

# NPSIA Workshop Series: Canadian Engagement in Contexts of Development, Fragility, Conflict

## Notes from Workshop One – Historical Context

### Current Context

- Multiple crises impact contexts of development, fragility and conflict – these include climate change, debt crises, increase in the number of conflicts, displacement, growing authoritarianism, etc.
- These crises are exacerbated by a challenging geopolitical context, an isolationist US, and weakened multilateral institutions.
- President Trump's actions – specifically USAID cuts and withdrawals from key multilateral institutions – will have a devastating impact on low-income contexts, exacerbating these crises.
- [Trade policies](#), the increased value of the US dollar, emerging [monetary policies](#), and efforts by Russia and China to engage in de-dollarization – will have an impact on LIC/conflict affected contexts. The nature of that impact is not yet totally clear, but will likely be significant.
- The rhetoric from President Trump, Secretary of State Rubio, and others that foreign aid is wasteful, supports terrorism, runs counter to national interests – will have a contagion effect on discourse in Canada and elsewhere.
- Many countries have signaled that their official development assistance budgets will remain flat/ or be cut.
- Canada has little fiscal headroom for development spending increases. We face pressures to ramp up defence spending and our economy will be under strain from Trump's tariff threats and efforts to lure investment to the United States. Given Canada's budget deficits and the need to support businesses making the transition to an economy less reliant on the US, Canadian ODA will not increase and could face cuts.
- While the Report needs to be realistic in its assessment of the global context and the possibilities for Canadian engagement, Canada cannot insulate itself from the world. The world will impact on Canada – we choose if/how to influence that impact.
  - *Include data/graphs within Report on Canadian ODA over time, where it goes (assessed contributions, multilateral, implementing partners), geographic distribution.*
  - *Could also include the budget figures Fen mentioned during the meeting – that illustrate the resource constraints we face.*

### Why We Engage

- We discussed the report laying out a rationale or vision for Canada's engagement in contexts of development, fragility, and conflict.

- The Report should clearly state that Canada's security, global standing, and ability to achieve our global goals improves when we engage in development and fragile/conflict affected contexts.
  - Political, social, and economic issues/crises in developing countries will impact on Canada's security – across multiple dimensions (physical, economic, social).
  - Our engagement with developing countries shapes our ability to achieve our diplomatic goals for Canada's security and economic prosperity. It also impacts on our ability to show leadership in multilateral organizations and on global initiatives (such as climate, refugees).
  - COVID provided clear evidence for global interdependence. Unfortunately, we seemed to learn the wrong lessons from COVID – namely that we can shut ourselves off from globalization/global engagement.
  - It is more efficient/effective to provide development assistance to support political, social, economic issues prior to them becoming crises.
  - For example, refugee settlement is funded from the development budget. If we reduce the conflicts/crises that cause refugee flows, we will free up ODA for other issues. If not, the costs of resettlement will reduce available ODA, and limit our ability to engage diplomatically.
- When advocating for this engagement, we need to be realistic – reflect the current geopolitical context, as well as Canadian capacity.
- Our engagement must:
  - Reflect our national interests and capacities;
  - Resonate with the Canadian public; and,
  - Align with the recipient country's vision/needs re. socio-economic development.
- The rationale for Canadian engagement in contexts of development, fragility, and conflict has varied across time, but has always been political and reflected geopolitics:
  - During the Cold War, one important rationale for Canadian development aid was to counter the appeal of the Soviet Union.
  - In 1990s, the post-cold war period, our aid focused on building liberal democratic institutions and strengthening human rights.
  - After 9/11, our focus became somewhat muddled. In some contexts, our aim was to ensure that countries did not become safe havens for international terrorist organisations. Our Official Development Assistance Accountability Act ([legislation –2005](#)) states the aim must be poverty alleviation, consistent with Canadian values.
- In terms of historical examples, we should reflect on:
  - What worked – what we did well;
  - What didn't work;
  - The reasons for those successes and failures – namely the geopolitical context, the approach taken, partners, etc.;

- How our approach adapted to cuts in funding in the past. In response to cuts, did the system become more innovative, and take more risks?
- China exercises influence in the global south through its development programs, belt and road initiative, its rhetorical commitments to equity and its support for the discourse of neocolonialism.
- Given the geopolitical context and the threat of China, it is unclear why Canada has not discussed the importance of development aid as a tool to counter China's influence.
  - *Through each of the upcoming workshop sessions – ask participants the ‘why’ question.*
  - *Do a scan of stated aims for engagement in development/fragility over time for reference.*
  - *Identify some historical successes and mis-steps – to summarise within ‘boxes’ in the report.*
  - *Assess if the successes identified are transferable to the present context – what can we learn from these successes and failures.*

### What our Development Assistance Accomplishes

- During the workshop, we discussed if we should focus less on why we engage, and more on what our engagement accomplishes. Tangible achievements resonate with Canadians.
- There is often an important interplay/interaction between the ‘why’ and the ‘what’ – the concrete initiatives that we undertake can influence how we frame ‘why’ Canada engages.
- Our engagement – in whatever form – must have results – it must move the needle.
- We discussed the appearance of a decline in Canadian concrete or tangible development achievements over time.
  - *The appearance of a decline in tangible results has occurred despite a growth in the size of the bureaucracy and the widespread adoption of results based frameworks.*

### Who Engages

- We will also need to reflect on the wide spectrum of actors engaged in development, and how these actors can be better utilized – to deepen and broaden our effectiveness.
- While we focus on Global Affairs Canada (GAC) (its objectives, its resources, its missions abroad) and GAC's implementing partners, many actors beyond GAC are active in development/fragility. This includes other government departments, other agencies (IDRC), civil society organisations, and academics.
- We could recommend a ‘hub approach’ – where we invest in and support convenors of networks. Points of connectivity between the government/decision makers and civil society, academics, and international networks.
  - *Constant reference to ‘networks’ – they can be critical for success, but they can also fizzle. What has worked in mobilizing networks/expertise? Need to reference the differences between open/closed networks. Refer to idea of receptors (social effects p. 24) in the [Commission Report](#).*

- *DND appears to have more small grants and funds than GAC – to support networks.*
- *Could look at a hub like CanWach.*

### How We Engage

- Reflect on Canada's comparative advantage in contexts of development, conflict and fragility. Avoid fads, and ensure humility in terms of what we can accomplish (i.e. spreading of Canadian values).
- Given the financial context (see below), how should we triage our engagement to be most effective? What are some high impact – lower cost approaches?
- How do we better leverage our multilateral engagement (example from IOM Mozambique – unlike other donors, Canada doesn't request the use of Canadian expertise).
- Could working more closely and forming alliances – with like-minded countries, multilateral agencies, not for profits – also make us more efficient and effective?
- Long-term and consistent engagement to support peace processes – in a way that reflects our expertise (Canada's engagement in refugee working group as part of Madrid/Oslo process in Israel/Palestine).
- Could we work to activate networks (see hub approach).
  - *The sector specific workshops will address the question of how we engage with focus on economic development, health/education, gender, humanitarian, and security.*
  - *In humanitarian contexts, how to enhance collaboration/coordination with broader humanitarian sector (support the cluster system, help boost the role of national voices).*
  - *Reflect on the role of donors like Canada providing sector wide support and coordination in development contexts.*
  - *Reflect on the importance of Canadian agencies – like GAC – supporting Canadian expertise within these hubs.*
  - *Reflect on provision of technical expertise within multilateral, regional processes, to national governments and technical agencies. Reflect on targeted support to national capacity. (Lise – CHAI – INS Mozambique).*

### Defining National Interest

- How do we define Canada's national interest vis a vis our engagement in development/fragility/conflict? We should reflect on this somewhere in the report.
  - 1Narrow view of self-interest: engage to reduce the threats abroad, so that we are not immediately impacted by terrorism, unregulated migration etc.
  - Moderate view: we have economic and political interests in ensuring that countries abroad experience human development, economic growth, and security interests.
  - Broad view of self-interest: human dignity, human rights, wellbeing has intrinsic value.

### What does Focus on Security Mean for Development Agenda

- Given the growing focus on national security in Canada – and elsewhere - how do we frame development as a security issue in a way that learns from the mis-steps of the post 9/11 context? (Failure to protect civilians in internationalized conflict).
- What do we gain from the security perspective, and what do we lose from the security perspective? How do we navigate that?
- What are opportunities for Canada's military to engage in development/humanitarian contexts? Does Canada's military need more exposure to different perspectives on international law, protection of civilians, etc.?
  - *Need a workshop that focuses on the relationship between Security and Development.*
  - *Could we suggest that 'defense spending' also include support to networks, research – on humanitarian contexts, etc.*

### Global Affairs Canada

- The report will need to recognize and acknowledge the capacity constraints at GAC.
- What is incentivized and rewarded at GAC in the face of those capacity limitations? Process or substance? For GAC to be more effective, certain actions/behaviours need to be incentivized.
- Historically, the Canadian international footprint was much smaller – but seemingly more effective.
- The culture of managerialism has taken over foreign and development policy, at GAC, IDRC, other government agencies. Culture of managerialism does not take risks.
- Senior management often lacks significant international experience. Traditional model of broad based experience at junior levels building expertise doesn't exist anymore.
- Within missions overseas, Canada seems more devoted to designing results based measurement frameworks, and gathering data to populate those frameworks, than traditional networking. Traditional reporting from missions has largely been abandoned – in part due to the existence of constant communications. What has been lost with that lack of reflection?
- We need to acknowledge the relationship between the political level and the civil service. The civil service cannot substitute for a lack of political vision.
- We need to acknowledge that we are not going to retrain the senior management at foreign affairs to meet the moment.
- We also need to acknowledge that more departments are leading files globally, often lacking effective coordination from GAC.
  - *Need to ensure that any criticism of GAC is constructive in nature.*
  - *Review GAC's transformation strategy.*
  - *Need to provide box with information on GAC – missions, employees, budget?*
    - *Engage with officials in the department.*

### **Potential Structure of the Report**

- Agreement that the Report needs to be 10 pages – max.
- The Report could follow the outline above:
  - Context – including existing ODA
  - Why we should engage
  - How we should engage
  - What we should do:
    - Specific sectors/activities
    - Multilateral support