls for proposals and no timeline for a response when unsolicited proposals are submitted. Even when successful, the timeline from proposal approval to signing a contribution agreement can be uncertain and often very long.

As an example to illustrate this point, Inter Pares was successful in the latest MNCH Call for Proposals – we submitted our application January 2015, were told our proposal was successful in June 2015, and signed a contribution agreement at the end of March 2016. A five-year program now has to be completed (with the same number and quality of results) in four years, the significant exchange rate fluctuations in that time have not been to our advantage and for the communities in which we work, the uncertainty in program initiation has been logistically difficult and resulted in some lack of trust with respect to Government of Canada funding.

Part of the difficulty has been the Calls for Proposals mechanism itself. Not only does it foster competition and compromise a culture of learning and collaboration amongst Canadian CSOs, but the flood of proposals at one particular moment, given there is no indication

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when the next such opportunity will arise, has resulted in a situation where even hard-working Global Affairs Canada staff cannot process proposals and the subsequent follow-up in a timely fashion. We have heard this feedback directly from GAC employees and have experienced the implications organizationally.

Furthermore, the initial investment of time in crafting a response to the Calls for Proposals mechanism is extremely labour-intensive, with no guarantee of a successful outcome. The Calls for Proposals mechanism should be seriously revised based on feedback from the international development sector. It should also not be relied on as the main vehicle to solicit Canadian CSO programming ideas. In many Calls for Proposals, the indicators and results are pre-established by Global Affairs. This may have a place in development programming when very specific results are sought, but overall, it stifles creativity and innovation.

Canada's International Assistance Should be Evidence-based and Accountable

Effective development programming is built on a foundation of evidence that includes research and experience. To this end, Inter Pares welcomed the Prime Minister's assertion in the mandate letter to Minister Bibeau that MNCH programming was to be "driven by evidence and outcomes, not ideology"² and Inter Pares welcomes Canada's impending increase in support for sexual and reproductive health and rights. It should be noted that an IDRC-funded study found Inter Pares' long-standing feminist approach to be highly effective.³ In the sector, there are a number of leading feminist organizations that have a proven track record in feminist programming. We would urge the government to consider the history of programming as an important piece of evidence in allocating support.

There are many aspects to accountability. Accountability for results and sustaining results often depends on the nature of the

programming. However, it is critical to consider that political accountability for systemic changes in Southern government policy and practice require strong southern CSO involvement. Accountability for programming is based on a Results-Based Management (RBM) framework. RBM has several weaknesses including an emphasis on quantitative indicators. Though data collection is a critical part of evidence-gathering, it should be meaningful without placing an undue burden on those directly implementing the program. The cost of data-collection should be recognized, compensated and kept modest. A mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection will give a more holistic picture of development results. RBM is not conducive to tracking social change which rarely follows a linear trajectory nor is it compatible with a feminist approach which emphasizes process as much as it does results. Evaluations should be done on a routine, predictable and planned basis; they should be paid for by Global Affairs as part of the cost of project monitoring and evaluation particularly with long-term funding.

Transparency is a core part of the Canadian government's accountability to its citizens and partners. More efforts could be made in this regard. For example, no public documents have been released related to the Civil Society Partnership Policy, nor have there been public releases of the Gender Equality Action Plan annual reports except when asked through a formal Access to Information Request. The latter is a learning document that other actors beyond the department could learn from or contribute to.

Preserve and Implement the Civil Society Partnership Policy (CSPP)

Inter Pares, along with many other Canadian civil society organizations including the leading voice in the sector, CCIC, invested heavily in the consultations around the CSPP. We were pleased with the end product and strongly urge

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the Government of Canada to lay out next steps and implement the policy in its entirety.

Global Affairs Canada funding should be accessible to a diverse range of Canadian CSOs

Increasing the accessibility of Global Affairs Canada funding will enable a diverse range of Canadian CSOs to carry out programs and enhance Canada's partnership portfolio. There are a variety of ways to do this. For example, many organizations are concerned about the level of cost-share required to implement programs; it is proving to be a barrier to good programming with a particular segment of valued partners for Global Affairs, namely small and medium-sized organizations who are effective development actors.⁴ Furthermore, the up-front investment in submitting full proposals for consideration is labour-intensive and privileges larger organizations.

Canada should support public engagement initiatives as a critical part of international development

Public support for international development is critical to its sustainability. In the past, the Canadian Government provided support to its partners to undertake development education in Canada. Canadian CSOs are particularly well placed to undertake this work as they have the direct links with members of the public who have an active interest and concern for global development and who view themselves as global citizens. In order to maintain and broaden the engagement of Canadians, it is urgent that GAC reinstate its funding of development education, building on the concept of universality of the Agenda 2030.

Canada should support innovation in programming by providing long-term, stable and flexible funding

Innovation has become a popular term in current international development discourse. As with many other such terms it depends on

what is meant by it. For more than four decades, Inter Pares has supported many programs that we and GAC, through its evaluations of our programs, consider to have been very innovative.

An important aspect of innovation is the willingness and capacity to take risks and to explore new ways of doing things. In our experience this is often closely related to the issues of long-term, stable and flexible support – something we and others have been calling for. When assistance is projectized and tightly tied to a rigidly defined results and indicators the consequence is often a lack of innovation and a focus on simply complying with the activities set out at the start of the project. When assistance is committed for longer terms and where it is clear that there is flexibility in activities, the result is that Canadian NGOs and their Southern partners feel able to innovate.

Innovation in our experience is also the result of communication and collaboration among development actors. It is important to have a reciprocal relationship between funder and fundee that allows for flexibility and innovation. It also depends on Southern organizations having learned from past experience and developed the analytical capacity to reflect on it – what has worked and what has not?, under what conditions?, why has it been effective or not? – all of which, once again, is tied closely to the issue of long-term, stable and flexible funding.

¹ Accra Agenda for Action. 2008. OECD.

<https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/45827311.pdf>

² Prime Minister's Mandate Letter to Minister of La Francophonie and International Development.

<http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-international-development-and-la-francophonie-mandate-letter>

³ Does it Work? Feminist Analysis and Practice at Inter Pares <https://interpares.ca/resource/does-it-work-feminist-analysis-and-practice-inter-pares>

⁴ Brian Tomlinson. Small and Medium-Sized Canadian Civil Society Organizations as Development Actors. InterCouncil Network. April 2016.