

Next Generation Final Evaluation Summary

The five-year benchmark of the Sustainable Development Goals is imminent and there is a push for collaborative cross-sectoral approaches to international development. The **Next Generation Program** proposed testing new models for collaboration to inform evidence-based program and policy and to build better relationships between academics and practitioners in the Canadian international development ecosystem. The Program's ultimate outcome was to "foster an environment within the Canadian international development and humanitarian sector that is more conducive to enhanced, impactful, sustained and effective collaboration between Canadian civil society organisations and academic communities". To achieve this, the program set out to strengthen the Canadian international development **ecosystem**; to improve research, knowledge-sharing and learning for greater impact and **influence**; to create the environment and support sustained collaboration amongst the sector's **next generation leaders** (academic and CSO); and **to deliver** an effective program.

To strengthen the Canadian international development **ecosystem**, what was needed was a better understanding of its current state and how academics and CSO practitioners work together. Three research pieces were commissioned: Improving Collaboration for Better Development Outcomes a Canadian-focused literature review of academic-CSO collaboration, The Observatorio Project, a North American literature review with case studies and finally Partnership in Practice a multiple-case study that looked at nine academic-CSO collaborations that examined the political economy, challenges and best practices of partnerships. The Next Generation program has succeeded in deepening the knowledge of the current Canadian ecosystem. The CCIC-CASID partnership was also a model that was studied by the Next Generation program. "Partners" learned how to move from a transactional relationship to a co-creative partnership focused on the co-production of knowledge. By the end of the program, eighty-nine percent (89%) of the stakeholders believed that the partnership delivered an effective program and the consensus of the CCIC-CASID leadership was to maintain the 'NextGen spirit' moving forward.

The Next Generation program sought to both deliver and encourage greater impact and **influence**. Through its research it provided recommendations meant to influence the policy, practice and investments decisions of CSOs, academic institutions, networks, funders and governments. Recommendations included creating the enabling environment by changing institutional incentive structures to encourage and reward academic-CSO research and for CSOs to embed research in their organizational DNA. In addition, the research calls on funders to go beyond simply increasing funding to an approach that "encourages research that is produced **with** rather than **on** people". This recommendation would greatly encourage collaboration between CSOs and academics through community-based research that reflects the principles of knowledge democracy, and co-creation. The Regional Working Groups (RWG) sought to influence policies that directly impact communities and vulnerable people and bring southern voices to Canada. Theo Sowa, CEO of the African Women's Development Fund and Gisèle Baraka Bashige, a journalist and activist from the Democratic Republic of Congo participated in the session "Putting Feminist Foreign Policy on the Agenda: A Civil Society Dialogue in Advance of the Women Foreign Ministers Meeting,"

The program sought to increase **Leadership** by 'raising awareness and encouraging sustained academic-CSO collaboration by the next generation of Canadian international development and humanitarian practitioners, academics and students'. The program worked to accomplish these goals through several models of collaboration including the PhD School, by creating networking opportunities for graduate students and CCIC's Emerging Leaders Network (ELN), having young people participate in the design and development of the program and hiring student Research Assistants. Students and Next Generation stakeholders agree the PhD School was a success that should continue and be extended to include more international/southern students. Next Generation supported cross-country student-organized events attended by almost 1000 students, academics and practitioners, that sought to improve international development policy and practice. The program was also successful in securing additional funding for a Post Doctoral Fellow through MITACS, funding previously unavailable to non-profits. Students at HEC Montréal worked with the Next Generation team to develop case studies on innovative models of collaboration between academics and practitioners for several Canadian NGOs including WUSC and Oxfam Québec. Student placement was identified as a priority initiative by the memberships of both organizations during the Y1 mapping survey of the sector, the consensus of the stakeholders is that moving forward CASID and CCIC should seek to build on the Leadership successes of Next Generation and identify, promote and support student placement opportunities.

Positioning Canada as a global leader in evidence-based and collaborative approaches was not something that could be achieved within the scope of the Next Generation program. The program did plant seeds for this long-term goal. Beyond supporting the development of the next generation leaders and research that provided solid recommendations to create the right environment, the program also developed a new tool that has game changing potential. The NextGen Database has the potential to evolve to be an innovative platform that is unique within the global sector. Creating a portal to facilitate connections between academics and CSOs was a key recommendation from the initial Literature Review. As of May 2019, seven hundred individual profiles (affiliated with 92 organizations) had been created, two hundred and three (39%) by women. There is also interest from other networks to partner on this initiative, specifically the Sustainable Development Solutions Network which would broaden the remit of the website beyond the international development sector to include Canadian academics and CSOs working on sustainable development. Like most beta versions of platforms, the NextGen Database needs further investment to refine its design and functionality and to maintain it to ensure that it remains relevant and responsive to user needs.

Lessons Learned

Ecosystem

- Effective partnerships need to be developed and are hard work - they need space, time, trust and commitment. Transparency and effective clear communication are the means by which trust is built.

Influence

- The research consistently noted the need for decision-makers within government, institutions and leaders in the CSO sector and individual CSOs to generate an enabling environment for collaboration between academics and practitioners.
- The research also called for funders and Canadian academics-CSOs to support Southern academic institutions and practitioner-researchers. Bringing Southern experts and activists to participate in policy and public engagement efforts ensures greater impact because both policy makers and the public hear authentic voices on the issues.

Leadership

- Young people want capacity-building support and are also capable of using their skills and experience to be leaders today. The International Development Sector, networks and institutions alike need to more consciously support and engage young people.
- Creating new technology, new portals to enable academic-CSO collaboration is something that is strongly supported by funders, professional and organizational networks and individual academics and practitioners.

Delivery

- Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) frameworks need to be fit for purpose– indicators must be SMART, design tools that are efficient and effective, and teams must have necessary MEL skill set.
- Sustainable collaboration – adaption and increased collaboration in existing activities can be as or more sustainable than new/innovative activities. Celebrate collaborative work as it takes place.

CCIC and CASID were able to deliver the Next Generation program effectively and efficiently because they used the limited funding to reimagine existing activities through a collaborative lens, to amplify the importance of academic-CSO collaboration and to fund new research to better understand the current Canadian international development ecosystem. Like all partnerships they experienced challenges early-on, but they chose to apply what they were learning from the research to improve their partnership and move along the continuum from adaptation to co-creation. The desire of the stakeholders to find a way to maintain the 'NextGen spirit' is perhaps the strongest evidence of the success of the program.