NEXT GENERATION

COLLABORATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

a CCIC-CASID program

IMPROVING OUR COLLABORATIONS FOR BETTER DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

A SHORT SUMMARY OF A CCIC-CASID LITERATURE REVIEW

September 2017

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Acknowledgements

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CCIC is Canada's national coalition of civil society organizations (CSOs) working globally to achieve sustainable human development. Our members represent a broad range of CSOs working in international development and humanitarian assistance — from faith-based and secular groups to labour unions, cooperatives and professional associations. CCIC seeks to end global poverty and to promote social justice and human dignity for all.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the adoption of the UN's new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, all actors within the Canadian international cooperation sector will need to collaborate more effectively in order to produce timely, relevant research geared toward addressing pressing contemporary global challenges. This move is part of a broader trend towards designing more inclusive research approaches that meaningfully engage not only academic researchers, but also development professionals and beneficiaries of development research, policy, and practice.

To increase the frequency and success of collaborative partnerships between academics and practitioners involved in international cooperation, in January 2017 the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), in partnership with the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development (CASID), launched the "Next Generation: Collaboration for Development" program. It seeks to address various aspects of academic/practitioner collaborations in development and ways to strengthen these collaborations.

This literature review used a systematic approach to explore the existing literature on research collaborations between academics and civil society organizations (CSOs) working in international development and humanitarian assistance. The objectives of the review were to identify what has been written of development-related academic/practitioner collaboration in Canada and what key themes and trends emerge from this literature.

The review found that, overall, relatively **little research is available on academic/practitioner collaborations in Canada** specific to the field of international development and humanitarian assistance. The available literature, whether from Canadian or other countries, describes various forms of collaboration, and points to numerous barriers and strategies for success.

Collaboration between development practitioners and academics in Canada can take on **a variety of forms**, including collaborative research projects, volunteering by academics, and input on training programs by CSOs.

Successful collaborations seem to be most impeded by cultural and institutional barriers, such as unequal or unbalanced relationships, poor communication, and the inability to overcome divergent priorities, biases, and approaches. For example, development studies departments may prioritize critical or theoretical approaches that may be deemed unhelpful by practitioners working hard to make a tangible difference on the ground.

Documented strategies to improve success included research co-production – in which all parties were involved in the research from the conceptualization and design stage onward – and the development of gateways, access points and spaces for exchange to help improve the approachability and accessibility of academic institutions and experts.

Finally, this literature review highlights the need for more research on the Canadian context and underscores the value of researchers, organizations, and previous studies that have championed collaborative approaches – approaches that could help to pave the way for **improved outcomes in development research, policy and practice**.

INTRODUCTION

Canadian civil society organizations (CSOs) and academic communities have much to learn from one another – and much to gain from effective collaborations. Indeed, the effectiveness of international development and humanitarian assistance as a whole rests largely on the ability of various actors to actively exchange knowledge and share expertise. Yet despite the rich potential benefits of collaborating, there is a general sense that such collaborations happen much less frequently than they could, and that in many cases one or both parties are left less than satisfied by the encounter. Divergent priorities, approaches and organizational cultures can lead to misunderstandings on both sides and prevent long-term partnerships from emerging (Roper 2002, Cameron, Quadir, and Tiessen 2013). Partially as a result of such divisions, "Canadian development CSOs rely much more on the commercial consulting world rather than taking advantage of the rich, intellectual resource that Canada's academic community offers in terms of research, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and policy advice" (CCIC and CASID 2016). This tendency has resulted in research by CSOs that is limited in scope and reach, while academic research has become increasingly focused on theory and concepts, divorced from policy and other practical applications. As a result, development practice in Canada "is not as informed by evidence as it could be, and research […] is not as informed by practice as it should be," standing out among Britain, the US and other G7 countries in terms of its gap between research and practice (Tiessen and Smillie 2016, CCIC and

CASID 2016). Yet as funding to the international development and humanitarian assistance sectors (and particularly to their research-related projects) continues to shrink, there is growing incentive to integrate the work of academic scholars and development practitioners. Universities, for their part, are increasingly interested in integrated knowledge and learning approaches (Mougeot 2017a). Together, these trends have created a climate conducive to taking decisive steps to addressing a long-standing issue.

THE NEXT GENERATION PROGRAM

It is in this context that "Next Generation: Collaboration for Development" was launched, a three-year IDRC-funded program to be carried out by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) in partnership with the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development (CASID). The program has the broad goal of identifying and promoting new ways of working among practitioners, researchers, academics, students and policy developers in order to create conditions for enhanced and sustained collaboration between CSOs and academia working in global cooperation, including international development and humanitarian assistance. This literature review is one of the first phases in this program.

CCIC and CASID's Next Generation program is part of an overall shift in the development paradigm from development assistance to global cooperation. Global cooperation is an inclusive framework that includes "issues of trade, investment, migration, the environment, human rights and humanitarian action" (Tiessen and Smillie 2016) that aims to develop "synergies between sectors, as well as between individual practitioners and researchers" (CCIC and CASID 2016). It also advances the spirit of collaboration, partnership, and equality inherent to the notion of cooperation, shifting away from the paternalism that development assistance implies.

We are also entering a new stage of global cooperation that will be characterized by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Meeting these objectives will require greater collaboration than ever among development actors and professionals, both across and within countries. The goal of such cooperation is to foster systemic collaboration, developing synergies between sectors, as well as between individual practitioners and researchers. Our ability to tackle climate change, complex emergencies that produce more refugees and population movement, and rapid growth of inequality between rich and poor people within and between countries, will in turn be determined by our ability to generate new structures, competencies and approaches by and within developed and developing countries themselves.

In this context, Canada needs to create opportunities for evidence-based, forward-looking thinking and analysis, which will equip it for the challenges that lie ahead and to play a

leadership role on the global stage (Ibid, p.1) This literature review is one of the first phases of the Next Generation program that aims to contribute to a more nuanced and robust understanding of how collaboration between academic institutions and CSOs can contribute to improved development research, policy and practice.

OBJECTIVES

This literature review helps advance the broad goals of the Next Generation Program, more specifically as they relate to increasing the success and effectiveness of academic/ practitioner collaborations in Canada.

The literature review contributes to the program toward these goals:

1. **Uncovering what has been written** on the topic of practitioner/academic collaboration specific to international development and humanitarian assistance in Canada;
2. **Identifying themes and trends in research on collaboration**, such as positive and negative experiences, lessons learned, best practices, requirements for success, and barriers to increased collaboration;
3. **Examining literature from other contexts**, whether other countries or other sectors, that contains lessons and insights applicable to our targeted sector;

4. Commenting on **ways to create, manage, and measure value in partnerships**; and
5. **Analyzing gaps that exist in the literature** and suggesting areas of future research.

THE SOURCES

Overall, the results of this review point above to a shortage of knowledge and information on the specific topic of academic/practitioner collaboration in international development and humanitarian assistance in Canada. While a number of publications dealt with academic/practitioner collaborations in other jurisdictions, few dealt specifically with the Canadian context. This gap has begun to be addressed in recent years through the initiatives of a handful of scholars and the financial commitment of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). An edited collection published this year begins to address this gap (Mougeot 2017b). Particularly helpful documents include a study commissioned by IDRC's former Special Initiatives Division (Chernikova 2011b) that was later included in *Putting Knowledge to Work*, an article entitled "Achieving successful academic-practitioner research collaborations" (Roper 2002), and an article that discusses the nuances of academic and civil society sub-cultures and their differences (Cottrell and Parpart 2006). An overview of international development studies (IDS) programs in Canada serves as an insightful commentary on the culture of these departments (see Cameron, Quadir, and Tiessen 2013), while another article introduces the useful concept of knowledge interfaces (Zingerli, Michel, and Salmi 2009). The following subsections discuss factors that either facilitate or hinder collaborations as discussed in previous research.

MODELS OF COLLABORATION

Within the literature, we have identified various forms of collaborations including these two different typologies.

Roper (2002) identifies five models of development:

Each of these models position the academic researcher as the active agent whose work contributes to the CSO. While this is not

untrue, other framings make clear the mutual contributions offered by researchers and CSO practitioners to collaborative partnership and the research or improved practice and policy that results.

Other researchers have looked at models that more fully engage the active agency of both academics and practitioners. Based on surveys of universities and CSOs, (Chernikova 2011b) this research lists seven key forms of academic/practitioner collaborations in Canada.

CSOs responses	University responses
1. Student study placements/internships with CSOs	1. Student study placements/internships with CSOs
2. University-CSO collaboration on research projects	2. Volunteering by academics in the South via CSOs
3. CSO input into training offered by universities	3. University-CSO collaboration on research projects
4. Commissioning of studies by CSOs to academics	4. CSO input into training offered by universities
5. Recruitment of CSO experts by universities	5. Visiting lectureships of CSO experts in universities
6. Visiting lectureships of CSO experts in universities	6. Recruitment of CSO experts by universities
7. Volunteering by academics in the South via CSOs	7. Commissioning of studies by CSOs to academics

Source: Chernikova 2011

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Co-producing research and knowledge. Several authors identified co-production as a central aspect of successful transdisciplinary collaborations and laid out in detail how research co-design and co-production can be successfully carried out (e.g. Aniekwe, Hayman, and Mdee 2012);

Working with and through bridging experts. Collaborations are often made possible by the presence of "bridging experts" who are defined as "experts in their field with decades of experience 'on-the-ground' and a strong reputation in research" (Chernikova 2011b);

Finding entry-ways through Embedded Gateways. Universities can be impenetrable institutions for people unfamiliar with them, and they may not offer easy points of contact or access to information or expertise. Embedded gateway is defined as "an easy-to-access portal (an email address or phone number) for the public to make an initial approach" (Shucksmith 2016);

Creating spaces for dialogue, learning, meeting and exchange. Creating "interfaces", which are physical or structural spaces that "allow for exchanges, co-evolution, and joint construction of knowledge with the aim of enriching decision-making" are helpful (Zingerli, Michel, and Salmi 2009). Interfaces could be networks, forums,

conferences, and other events that aim to facilitate dialogue and learning (Chernikova 2011b);

Driving collaborations through funding (and funders') priorities. In many cases, collaborative research partnerships are driven by donor requirements (Stevens, Hayman, and Mdee 2013, Aniekwe, Hayman, and Mdee 2012), as many donors recognize the benefits of collaborative research;

Keeping lines of communication open. Terms and language must be mutually intelligible (Shucksmith 2016) as open and transparent communication is essential (Cottrell and Parpart 2006). Clarity and understanding must not be taken for granted (Roper 2002).

CHALLENGES

Structural challenges. Challenges may stem from structural aspects of the overall development ecosystem. For example, the past decade has seen "substantial cuts to Canada's official development assistance (ODA), the de-funding of important think tanks focusing on international development and the absorption of the former government agency for international development into the foreign affairs ministry" (Tiessen and Smillie 2016);

Power differentials. In all aspects of development studies, differing social and financial status, whether perceived or real, can lead to tension and simmering discontent that can disrupt collaborative efforts. As Cottrell and Parpart (2006) point out, "The gap between academics and community partners may differ in intensity, but it is rarely absent. It occurs on many fronts—over money, publications, recognition for one's contribution, tone of voice, and manner of speaking;"

Differing orientation. Academics and CSOs differ both individually and collectively and vary in terms of their priorities, incentives, objectives, organizational cultures, and degree of financial security. Furthermore, CSOs may prioritize practical, tangible change and may view academics as being preoccupied with theories, approaches and outputs that are largely unhelpful in resolving real world problems (Garrett and Islam 2004). Differing priorities may also call for differing research design and methodologies;

Different skill-sets. Academic researchers may have "limited understanding of and experience with effective methods of engaging communities" (Ahmed and Palermo 2010). Meanwhile, academic theories, methodologies, and the language used to explain them may be complicated and difficult for non-experts to understand (Shucksmith 2016). Both the nuanced relationships that CSOs have with their communities and complex academic information may be difficult to explain;

Varying degrees of stability in funding and financial status. "The level of salaries and basic livelihood is the number one contradiction between the support for university and for community-based research [...] that changes the whole dynamic of

how they relate to one another" (Chernikova 2011b). Financial insecurity may also be reflected in the reluctance of CSOs to work with academics because research findings may not necessarily reflect well on the CSO. These considerations may lead CSOs to overlook the importance of objective evaluations of their projects/programs/policies" instead choosing to focus on "findings that support their actions" (Garrett and Islam 2004);

Personal biases regarding academics or CSOs. All of the above challenges can contribute to attitudes toward one camp or the other that are detrimental to collaboration. As Roper (2002) points out, "it is not unusual, particularly in activist or community-based NGOs, to find an anti-academic bias. This may not be something that is explicitly held or stated, but it is important for the academic collaborator to determine if such bias exists and, if so, what its roots are" It should be clear that such biases may not only stem from an underestimation of the value of academic work, but also from an overestimation of the outcomes or potential benefits of the research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS AND FUNDERS

1. **Invest in partnerships as a key long-term outcome.** This literature review has noted a range of challenges to fostering long-term, meaningful and productive collaborations between academics and practitioners. But it has also argued that academic-practitioner collaborations will be necessary in order to generate more timely and (mutually) relevant research, policy and practice. With mutually-developed co-production of research identified as one of the key ingredients for successfully realizing this ambition, it seems clear that ongoing, long-term relationship-building must become an accepted component of academic work. In many cases, *ad hoc* collaborations based on academic funding requirements have left community partners feeling unsatisfied and can cause relationships to deteriorate. Research funding, for example from foundations and government, must acknowledge the need for—and time-consuming nature of—such relationship-building and allocate resources to invest in this partnership-building process. This could build on such initiatives like the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership Development Grant. Although it may not always lead to immediate tangible outcomes, many authors agree on the importance of partnership development to the long-term effectiveness of research efforts.

2. **Acknowledge the range of actors engaged in research and knowledge production, including by opening up access to funding opportunities.** Funders should expand access to funding for non-academics to encourage research co-produced and co-led by practitioners/CSOs and academics. This will support Canadian knowledge leadership by supporting evidence-generation and research that incorporates a diverse range of actors and perspectives, which can in turn contribute

to more informed policy decisions. Government can complement this democratization of funding by explicitly seeking and favouring (e.g. in discussions with CSOs and academics) evidence and recommendations that reflect a consideration of diverse perspectives and/or substantive partnership and collaboration.

3. **Build bridges and gateways, and create spaces for knowledge exchange and learning.** For research and knowledge co-production to take place, there clearly need to be gateways and entry points where academics and research-practitioners can connect. These spaces can help foster greater collaboration by identifying shared areas of research interest, developing a common language and shared understanding of one another's work (including tackling personal biases), and facilitating spaces for the exchange of ideas, perspectives, expertise, knowledge and learning. CCIC and CASID have started to build the "who" – an online, searchable database of Canadian researchers from universities, colleges, institutes, think-tanks and CSOs working on international development and humanitarian assistance (See NextGen Database). Governments, research funding agencies, academic institutions, and national platforms like CCIC and CASID, should now work collaboratively to build the "how" – informal or formal platforms that open up access to information and expertise, and facilitate such an exchange. These can take various forms, including among others *ad hoc* reference groups, ongoing communities of practice, annual learning seminars, forums and conferences, or theme-specific national roundtables, and be convened by different partners as needs arise.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT GENERATION PROGRAMMING

1. **Document what works (and what doesn't) to inform next generation programming.** While much can be learned from experiences in other locations reported in the literature (e.g., the UK, Switzerland, Australia, etc.), more research is needed on academic/practitioner collaborations in international development specific to the Canadian context. CCIC and CASID and their respective memberships should document their collaborative works in a series of case studies (potentially against the different models of collaboration identified in this literature review). These could shed further light on key pathways to success highlighted in this literature review, including with respect to lessons learned, new opportunities and perennial barriers, and the perceived value-added of collaborating. These findings can help provide clear guidance and shape to future models of collaboration between academics and practitioners that are more specific to the Canadian context, including identifying the supports necessary to help bridge the divides between the two communities.

2. **Build the next generation of academics and CSOs**. Given the importance of student placements as a form of academic/practitioner collaboration, increased professional training as part of IDS programs could help ensure that students arrive at their placements well-equipped with professional skills of value to partner CSOs. Similarly, placements of

research-practitioners within University settings, or training programs around research skills and methodologies, could help enhance the quality and professionalism of practitioner research, and expose practitioners to new thinking and practice within more formal academic settings. Furthermore, this could help narrow existing gaps (e.g., biases, skill sets, orientation, etc.) between the two communities. The Next Generation Program should encourage student/ practitioner placements and engage young leaders (e.g. CASID student members, Emerging Leader Network (ELN), etc.) in the activities of the Next Generation program.

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