

# **EFA: The Challenge for Canadian Civil Society**

## ***Discussion Paper for the Canadian GCE Forum, April 26, 2005***

### **1. Introduction**

In December 2004, six Canadian organizations came together to launch the Canadian GCE Alliance and form a steering committee. We set out three primary goals:

- To enhance Canadian commitment to the achievement of the universal right to education by raising public awareness, stimulating evidence-based dialogue, and demanding better funding and more effective approaches to this issue within our foreign policy agenda.
- To support forms of research and policy dialogue that can encourage a sustained role for democratic engagement in the governance of education in developing countries.
- To provide a forum for debate, information sharing and discussion among those Canadian civil society organizations which are active in efforts to achieve universal publicly-funded basic education in developing countries.

So far, the steering committee has been operating on the assumption that the formation of an Alliance can bring important new value to the work of Canadian member organizations committed to the universal right to education. On April 26<sup>th</sup> we want to put this assumption to the test.

How can coordination and cooperation among Canadian organizations foster new ways of working with Southern counterpart organizations and help us to work more effectively within Canada? What should the scope of our work be? We invite your active engagement with these questions.

This paper is intended to kick off a discussion on the future of the Canadian Global Campaign for Education (CGCE). It is accompanied by two additional background documents: an overview of Canadian aid to education and the CGCE concept note. Together they will form the backdrop for action oriented plenary panels and working group sessions on the afternoon of April 26.

### **2. Canada's Education for All (EFA) Performance**

Something of a revolution has occurred in Canada's commitment to the universal right to education over the past 5 years. After years of little activity, CIDA has quadrupled the amount it spends on basic education. For the first time, CIDA has a formal policy to guide its work in this field. Its efforts are increasingly concentrated in programs of sector-wide support and coordinated with those of other donors. Old patterns of self-interested educational aid – focused on higher educational relations or tying of Canadian aid to Canadian resources – have been replaced by direct budgetary support to educational systems. Equally important, Canada's leaders have shown a willingness to make education for all a leading issue in such international fora as the G8 meetings.

Canadian civil society actors have been highly supportive of these changes in the scope and intensity of Canada's commitment to education and to other Millennium Goals. But several challenges remain.

- A. Education for All in Canada's broader foreign policy framework. Canada's new International Policy Statement highlights education as one of five sectors of continued commitment for its programs of international development.<sup>1</sup> But our government has not committed to raising its international aid to the 0.7% international target – crucial to Canada's ability to bear its share of the international effort to achieve EFA. Nor has it indicated how it plans to integrate a commitment to EFA in other areas of its foreign policy. For example, how is commitment to EFA linked to programs for defense and international security and the proposed stability and reconstruction fund under Foreign Affairs? Why not link EFA to issues like the WTO and fair trade, debt relief, and plans to enhance multilateral governance? Canada needs an EFA framework that is not limited to the activities of CIDA.
- B. CIDA's EFA Policy Framework: CIDA's EFA policy framework is good – as far as it goes. But among the key issues left out: How will CIDA resources reach children in post-conflict or emergency situations? How does its work in basic education relate to other parts of educational systems (secondary education? higher education? Adult education?), or to such issues as child protection and child rights? Most importantly, CIDA's EFA policy framework does little to elaborate a role for Canadian civil society – especially in the context of its adoption of sector wide programmes.
- C. CIDA's Capacity. CIDA has had limited experience in working on issues of basic education and remains sharply understaffed. It has virtually no in-house research capacity in education and has never cultivated a knowledge-intensive approach that is capable of linking innovations and experiences on the ground to better policies (see the background paper by Mundy). More attention to building and sharing a knowledge-base is essential – not only because such knowledge adds value to our aid, but because such knowledge is essential to the role Canada can play in multilateral efforts to tackle global EFA challenges. If Canada wants to participate in an effective and fair mechanism for pooling resources at the global level – such as the Fast Track Initiative – we need to have strong independent analytical capacity, both inside government and within Canadian civil society.
- D. Efficacy of Sector-wide Approaches. Sector wide or program based approaches to educational aid offer many advantages – support for locally owned and developed policy plans, better donor coordination, support for recurrent costs of educational systems, untying of Canadian aid. But sectoral programmes can also be problematic. They concentrate resources in the hands of governments and often leave civil society actors out of the picture; they tend to produce standardized policy responses (rather than local innovation); and they give donors a great deal of power over developing country decisions. Canada needs a policy framework that offsets some of these problems.

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<sup>1</sup> The IPS promised to “Focus education assistance on improving community access to schools, increasing the quality of teaching and supporting life skills training” (p. 22).

### 3. The Challenge to Canadian Civil Society

Canadian organizations that have traditionally worked in the area of education for development face at least three major challenges.

- A. Our Southern counterparts and partners increasingly want us to support their efforts and activities – rather than being the direct providers of services. They want to be more effective policy actors in their own right, capable of ensuring that their own governments guarantee the right to education. Though we will continue to have a legitimate role to play in making sure that basic education is made widely available in post-conflict and emergency situations, our role in other aspects of education for development is changing.
- B. CIDA's priorities and modes of operation have changed. CIDA increasingly demands that we find new ways of working alongside its sector-wide programs and its prioritized areas of activity. In the area of basic education, the activities of many Canadian organizations supported through CIDA's Partnership and Bilateral Branch Programs have actually declined over the last decade.<sup>2</sup> Policy and research capacity in education – so important in the new sectoral programs is rather weak. For a variety of reasons there has been too little synergy and learning across the basic education oriented programs of Canadian organizations.
- C. Globally, two new ethics have become dominant in development circles. The first is a commitment to rights based approaches – activities that enhance the capacity of citizens to demand their basic rights, and that link the abuse of fundamental human rights in both rich and developing countries. The second is a commitment to stronger coordination and advocacy among civil society and NGO actors. Here the goal is to hold Northern governments accountable for the integrated effects of their policies (in areas such as trade, defense, international development) on the rights of people in the developing world. Both of these ethics require new ways of working in basic education for Canadian organizations. They demand better coordination of activities, new kinds of activities with a stronger policy and advocacy foundation.

We need to take the time to discuss these challenges and to explore new ways of working better – with our Southern counterparts, with CIDA and amongst ourselves. Currently, however, CIDA is doing too little to support such new initiatives. It is hesitant about supporting advocacy activities, policy and research efforts, national or transnational coordination and networks among NGOs, research organizations and other actors. Yet these are at the heart of our evolving roles. Only a common push can move CIDA thinking forward on these issues.

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<sup>2</sup> CCIC has found a 6% decrease in general NGO funding from CIDA's Partnership Branch and a 25% drop from Bilateral Branches between 1999/2000 and 2002/2003. Research by Mundy and Bhanji found a drop in basic education programmes funded through Partnership Branch from 7.4% in 1992/3 to below 2% in 2003.

#### **4. Innovative Experiences – Beyond Canada**

In this section, I want to highlight two “innovations” in the wider world that may have something to contribute to our thinking about how to move forward. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list – I encourage you to share your experiences with other interesting innovations.

##### ***The Global Campaign for Education and its “REAL WORLD” Strategy***

The activities of the Global Campaign for Education can provide both a model and an anchor for the development of the Canadian coalition. Established in October 1999 by four international organizations (ActionAid, Education International, Oxfam International, and the Global March Against Child Labour) the GCE’s official membership today is 24 international and regional organizations and 27 national coalitions.

The GCE works in two main ways. First, it uses a variety of advocacy and campaign techniques to hold Northern and Southern governments and multilateral agencies accountable for delivering on all six EFA goals set out in Dakar. For example, it sponsors the Global EFA action week (with more than 2 million participants in 2004); represents civil society on various EFA high level boards and taskforces, and publishes high profile reports critical of such issues as school fees, the Fast Track Initiative and IMF public spending constraints.

The GCE also supports national coalitions of NGO’s, teachers unions, citizens, church and other groups in the South to develop the capacity for evidence based policy analysis and advocacy, through its REAL WORLD STRATEGY.<sup>3</sup> The goal is to support effective participation of civil society in the making and implementation of national educational policies. Among the exciting innovations have been the development of national Education Watch monitoring reports and experiments in civil society budget tracking of educational commitments.

##### ***The Commonwealth Education Fund***

The Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) is worth highlighting because it is one of the first formal mechanisms established by a G8 government to support new roles for civil society actors in the achievement of education for all. The CEF was launched in March 2002 as a collaboration between the UK Government, leading UK development agencies -- ActionAid, Oxfam and Save the Children-- and the private sector.

What makes the CEF different is that it is aimed not at supplying immediate educational needs (such as new schools and textbooks) but at creating a social and political environment in which education becomes the number one national priority for developing nations. The CEF builds national coalitions to promote education at the national level. Its three key objectives are:

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<sup>3</sup> The Real World Strategy is funded by the Dutch and UK governments.

- I. Strengthening civil society participation in the design and implementation of national and local education plans and frameworks.
- II. Enabling local communities to monitor government spending on education both at national and local levels.
- III. Supporting innovative ways for civil society to ensure that all children, especially girls and the most vulnerable and disadvantaged (including street children, former child soldiers and nomadic children) access quality education.

The CEF is an example of one way CIDA might begin to support new roles for Canadian civil society actors and help expand the role of Southern civil society actors at the education policy table.

## **5. Forward to our Discussion**

Members of the initial steering committee of the Canadian Global Campaign for Education believe that Canadian civil society organizations have an important role to play in supporting Southern citizen's demands for a right to education. We are convinced that we can work together to ensure that Canadian aid to education is *more effective*, and that Canada contributes its share of the EFA effort.

Beyond these broad goals, however, our agenda remains wide open. My personal hope is that we can indeed find innovative ways of coordinating our support for southern citizens, and new way of working with their organizations to support a stronger culture of participation in educational policy making in developing countries – right down to the level of teachers, learners and schools and communities.

A final note. On Tuesday afternoon you will be asked to join a working group in one of four main issue areas.

- A. A new framework for working with CIDA;
- B. Key priorities for EFA advocacy, research and for development education about EFA within Canada;
- C. Innovations in North-South Civil Society Partnerships; and
- D. Concrete steps for building information sharing and coordination among Canadian NGOs, citizens groups, unions, churches, research organizations etc.

Each of the organizations represented at this forum has a wealth of experience and expertise related to the challenges posed above and to these specific themes. I urge you to bring that experience forward in these 4 Working Groups, and also through the two general plenary sessions planned for the afternoon of April 26.