



Between Policy and Practice:  
Navigating CIDA's Democracy Agenda

by Geoffrey Cameron

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## INTRODUCTION

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Democracy occupies an uncertain position in Canadian public discourse; we want more of it at home, but we are hesitant to openly promote democratization overseas. Election campaigns are peppered with promises to revitalize Canadian democratic institutions, struggles to legalize same-sex marriage are waged in the name of universal human rights, and government scandal is decried for a lack of accountability and transparency. But while the United States brazenly asserts Wilsonian ‘transformational democracy’ as its foreign policy<sup>2</sup>, Canadians are wary of being cast in the same imperialist mould as our neighbour (Welsh, 2004). Consequently, Canada’s democracy agenda has emerged tentatively in the government’s foreign policy and has not taken shape as a well-defined policy with clear objectives.

The debate over the position of democracy promotion in Canadian foreign policy is at least twenty years old, and it has yielded somewhat of a compromise. Canada does not aggressively employ ‘democracy’ terminology in foreign policy statements, but the government promotes ‘democratic development’ through the activities of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). For example, the term ‘democratization’ was not mentioned once in the recent International Policy Review, but an agenda of ‘Human Rights, Democratic Development, and Good Governance’ (HRDDGG) has been identified as a priority area for CIDA. Canada’s democracy agenda is subsumed beneath a much broader development scheme, and it constitutes an approach to political development that is broad, flexible, and vague. However, CIDA’s HRDDGG policy defines the Canadian approach to international democratic development as distinct from the policies of other Northern states, many of which subscribe to theoretical models that presuppose the movement of states from one ‘transitional’ phase of government to the next, culminating in liberal democracy.<sup>3</sup>

The peculiar character of Canada’s democracy agenda as distinct from that of other Northern states, yet undefined, opens intriguing questions about the emergence of the HRDDGG policy and its political and developmental intentions.<sup>4</sup> The HRDDGG policy is the product of a broad change in thinking about ‘development’ and well-defined shifts in official discourse about Canadian aid delivery. The Canadian democracy agenda has emerged as a result of a *pragmatic* consensus about the effective

*Canada’s democracy agenda is subsumed beneath a much broader development scheme, and it constitutes an approach to political development that is broad, flexible, and vague.*

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Transformational diplomacy’ is the phrase introduced by Condeleeza Rice as a euphemism for the American exercise of benevolent imperialism in the interests of promoting democracy and expanding free markets. Since she first introduced the phrase, the Department of State now confidently pronounces a foreign policy of ‘transformational democracy’ with respect to its covert activities in Iran and other troublesome countries.

<sup>3</sup> See Carothers, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s recent remark at a meeting with George W. Bush evokes similar questions: “Canada and the United States share very important common values – values like freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We may disagree how we get there, but that’s the objective that we share” (Delacourt, 2006, A7).

delivery of development assistance, which distinguishes it from policies forged from an *ideological* consensus that equates (liberal) democratization with modernization.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the HRDDGG policy does not espouse or reflect a coherent theoretical approach to democracy or democratization; this is borne out in its vague terminology and CIDA's analytical weakness in this sector. Project design and implementation challenges suggest that the underlying objectives of the HRDDGG policy could be better served if situated within a theoretical paradigm of democracy scholarship.

In this paper I will first describe the gradual and pragmatic formulation of Canada's democracy agenda through an historical examination of development theory and Canadian foreign policy. This examination is primarily textual and discursive, relying upon policy documents (rather than hard data) as key signals of changes in government direction.<sup>6</sup> Second, I will argue that the present phase of Canada's democracy agenda is defined by policy that is limited and limiting because its objectives are not situated with reference to theoretical literature in democracy scholarship. After introducing a theory of deliberative democracy I will suggest it offers a constructive approach to CIDA programming by helping to define the parameters of politics, identify relevant questions, and offer innovative solutions to practical problems.

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<sup>5</sup>Carothers, 2002. I should note that I do not intend to conduct a comparative analysis. This is simply an observation to frame the arguments of this paper.

<sup>6</sup>I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that this point be made clear. While there are obvious limitations to the approach taken in this paper, I didn't consider them an insurmountable obstacle to drawing general conclusions about the evolution of Canadian foreign policy on development.

## DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE: FROM DECOLONIZATION TO NEW WORLD ORDER

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The genesis of development assistance is connected with the process of decolonization. As the optimistic visions of a global Marshall Plan continue to fade, however, aid is less frequently thought of in terms of redistribution, technology transfer, and phases of growth. It is now more common to hear of aid as a tool to ensure (human) security, promote a democratic peace, and target the ‘root causes’ of conflict. Some even go so far as to claim that development assistance is “the precursor to global government” (Freedman, 2000, p.7). In short, development assistance – generally speaking – is increasingly oriented towards politics.

Although aid is always, to some extent, political, what aid is meant to *do* has not always been to promote a normative agenda of socio-political change (as it is today). The emergence of development theory in the wake of decolonization in the South and the triumph of welfare economics in the North imbued it with a sense of optimism about economic growth in the former colonies. The first development economists, notes Leys, “shared the broadly social-democratic ethos of the period, including its commitment to planning and its conviction that economic problems *would yield to the actions of benevolent states* endowed with sufficient supplies of capital and good economic analysis” (1996, p.8; emphasis mine). Politics was not necessarily ignored in these early years; it was simply assumed that governments would naturally act in the national interest and promote developmental economic policies. This trend in mainstream development thinking prevailed for about thirty years, until a sea change swept across the development assistance policy community. In the 1990s, the political dimension moved from the periphery of development thinking towards the centre, and a new consensus proclaimed “that the legitimacy, effectiveness and efficacy of political and administrative institutions were essential for the success of development policies and programs” (Morrison and Islam, 1996, p.5). Naturally, the promotion of democracy and human rights emerged as key elements of this normative consensus (Sundstrom, 2005). The ‘political turn’ in development policy and thinking was the product of converging forces: the failure of classical development theory, the end of the Cold War, and (in Canada) domestic pressure to incorporate democracy and human rights into foreign policy.

By the late 1980s, many confidently pronounced the death of development economics and declared a ‘development impasse’. The verdict was in on more than two decades of resource transfers from the North to the South: critics on both the left and the right considered development a failure and indicted the political blindness of development assistance. Radical post-structural critiques of development were gaining ground in the late 1980s, and many echoed Ferguson’s argument that the development apparatus “is an ‘anti-politics machine,’ depoliticizing everything it touches, everywhere whisking the political realities out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation of expanding state power” (1994, p.xv). A less totalizing critique was launched by prominent Canadian activists, who argued that aid was lining the pockets of Southern elites and strengthening autocratic and oppressive states (Morrison, 1998, p.20). Critics from the left criticized development theory for its delusional technicism, arguing that the failure to include politics in the calculus of aid disbursement and project implementation would help to reinforce patterns of domination in recipient countries.

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The neo-liberal critique, however, proved more influential in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The argument from the right, although quite different from that of the left, also targeted the variable of political practice in development policy and programming. Neo-liberals argued that the failure of development was a Southern failure in government; public sectors were too large, economic controls too strong, and bureaucracy too inefficient. In other words, “governments were part of the problem, not part of the solution; they were inefficient and often corrupt and hence parasitic, not stimulators of growth” (Leys, 1996, p.18). Insofar as development theory relied upon a ‘developmental state’, the body of theory was considered moribund. Neo-liberals argued that aid should go to governments that downsize, implement the ‘right’ macroeconomic policies, and open their markets to the global economy. Because the best political complement to a market economy is a liberal democracy, many on the right promoted these development agendas side-by-side (Abrahamsen, 2000).

At the same time that development economics was eulogized by both the left and right, the Cold War ended. With the official end to a viable alternative to capitalism, the confidence in liberal values waxed and a ‘wave’ of democratization swept across Latin America and Africa. The ensuing Northern triumphalism drew critical attention to the inconsistency between the liberal-democratic ethos among donor countries and the lock-step autocracy that persisted among many recipient states: “Just as it became more difficult for capricious dictatorial regimes to hide behind expressions of ideological solidarity with their Cold War benefactors, so too did it become more difficult for donor countries to defend such regimes” (Morrison and Islam, 1996, p.8). As a result, the end of the Cold War was accompanied by the rise of an official normative consensus among Northern donors, and most Southern governments. Although ‘democracy’ was a “controversial term” during the Cold War era, “virtually all national governments are now reluctant to call themselves opponents of democracy, even if they do not fulfill the democratic principle of rule by the people in practice” (Sundstrom, 2005, p.11).

The democracy consensus, no doubt supported by experience with development ‘failures’, posited that the political objectives of development should be given a priority of their own in development policy. This led to a radical re-thinking of what lay at the foundation of development:

The *assumption* is that the objectives of development cannot be determined in any universal manner but have to be decided by the population and the citizens concerned. The *hypothesis* is that democratic procedures and protection of human rights are important preconditions for setting development objectives, because they ensure broad participation and legitimacy. (Martinussen, 2003, p.196; emphasis his)

Democracy and human rights were seen to be not simply a Northern preference among a menu of political options, but a shared normative foundation for prosperity and security (Sen, 1997). This argument carried substantial moral weight, and was taken up by traditional defenders of Southern interests in international relations; the United Nations reinvigorated a rights agenda and developed a human development index

based on Amartya Sen's human capabilities approach, which emphasized the role of political freedom in social and economic development.<sup>7</sup> Still, the way forward was not pre-determined. A former Canadian Ambassador notes that "a major challenge facing the post-Cold War world is searching for relevant, new paradigms of development which can integrate economic practice and popular demands with respect for human rights and adherence to democratic forms of government" (Conley and Livermore, 1996, p.20). Although democracy has been widely embraced as a political ideal, the meaning of the concept remains contested. By its nature democracy is not present in a consistent set of institutional configurations, and democratic practice has shown itself to be capable of producing an alarming diversity of forms, both liberal and illiberal (Zakaria, 2003). While the meaning of democracy may be contested, however, its desirability for development is rarely questioned.

The 1980s also witnessed a movement among Canadian parliamentarians to strengthen the role of democracy and human rights in Canada's international development agenda. In fact, beginning in the late 1970s opposition MPs began to criticize the Canadian government for its inattention to human rights and democracy as key considerations in foreign policy and the disbursement of development assistance (Thede, 2005). In 1986, a Special Joint Committee on Canada's International Relations<sup>8</sup> published an influential report titled *Independence and Internationalism*, which formulated rights and democracy in developmental terms. This report, according to one notable commentator, "was instrumental in expanding the approach to human rights beyond familiar notions of protection of individual rights towards more developmental conceptions" (Schmitz, 2004, p.13). The report advanced a vision of development in which the protection of political, civil, and cultural rights as a set of normative objectives is commensurate with long-term economic growth (Parliament, 1986). It also presented a detailed agenda to align the Canadian government with this vision, including the following suggestions:

Technical assistance for developing electoral institutions and procedures; support for strengthening workers' organizations; encouragement of partnership between human rights research and advisory bodies in Canada and their counterparts abroad; and help in strengthening judicial institutions, the rule of law, local government, and the media. (Morrison, 1998, p.274)

At the time the report was published CIDA was perceived to be 'lukewarm' on human rights. Rather than integrating rights and democracy directly into Canada's development assistance policy, the committee recommended the creation of a new Crown Corporation operating at arm's-length from the government (Morrison, 1998, p.274). This recommendation would be taken up in another Parliamentary Report in 1988, which led to the creation of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Sen's *Development as Freedom*.

<sup>8</sup> This Special Joint Committee is commonly referred to as the Hockin-Simard committee.

<sup>9</sup> The ICHRDD is now referred to as *Rights and Democracy*.

Although the discourse on rights, democracy, and development in Canada would remain at the margins of foreign policy until the mid-1990s, these early Parliamentary reports paved the way for the creation of a unique Canadian democracy agenda. Together with the political turn in development theory, they provided the impetus for CIDA to progressively embrace a democratic development agenda.

The previous section hastily traced the history of the political turn in development thinking and the emergence of the Canadian foreign policy agenda of democracy and human rights. Although vigorously advocated by several Parliamentarians and NGOs, the explicit introduction of democracy and human rights into Canadian foreign policy was not immediately embraced by CIDA. In fact, the creation of the ICHRDD as an arms-length Crown Corporation based in Montreal can be read as a gesture of appeasement towards those who preferred Canada to pursue a more active agenda of international democracy promotion; as noted above, CIDA was not initially keen on human rights as a development objective. But in the late 1980s, when the development policy community began to embrace the use of aid to promote political change, CIDA warmed up to the idea. Indeed, as Morrison notes, “like other donors, but with more alacrity than most, CIDA has associated itself with new fashions and policy thrusts” (1998, p.17). CIDA has embraced this particular policy thrust in two phases: I refer to the first as that of ‘disciplinary aid’, which extended from 1988 to 1995<sup>10</sup>; the second phase of ‘constructive aid’ officially began in 1995 and continues today (with little sign of ending soon). These dates correspond with the release of major CIDA policy documents under the Mulroney and Chrétien administrations.

### *Disciplinary Aid*

In 1988, the Mulroney government launched *Sharing Our Future*, the first review of official development assistance policy since 1975 and the product of several years of public consultations. The document marked a definitive shift in Canadian aid policy: “The review provided an unprecedented and wholesale reassessment of the Canadian foreign aid program, its management system, goals, priorities and instruments” (Rudner, 1991, p.10). *Sharing Our Future* notably augmented CIDA policy by embracing the increasingly popular practice among Northern donors of using aid to discipline the political practices of Southern governments. Two policy thrusts stand out: a new regime of conditionality on bilateral aid, and unprecedented support for structural adjustment. This early phase of ‘aid for political change’ is characterized by its disciplinary intentions and its focus on the politics of the *state*.

*Sharing Our Future* changed the eligibility framework for Canadian development assistance and concentrated decision-making in Cabinet. The criteria used by Cabinet focused heavily on the internal political dynamics of Southern countries, which marked a notable shift from the previous practice of selectively withholding funds from gross violators of human rights. Keenleyside notes that prior to 1988, “action by Canada relating to human rights [was] largely punitive in nature and directed at ‘worst-case’ situations” (1988, p.205). The new criteria did not simply refer to ‘worst-case’ situations, but cast the eligibility net wider to include even slightly disagreeable

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<sup>10</sup> My use of the terms ‘discipline’ and ‘disciplinary’ in this paper denotes their conventional definitions. A Foucauldian reading of the Canadian government’s foreign policy under the Mulroney administration would not be unwarranted, but advancing such a critique is not my objective in this paper.

political behaviour. Indeed, four (\*) of the six criteria for determining eligibility for Canadian development assistance concerned the internal political characteristics of the recipient country:

1. Recipient country 'needs';
2. \*recipient country 'commitment' and capability to manage aid absorption effectively;
3. \*the 'quality' of recipient country economic and social policies, or its commitment to 'improve' these policies;
4. Canada's economic and political relations with that country;
5. \*the recipient country's human rights record, and;
6. \*the recipient country's 'commitment to involving its population in the development process'. (Rudner, 1991, p.16)

A country that did not satisfy all of these conditions, however, could reform its policies and regain eligibility. Rudner notes that eligibility criteria were conceived to provide both 'positive incentives' and 'penalties'<sup>11</sup>, with a Canadian commitment "that decisions on bilateral funding will respond to marked improvements" in the behaviour of recipient states (1991, p.15). To ensure that Canada would not be misunderstood about the intentions of its new eligibility framework, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney made a well-publicized declaration at a Commonwealth meeting in Harare: "We shall increasingly be channeling our development assistance to those countries which show respect for fundamental rights and freedoms" (qtd. in Morrison, 1998, p.322). Canadian aid policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s was distinguished by the emergence of "new and expanded forms of aid conditionality", based on a host of domestic political variables in recipient countries (Morrison, 1998, p.323). The integration of rights and democracy into the calculus of Canadian aid policy represented the fruits of more than a decade of lobbying by Canadian churches, solidarity groups, and a small number of opposition Parliamentarians for an assertive Canadian approach to the political affairs of development assistance recipients (Theede, 2005; Morrison, 1998).

*Sharing Our Future* not only altered the nature of aid conditionality, it brought Canada into line with the neo-liberal critique of development economics and the policy prescription of structural adjustment for 'underperforming' countries. Unexpectedly, *Sharing Our Future* included structural adjustment as one of CIDA's six priorities. "This inclusion came as a surprise to many CIDA staffers," notes Burdette, "as structural adjustment had not [previously] been a major policy thrust" (1994, p.217). The emerging consensus among the international financial institutions concerning aid effectiveness was that efficient public administration and a 'sound' macroeconomic

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<sup>11</sup> This approach to eligibility was presumably influenced by a 1987 report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade on aid policies and programs, which "proposed the adoption by CIDA of a four-tier country classification grid for Canadian aid recipients that would 'provide incentives for good behaviour as well as penalties for poor human rights performance'" (Keenleyside, 1994, p.188).

framework were pre-requisites for growth. Marcel Masse, the President of CIDA, articulated the logic of this consensus in 1990: “There is clearly a change in the way we have to look at development policy... The influence of the domestic economic policies swamps away the influence of all aid flows...and therefore conditionality on macroeconomic policies...is essential for us” (qtd. in Pratt, 1994, p.352). Canada’s adoption of structural adjustment as a priority area did not represent a decisive ideological shift in Ottawa, but it indicated a short-term concession to dominant trends in development policy.

Although the policy prescription was often cast in technical terms (‘strengthening administrative capacity’ and providing ‘technical assistance’) its implications were contentious and political; making the macroeconomic policies ‘right’ involved tactical foreign intervention into the public administration of recipient countries (Burdette, 1994, p.225; Rudner, 1991, p.22). The prioritization of structural adjustment allowed CIDA to use aid instrumentally, as a “policy lever...to encourage the recipient country to follow a certain set of principles” (Burdette, 1994, p.217). As structural adjustment began to demonstrate severe impacts on the poor, CIDA distanced itself from the agenda by re-casting this policy priority within the wider framework of ‘sustainable development’ (Rawkins, 1994). This framework embraced ‘five pillars’ of development: economic, environmental, political, social, and cultural ‘sustainability’. Under the umbrella of ‘sustainable development’, “CIDA would seek to influence the policy direction of recipient countries and help strengthen their core policy-based institutions; projects and operation work would become less central” (Rawkins, 1994, p.176). Although ‘sustainable development’ was defined broadly, it implied that CIDA would become more actively involved with the administration of the institutions and agencies that received Canadian development assistance.

Prior to 1988 Canada *had* used aid instrumentally in order to punish or reinforce political behaviour of recipient governments, but *Sharing Our Future* placed politics at the centre of the Canadian aid strategy. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, CIDA policy was characterized by new standards of eligibility and conditionality and a “central preoccupation” with structural adjustment (Burdette, 1994, p.211). The instrumentality of aid was *disciplinary*; development assistance was targeted to promote tactical administrative and political reforms in recipient countries. The object of this disciplinary strategy was the state: its administrative efficiency, protection of human rights, commitment to macroeconomic reforms, decentralization, strengthening electoral commissions and procedures, etc. (Morrison, 1998; Morrison and Islam, 1996).

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### *Constructive Aid*

In 1992, CIDA commissioned the publication of a book that argued for the embrace of a conception of democracy that extends beyond the state. *The Challenge of Democratic Development: Sustaining Democratization in Developing Societies* laid out a new field of intervention for Canadian aid:

External support for democratic institution building should attempt as far as possible to work with institutions that the poor have themselves created....It is this component of promoting political participation that distinguishes

democratic development projects from conventional aid projects (Schmitz and Gillies, 1992, p.96).

When newly elected Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien initiated a foreign policy review, these ideas about how to promote democratization and human rights without relying upon recipient state reform were taken seriously. This second phase in Canada's 'political turn' was (and still is) distinguished by a diminished focus on the recipient state and a greater emphasis on interventions into the public sphere. The shift in focus was highlighted by a more active embrace of human rights in Canadian foreign policy and the prioritization of 'human rights, democracy and good governance' in CIDA programming. In what I have called the phase of 'constructive aid', development assistance became targeted at projects and programmes that could 'build the essential components' of a democratic regime.

The Liberal foreign policy review culminated in the publication of *Canada in the World*, which identified a set of strategies to serve three core objectives: "the promotion of prosperity and employment; the protection of security within a stable global framework; and the projection internationally of Canadian values and culture" (Rudner, 1996, p.194). The document highlighted a concern with the 'punitive' application of human rights conditionality on aid under the Mulroney administration. In fact, an influential 1993 CIDA discussion paper claimed that "experience shows that ODA is best used to support programming in these areas [human rights], rather than using it as an on/off switch to try to change behaviour" (qtd. in Morrison, 1998, p.409). A constructive approach to defending human rights through CIDA programming was officialized with CIDA's adoption of a Policy on Human Rights, Democratization and Good Governance in November 1995. Rather than continue the use of punitive measures to discipline offending states, the Policy committed CIDA to a set of activities<sup>12</sup> that reflected a much broader definition of democratization, with a key role to be played by non-governmental actors in the public sphere. The document notes:

The Government's approach to rights, democracy, and governance...is broad. It emphasizes organizations in civil society as key vehicles for articulating popular concerns and channeling popular participation in decision and policy making....This approach includes a wide range of activities...and a wide range of partners. (CIDA, 1996, p.4)

The adoption of such a 'broad' policy opened up new areas for CIDA programming to foster political change in recipient countries.

*Canada in the World* identified six "program priorities" for Canadian policy, and as one of these priorities 'human rights, democracy, and good governance' was formally

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<sup>12</sup> The Policy commits CIDA to strengthen: "the role and capacity of civil society in developing countries in order to increase popular participation in decision-making; democratic institutions in order to develop and sustain responsible government; the competence of the public sector in order to promote the effective, honest and accountable exercise of power; the capacity of organizations that protect and promote human rights in order to enhance society's ability to address rights concerns; and the will of leaders to respect rights, rule democratically and govern effectively" (CIDA, 1996, p.4).

introduced into CIDA's mandate. Identifying human rights, democratic development, and good governance (HRDDGG)<sup>13</sup> as a program priority meant that certain CIDA projects would be proposed, implemented, and evaluated according to their results in these areas. As early as 1995-96 CIDA expenditures coded as HRDDGG accounted for 10.5% of CIDA's spending (Morrison, 1998, p.410). Disbursements were often targeted to fund activities that strengthened the public sphere in recipient countries, even if this area of programming was not always clearly defined. CIDA had adopted human rights and democratic development (HRDD) as an interim priority in 1994 and had conducted several pilot programmes and studies into how an HRDDGG agenda could be implemented. A CIDA evaluation of HRDD activities in 1994 found:

HRDD has grown as a programming area as a result of a permissive rather than prescriptive management approach....In many cases, this has resulted in programmes...with minimalist structures. This has opened the possibility of doing imaginative and timely work with local organizations doing important things and seeking to make a difference. (Rawkins and Bergeron, 1994, p.18)

One can tell from this assessment that CIDA did not have a clear sense of how to promote human rights and democracy without necessarily engaging with the state. The introduction of the Policy on Human Rights, Democratization and Good Governance in November 1995 spelled out the agenda more clearly, and built upon the "responsive" and "flexible" programming in partnership with local organizations that had proliferated in the absence of a clear policy (Rawkins and Bergeron, 1994, p.14).

The Policy identified types of CIDA interventions that had proven successful in the past, focusing heavily on extra-governmental political activity. Among the twenty interventions recommended: seven related to civil society/public sphere activities; five concerned strengthening legal systems; three referred to democratic state functioning (elections, legislature, etc.); two related to demilitarization; and two concerned Canada's work with other international donors (CIDA, 1995, pp.12-13). While it may simply have taken more detail to describe what exactly it meant to strengthen in the public sphere, the attention to this element of CIDA programming is notable – especially compared to the relative lack of focus on the state. In any case, the implications of the new HRDDGG agenda were far-reaching. The Policy committed CIDA to "undertake rights, democracy, and governance analysis and incorporate it into Agency strategic planning, policy development, program branch strategies, [and] regional/country development policy frameworks..." (CIDA, 1996, p.17). Over the following decade this would be easier said than done.

The latest phase in Canada's 'political turn' in disbursing development assistance has been in the direction of *constructive* activities to promote human rights, democracy and good governance. While the definitions of these terms are, of course, fluid, the incorporation of Canada's democracy agenda into broad CIDA programming strategies reflects an approach to democratic strengthening based upon the politics of the public sphere. CIDA policy in this area followed upon several years of experimental practice, and it has outlined an ambitious agenda for Canadian involvement in political development. As it will be seen in the next section, the lack of a strong theoretical

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<sup>13</sup> This acronym is often treated as short-hand for this CIDA agenda.

foundation for Canadian programming has left the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of HRDDGG projects poorly defined and ambiguous.

### *'How do we do this?': The Challenges of the HRDDGG Agenda*

CIDA officers working to design, implement, and evaluate HRDDGG projects routinely encounter challenges with promoting a vaguely defined set of policy objectives. Without a strategy to achieve specific goals and a clear sense of how a project should work, CIDA runs into the problem – in the words of one CIDA governance monitor – of “simply financing a series of activities with different organizations” (Johnson, 2006)<sup>14</sup>. The primary challenges of the HRDDGG agenda arise from weak definitions of ‘democracy’ and ‘governance’ and a stated expectation that CIDA programming will be simultaneously *normative and responsive*.

The terms ‘democracy’ and ‘governance’ can be employed to serve radically different (even contradictory) ideological agendas, from neo-liberalism to deep participation (Morrison and Islam, 1996; Abrahamsen, 2000). The flexibility of these terms only reinforces the importance of using them with clarity and strong meaning. Canada’s policy statements, however, have adopted vacuous – but unobjectionable – definitions for democracy and governance. CIDA has defined ‘governance’ rather innocuously as “the manner in which power is exercised by governments in the management of a country’s social and economic resources”. “Good” governance simply implies that the exercise of power is “effective, honest, equitable, transparent and accountable”. In defining ‘democratization’, CIDA resorts to an unhelpful tautology as its definition: “strengthening of popular participation in the exercise of power, building democratic institutions and practices, and deepening democratic values in society” (CIDA, 2000, p.1). The nebulous political objectives specified by these definitions provide very little analytic traction for the design and evaluation of CIDA projects within the HRDDGG sector.

*The primary challenges of the HRDDGG agenda arise from weak definitions of ‘democracy’ and ‘governance’ and a stated expectation that CIDA programming will be simultaneously normative and responsive.*

It is ironic that the embrace of politics by development agencies has resulted in the adoption of such *unpolitical* definitions of administrative and democratic practices. Indeed, a report commissioned by CIDA titled “Redefining the Concept of Governance” simply reviews the various definitions of governance used by international organizations and agencies, and in the process hardly mentions ‘democracy’ as an element of governance<sup>15</sup> (Johnson, 1997). The remarkable conclusion of the report is that “it would be helpful” to develop a definition of governance for CIDA, and “it would be useful” to have an “analytic framework to identify problems relating to governance” (Johnson, 1997, p.9). This paper, commissioned to define the concept of ‘governance’, concludes without establishing a helpful way to think through the definitional problem. In fact, it reiterates the problem that justified the authorship of the paper in the first place. Although it is tempting to ascribe this aversion to clarity to the bureaucratic operations of CIDA,<sup>16</sup> I propose that these banal definitions are a function of the ambiguous demands of the HRDDGG agenda itself.

<sup>14</sup> These comments were made by a CIDA Governance Monitor and Technical Advisor about CIDA’s national “flagship project” in the governance sector of a recipient country.

<sup>15</sup> A similar observation was made by Schmitz (2004).

<sup>16</sup> Schmitz, 2004, p.23.

CIDA's HRDDGG agenda reflects a remarkable ambivalence towards the project upon which Canada has embarked. This ambivalence is demonstrated by a policy agenda that requires projects to be simultaneously *responsive* and *normative*. Two sections of the 1995 Policy on HRDDGG illustrate the nature of this paradox:

The fundamental principles [of democracy] are universal, although each society and each region crafts its own approach, drawing on its culture, history, and political and economic legacy....

Canada does not seek to export particular Canadian institutions or practices; rather, the Agency seeks to work carefully and sensitively with those in developing countries who are best placed to achieve positive change. (CIDA, 1995, p.4)

These statements are both covertly normative, but they advocate an overtly responsive approach to programming. To uncover the normative edge of this policy, one might ask: what are the “fundamental principles” of democracy?; how are the “approaches” crafted by each society actually different from each other (or different from *undemocratic* practices, for that matter)?; and what do we consider to be “positive change”? Although both statements announce the responsiveness of CIDA programming, they each elide the meaning of the normative intentions embedded in the text. As a consequence, the HRDDGG agenda is set adrift to float somewhere between the shores of ‘what we want’ and ‘what they want’; the HRDDGG policy, one can conclude, requires normative design and responsive implementation of CIDA projects.<sup>17</sup> By pointing out this paradox, I do not intend to condemn CIDA's policy strategy, for as I will explain below I think it opens up innovative possibilities for CIDA programming. Noting the tensions that underlie CIDA's HRDDGG policy mandate helps us to understand the nature of the challenges encountered by CIDA staff in their efforts to implement programmes within this agenda.

The tension in the HRDDGG agenda between normativity and responsiveness is encountered by CIDA officers with both frustration and bewilderment. Frustration is expressed in terms of the lack of clean and easily deployable concepts associated with democracy and good governance (Johnson, 1997; Rawkins and Bergeron, 1994). The more prevalent problem, however, is the lack of analytical capacity in CIDA, which suggests a limited understanding among staff of what projects are expected to accomplish. Indeed, poor analytic capacity implies an inability to *perceive* and *describe* political change. In a 1994 review of HRDD programming, Rawkins and Bergeron highlighted the poor attention given to analysis for HRDD, and they remark that “CIDA staff are not clear on how to do it, knowing what to do, or when to do it” (Rawkins and Bergeron, 1994, p.24). Another evaluation conducted little more than a year later reported similar results. The second CIDA Policy Branch study noted that when implementing HRDD projects, a sound understanding of political context and awareness of local knowledge and expertise is essential to CIDA's success; however, “a principle weakness [among HRDD projects] tends to be analysis rather than

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<sup>17</sup> See pp.21-23 in Rawkins and Bergeron. The sections on “Programming and Design” and “Implementation” provide a helpful illustration of this tension. Also, see p.11 in Kapoor for a discussion of “iterative” implementation.

information collection” (Brown, 1995).<sup>18</sup> Analytic capacity means the ability to assess how a set of activities will contribute to (or not) a sort of social, political, economic or environmental change. Analysis, in short, requires a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge; technical knowledge does not suffice.

Implementing the HRDDGG agenda requires a much different set of analytic tools – usually involving a rich understanding of local context and intersubjective dynamics – than those required for other CIDA projects (Kapoor, 1997). One CIDA project officer in Haiti was up front about the difficulty with conceptualizing programmes that correspond with the HRDDGG agenda: “I’m scared of this sector [HRDDGG]: it’s the one where I feel least competent. Compared with building railways, this is difficult. Here we come up against something we can’t do anything about...” (Rawkins and Bergeron, 1994, p.8). This type of comment reflects a poor sense of what is to be done, which arises out of a lack of understanding about what kinds of activities will promote democracy and human rights. This is not an organizational problem; it is a knowledge problem. The development enterprise, as discussed above, was constructed in response to compelling theories of economic transformation, but the HRDDGG agenda faces the challenge of policy preceding widely recognized theories of democratic transformation. Consequently, relative to the strong connections between economists and development agencies, practitioners in the field are unfamiliar with academic research in the field of democratic development (Perlin, 2003, p.34).

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<sup>18</sup> Barbara Brown. 1995. *Democracy and Human Rights: What are we Learning? Summary of Lessons Learned to November 1995 in Human Rights and Democratic Development Programmes Supported by CIDA*. Hull, Quebec: CIDA.

## DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY: AN ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK FOR CIDA?

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The emergence of Canada's democracy policy agenda has occurred slowly over the past twenty years. Yet, the agenda *has* emerged, despite the reticence of many citizens and politicians to endorse Canada's promotion of a strongly normative policy of international political transformation (Schmitz, 2004). The increasingly prominent analyst of Canadian foreign policy, Jennifer Welsh, perceptively remarks:

Canadians, it has been said, take other countries as they find them, rather than seeking to transform them. Nor are we confident in our ability to rebuild other societies overnight. Perhaps this derives from our own very gradual experience of building Canada – a process that we see as ongoing. Part of the magic of being Canadian is the recognition that our country is still a work in progress. With this recognition comes a sense of humility, but also a sense of empowerment that an individual can make a difference to the shape of his or her society....Canadians believe in and are committed to the appreciation of difference. (2004, pp.199-200)

Despite its sentimentality, this passage helpfully sums up popular convictions<sup>19</sup> that have shaped the emergence of Canada's democracy agenda. These rather ambivalent convictions are reflected in CIDA's HRDDGG policy, which is ambitious in its objectives but limited and limiting in its poor theoretical foundations. The hand-wringing that prevails in CIDA is well-captured by the comments of a consultant hired by CIDA to develop indicators for its HRDD projects:

*No comprehensive or 'objective' theory/model of democracy or human rights exists against which to measure progress. All mainstream theories/models have tended to grow out of the unique historical circumstances of Western nation-building and are undergirded by corresponding western values and priorities.* (Kapoor, 1996, p.5; emphasis hers)

This remark, of course, is patently untrue. The philosophical foundations of democracy predate the emergence of the modern nation state and democratic principles cannot be considered the exclusive property of "western" nations, nor do they simply reflect "western values" (Sen, 1997). It is worth noting that despite the consultant's discomfort with democracy and human rights, she *did* manage to devise a long set of indicators for HRDD, most of which began with the phrase "increasing # of...". The disingenuous act of denying the existence of relevant theoretical foundations for democracy as a prelude to declaring *indicators* of democratic development highlights the gap between contemporary political thought and CIDA policy.<sup>20</sup> Although HRDDGG projects are defined by their strongly practical orientation, an analytical framework is still necessary to understand what CIDA is trying to do in the foggy field of democracy promotion. Canada's ideological reasons

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<sup>19</sup> Jean-Philippe Therien and Alain Noel have drawn comparable conclusions: that Canada's foreign aid policies are reflective of its domestic institutions and priorities (Therien and Noel, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> Kapoor's paper neglected to cite more than one peer-reviewed book in the field of political science.

for promoting democracy are touched upon by Welsh, but the theory of deliberative democracy may help to both clarify and direct HRDDGG projects. As a theory of democracy, it can define the parameters of politics, identify relevant questions, and offer innovative solutions to political problems.

Deliberative democracy is a theory of democracy in practice. It emerges from the political philosophy of Jurgen Habermas (among others), which privileges the role of discourse and communication in political life. Deliberative democracy posits that democratic engagement is constituted through negotiation about *reasons* (or justificatory statements) for adopting a policy, endorsing an action, or pursuing a goal – all of which are political activities. Habermas uses the term ‘communicative action’ to refer to this dynamic relationship between the clash of opinions and the activation of a shared political agenda based on collective deliberation. At a macro level democracy is reinforced by: strengthening the argumentative capacity of citizens and political actors; reinforcing the spaces of an autonomous public sphere; and institutionalizing “procedures and conditions of communication” through law and by forging linkages between groups and citizens (Habermas, 1996, p.27). Democracy is not an act of will-formation (often symbolized by casting a ballot), but an ongoing process of public reasoning that legitimates the use of political power (Cohen, 1996). Within a framework of deliberative democracy a political action derives its legitimacy from the existence of procedures to secure fair bargaining among a plurality of political actors. According to Torgerson, this implies that “democratization is...viewed in the sense of citizenry becoming actively engaged in discourses that enter in the very processes of governance” (Torgerson, 2003, p.115). A key supposition of deliberative democracy is that the process of debate and contestation in the public sphere has the effect of changing perceptions and values, providing the basis for effective collective action. As Benhabib remarks, “the deliberative theory of democracy is not a theory in search of practice; rather it is a theory that better claims to elucidate some aspects of the logic of existing democratic practices better than others” (1996, p.84). As a theory of democratic *practices*, the greatest strength of deliberative democracy is its potential to serve as an analytic framework for evaluating the mechanics of democracy promotion at a micro-level and at a broader social and institutional level.

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By focusing on communicative practices and associations – instead of exclusively emphasizing institutions and laws – deliberative democracy encourages analysis of democratic practices at many levels of political engagement; ‘politics’ is not conceptually isolated within the halls of government. The texture of democracy emerges from “a plurality of modes of association”, which may include political parties, citizens’ initiatives, social movements, voluntary associations, and consciousness-raising groups (Benhabib, 1996, p.74).<sup>21</sup> Understanding democracy as a ‘public conversation’ provides a wider analytic frame, and it also focuses attention on the microphysics of power and representation among associations and citizens. Furthermore, it draws attention to specific sites of “recurrent communicative interaction” where actors converge to generate and coordinate actions in response to a political problem (Dryzyk, 1990, p.43). These spaces for “discursive design”, in

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<sup>21</sup> The examples given were taken from Benhabib.

Dryzyk's terminology, often link up and interlock with government channels, but they represent "autonomous public spheres that remain as distinct from the economic system as from the administration" (Habermas, 1996, p.28). Such spaces can include large events such as the World Social Forum, the weekly planning meetings of an indigenous rights coalition, or even the project advisory committee meetings for a major development project. The point is that politics is a negotiated and many-sited affair; attempts to evaluate democratic development should direct attention to the rich spaces of political contestation.

Deliberative democracy is well suited to inform CIDA's programming under the HRDDGG agenda, particularly because it accommodates programming that is normative in design and responsive in implementation. Although the 'messiness' of the HRDDGG mandate is challenging for many CIDA officers, if the tension is managed effectively it can produce a creative dynamic to inspire innovative programming (Johnson, 2006). The normative edge of deliberative democracy is its design of political practice: institutions and procedures must secure fair bargaining practices between political participants; a plurality of modes of association should interact through "interlocking and overlapping networks"; and democratic legitimacy rests upon freely and equally exchanged viewpoints between actors and organizations (Habermas, 1996; Benhabib, 1996; Cunningham, 2002). Deliberative democracy does not simply require *participation* – although this is essential to legitimate political decisions – but a commitment of all agents to augment positions and preferences in response to reasoned arguments advanced by others. This requires the design of projects that establish clear channels and procedures of decision-making to engage citizens and organizations in deliberation on the core objectives of a given project (e.g. improving human rights, promoting occupational health and safety, developing alternative livelihoods, etc.). Thus, the normative element of democratic deliberation is connected to the responsive requirements of the HRDDGG policy. By decentring politics from the state the theory of deliberative democracy widens the parameters of debate and policy formation to include non-traditional actors: community-based organizations, religious institutions, new social movements, indigenous groups and individual citizens, in addition to unions, business and government. Incorporating a broader spectrum of political actors into CIDA programming will require from CIDA a strong field presence and well-informed sense of local context.

It was proposed above that the implementation and analysis of HRDDGG projects would benefit from a conceptual framework that draws from the theoretical tradition of deliberative democracy. While a comprehensive assessment of deliberative democracy has not been possible within the constraints of this paper, I have argued that it complements the HRDDGG policy for two reasons: it suits the criteria of informing programming that is normative in design and responsive in implementation, and it describes democratic practice in the public sphere.<sup>22</sup> As an exploratory exercise, I will outline two elements of a conceptual and analytical framework that can inform CIDA programming under the HRDDGG policy.

*Deliberative democracy does not simply require participation – although this is essential to legitimate political decisions – but a commitment of all agents to augment positions and preferences in response to reasoned arguments advanced by others.*

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<sup>22</sup> It has been argued above that strengthening the public sphere and promoting non-state democratic practices is characteristic of the *constructive* phase of CIDA's democracy agenda.

*Landscapes* (Baseline). Every CIDA project requires extensive baseline studies prior to project design and implementation. The purpose of baseline studies is to serve as a benchmark by which the outcomes generated through the project can be assessed, verified, and attributed to the development intervention. Baseline studies typically emphasize quantitative assessment, which can be used easily to calibrate project indicators and goals. The theory of deliberative democracy can inform the production of baseline studies by focusing attention on the social and political landscapes of the project. The project landscapes constitute the terrain upon which it operates; they are the patterned activities of engagement, domination, and struggle that characterize every society undergoing rapid change. The concept of *landscapes* presents the following questions (among others):

- ◆ What are the sites (if any) of recurrent deliberation over group or individual interests?
- ◆ Who are the strong actors, and who are the weak ones?
- ◆ Who is represented in deliberation, and who is excluded?
- ◆ How are concepts of rights and citizenship deployed in popular discourse?
- ◆ On what bases are popular authority legitimated?
- ◆ How, why, and under what conditions do individuals and groups engage with government agencies?

This preliminary and incomplete set of questions provides an insight into how a baseline study can be guided by a theory of deliberative democracy. An HRDDGG project should be built from a sophisticated understanding of the social and political texture of the locale in which it will be implemented. A baseline study that incorporates political *landscapes* into its analysis will not only help to calibrate project outcomes, but will also inform strategic and tactical choices about how to support discursive design.

*Linkages* (Design). The second phase of a CIDA project is design, which relies most explicitly on a normative conception of social change. Every CIDA-funded project is designed within a logical framework, a common planning matrix that serves as an intervention blueprint. At the heart of the logical framework is a development goal, which is “a statement of desired changes in society as a whole...to evolve into a desired end state at the end of the project” (Cummins, 1997, p.594). The development goal serves as the keystone to the arch of the intervention by articulating a vision of international development upon which the rest of the structure relies. HRDDGG projects – as it has been discussed above – are often built around a poorly defined goal.<sup>23</sup>

Theories of deliberative democracy emphasize the concept of *linkages* as elemental to democratic practice, and this concept can be incorporated into CIDA project design as an HRDDGG goal and strategy. *Linkages*, in this sense, are defined as “mediations, connections, and...the general process through which different levels of organization

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<sup>23</sup> A comment made by the CIDA Governance Monitor and Technical Advisor (M/TA) for Asia in his monitoring report is illuminating in this respect: “From the original Call for Proposals, through the launching of the mandate one year ago and the monitoring mission in May-June 2002, the role of the M/TA in monitoring the [project name deleted] has been systematically limited to its “governance aspects”, a term nevertheless left undefined” (Johnson, 2003).

are bound together over space and time” (Levine, 1992, p.320).<sup>24</sup> Depending on the project, this project goal could accommodate several different types of linkages: between individuals and community-based organizations; among community-based organizations; between individuals and government agencies; or between community-based organizations and government agencies. ‘Working’ these linkages is both a design strategy and an analytical strategy; it involves identifying how linkages structure power, authority, representation, and legitimacy through the deliberative sites they create (or do not create). A project goal that reflects this approach can be as simple as: ‘Promote systematic linkages between organizations, initiatives, and actors on the question of indigenous cultural rights.’<sup>25</sup> From this goal, a project strategy can be derived to focus on a set of activities and interventions that promote deliberative engagement on a key development issue. This project strategy will rely upon the baseline study of *landscapes* to develop its intervention tactics.

Landscapes and linkages are introduced as preliminary elements of a potentially rich conceptual and analytic framework, grounded in the theoretical tradition of deliberative democracy. By drawing the attention of CIDA programming to the multi-faceted and perpetually negotiated terrain of society and politics, deliberative democracy creates the conceptual space to think about and support democratic change overseas. The type of democratic change advocated clearly does not involve either revolution or regime change but, rather, changes that happen through the creation of new democratic practices and discursive design.

*By drawing the attention of CIDA programming to the multi-faceted and perpetually negotiated terrain of society and politics, deliberative democracy creates the conceptual space to think about and support democratic change overseas.*

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel H. Levine’s study of Base Christian Communities in Latin America is an excellent empirical analysis of emerging patterns of deliberative democracy (Levine, 1992).

<sup>25</sup> The above-mentioned Governance Monitor and Technical Advisor articulated a similar objective for his own monitoring missions, and I have adapted his idea for the purposes of this paper.

## CONCLUSION

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The current crisis in developmental thought may be even more difficult to surmount, since it requires, in addition to political theories of development, political theories for development. Developmental theory faces the challenge of democracy.

– Richard Sklar<sup>26</sup>

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it became common in development studies to refer to the ‘impasse in development’ (Schuurman, 1993). Sklar’s comment, quoted above, provides insight into the dominant thinking of the time: development theory faced the challenge of democracy. But democracy is messy; it is difficult to design, implement, measure, and evaluate. In short, it is an awkward fit for ‘development’. Furthermore, overtly promoting political change in recipient countries seemingly contradicts the prevailing wisdom that local/national ‘ownership’ is essential to the successful deployment of development programming (Helleiner, 2000). The challenge for development, in theory and in practice, has been how to advance a sound agenda of political change that reinforces (rather than undermines) a model of development assistance built around dialogical donor-beneficiary partnerships.

Thus far, Canada has elided this challenge. Although the current phase of *constructive* aid is a laudable improvement over the era of paternalistic *disciplinary* aid, CIDA’s vapid statements on democracy lack substance. I have argued that CIDA’s commitment to human rights, democratic development, and good governance is more declarative than substantial. Without providing strong theoretical moorings to its policy on HRDDGG, more than 10% of Canadian development assistance drifts somewhere between policy and practice. Pragmatic choices have delivered democracy onto Canada’s development agenda, but if CIDA is to substantiate the purpose, intention, and concrete results of its programming, a much closer examination of the relevance of democratic theory to CIDA’s practice is necessary. I have argued that the theory of deliberative democracy deserves the attention of policy-makers and practitioners, since it offers a very helpful way to think about democratic practice in a manner that is consistent with CIDA policy. While I have highlighted the salient elements of a theory of deliberative democracy, a much greater scholarly effort is necessary to draw out the implications of this theory through collaboration with development practitioners. Furthermore, development studies would be enriched by a comparative literature on the increasingly popular concept of ‘social capital’ and deliberative democracy as two competing (but in some respects compatible) approaches to systematic social and political analysis in development practice. In approaching these topics, however, it should be remembered that political practices are only one element of a strategy to combat global inequality. “The case for liberty and political rights,” Sen reminds us, “turns ultimately on their basic importance and on their instrumental role” (1997). The concept of development, to the extent that it welcomes more political definitions, should not neglect an emphasis on reducing inequality, expanding human capabilities, and promoting social justice.

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Schmitz and Gillies (1993).





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