The Role of NGOs in International Democratic Development

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November 2005

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INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago, Canada had essentially no programs to support democratic development internationally. The policy at the time opposed such assistance on the grounds that it constituted unacceptable interference in the internal political affairs of other countries, a view that may have been influenced by the Canadian desire at the time to keep other countries – notably France – from interfering in our internal affairs. It was not that officials at the time did not see the importance of democratic development or the potential value of international assistance. It was just that – as one of them put it to me – "it may be a great idea but we don't want to touch it with a ten foot pole."

The report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Canada's International Relations in the mid- 1980s recommended that support for democracy should become an integral part of Canadian foreign policy. It further recommended that the government should create an institution to give effect to the policy. Under the leadership of Rt. Hon. Joe Clark, then foreign affairs minister, the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD) was established as an independent organization funded by the government of Canada. Note that in creating an independent entity, the Canadian government had not yet fully embraced democratic development as part of its own mission, but the first step had been taken. One other peculiarity of the founding of ICHRDD is worth noting. The academics hired by the government to advise on the formation of the new institution recommended that the word democracy not be used in its title. The word had such a variety of meanings, they noted, that Canada ran the danger of giving offence to those who used the word differently from the way we did. Those who felt that the word democracy belonged in the title fought back and won the day.

By the mid 1990s Canada was prepared to take the next step to make democracy promotion an important part of its official development assistance programs. In 1996 the government published *Government of Canada Policy for CIDA on Human Rights, Democratization and Good Governance*. As sketched in that brief document, Canadian policy was to be grounded in respect for and promotion of human rights and have as its primary objective to "enhance the will and capacity of developing country societies to respect the rights of children, women and men and to govern effectively and in a democratic manner." CIDA would seek to strengthen the role and capacity of civil society, democratic institutions, the competence of the public sector, the capacity of organizations that protect and promote human rights and the "will of leaders to respect rights, rule democratically and govern effectively." Thereafter CIDA steadily expanded support for democratic development programs. In the early days, support was limited to funding small one-off projects that typically consisted of workshops and study visits to Canada, but by the end of the 1990s CIDA was supporting multimillion dollar, multiyear programs in good governance and democratization. Not surprisingly, the new and expanded financial resources stimulated the appearance of many nongovernmental and private sector organizations, which redesigned themselves as Canadian Executing Agencies to bid on CIDA projects. The Parliamentary Centre was one such organization.

With more than fifteen years of practical experience, Canadians are now taking stock of their work to promote democracy and good governance around the world. The IRPP's International Democratic

Development research program is an important part of a review that should be guided by several key considerations. First, the global context has changed. The hope of the early 1990s that the democratic day had dawned has been downgraded to a sober assessment of the challenges of democratic development. Second, studies and common sense agree that programs in support of democratization can and should be improved significantly. Lessons that have long since been learned remain to be applied in practice. Third, there is a strong feeling in Ottawa that Canada needs to take a fresh new approach to democratic development, one that better integrates and brands the many different Canadian initiatives. This paper is intended to contribute to this stocktaking exercise. Its focus is on Canadian support for political institutions – elections, parties and legislatures – drawing heavily on the experience of the Parliamentary Centre. The paper is organized as follows. The first part provides an overview of Canadian support for political development. The second part sums up the experience of the Parliamentary Centre, highlighting lessons learned and best practices. The third part looks at broader policy issues by framing recommendations for the future of Canadian programs.

CANADIAN SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The heart of the matter

As George Perlin has shown in his introductory essay to the International Democratic Development series (*Irpp Working Paper* 2003), support for democratic development and good governance covers a wide territory. It includes subjects as diverse as local government, public service reform, judicial reform, civil society and federalism. It also includes the heart of the matter – democratic politics. Donors strive to avoid using the word politics in their programs because it connotes interference in the internal affairs of other countries, the issue that once caused Canada to regard democracy-building as an unacceptable area of international cooperation. Nevertheless, much of the international support for democratization and good governance is essentially an effort to inculcate the practices and values of democratic politics. This now seems to have been accepted as a norm of international relations, provided it does not extend to supporting one party against others, though some donors – notably the United States – do not shy away from taking sides. The Canadian approach has been to provide assistance for the infrastructure of democratic politics, while avoiding partisan politics.

Canadian nonsupport for political parties

Samuel Johnson once declared his ambition to write the world's shortest book on the snakes of Iceland. It would consist of one sentence – there are no snakes in Iceland. The story of Canadian international support for political parties is almost as short. When I conducted a study (*Canada and Democratic Development*) in the mid-1980s, I discovered growing support for Canada promoting democracy abroad but little support for the German or American models of funding party-affiliated institutions. Most of those interviewed felt that was going over the line that separated cooperation from political interference, and besides, they were uncomfortable with the idea of providing official development assistance (ODA) to Canadian political parties. Better, it was felt, to have the various Canadian political parties work on their own through organizations like Liberal International. This approach has essentially been followed ever since. With the exception of occasional one-off activities, CIDA has not funded programs that focus on strengthening political parties. The Parliamentary Centre and, one assumes, other organizations working in the field, addresses political parties in study visits and workshops as an important element in the political process, but not as a subject deserving major attention in its own right. Given the importance of parties and their weakness in many countries in transition, this approach is now being questioned For example,

Canadians who have worked for the US National Democratic Institute (NDI) are lobbying the federal government to create a new entity to be called "Democracy Canada," which would be a kind of Canadian version of the NDI. We will revisit this issue in the last part of the paper.

Electoral assistance and election observing

Elections and electoral systems have attracted strong support internationally, and in this area Canada too has paid considerable attention. Elections have been described as having political sex appeal for donors, because they capture the attention of the international media in a way that few other aspects of democratic development do. This has been both a benefit and a curse for electoral assistance programs. While they attract interest and resources, both tend to disappear as quickly as do the elections themselves. On the other hand, the field of electoral assistance has seen the rise of strong multilateral institutions like the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), which have served to deepen electoral knowledge and establish international standards for electoral practices. The field of legislative assistance could use such institutions.

Elections Canada

Canada has provided substantial assistance to help strengthen elections over the years, though there is no Canadian organization dedicated to international electoral assistance in the way that the Parliamentary Centre focuses energy on legislative assistance. Elections Canada has an active program of international cooperation and responds regularly to requests for assistance, as its own domestic responsibilities permit. When Canada is approached for assistance by a multilateral organization or an individual country, the Department of Foreign Affairs makes the initial decision about participating, while CIDA in most cases provides the funding. Elections Canada will supply the necessary expertise from within its own ranks, by calling on provincial election agencies or by bringing in technical or electoral experts. Since 1990, the Agency has organized more than 350 international democratic development missions in some 94 countries around the world. Note the word missions – relatively short assignments providing discrete assistance. Some years ago, it was proposed that the legislation establishing Elections Canada be amended to include an international mandate but the Chief Electoral Officer objected and the idea was dropped. As with other arms- length crown agencies, for example, the Auditor General, the Human Rights Commission – the mandate of Elections Canada remains a Canadian one; international assistance is an important but subordinate activity to be pursued as and when responsibilities at home permit.

Canada's reputation as an election observer

In addition to assistance in the management of elections, Canada has a tradition of providing election observer missions, organized sometimes by NGOs but often by the Canadian government. We were told by a well-informed source that Canada's reputation in this field was damaged during the 1990s by the injection of partisan political considerations in the selection of observers. It became common practice to select friends of the government in power who may or may not have had the requisite knowledge or other qualifications. In some cases, observers treated the assignments lightly as interesting junkets. Others were inadequately screened for hidden political agendas. The lesson here is not that political experience or connections disqualify a person as an election observer. In fact, those could be assets, provided they are matched by interest, knowledge and fair mindedness.

CODE Inc.

We have not done a systematic survey of Canadian organizations supporting elections, though we have come across the interesting case of CODE Inc. – a for-profit arm of CODE International. The organization is an example of serendipity in democratic development. Quite by chance, the president of CODE discovered the need for ballot boxes during a Nicaraguan election and matched the need with the capacity of a small Quebec-based company that could supply the boxes. By acting as a go between in this instance, CODE discovered the emerging international market for election supplies and established CODE Inc. to go after it. The organization has since expanded its operations from providing election supplies to advising on the design and management of election organization and infrastructure.

Canada and multilateral electoral assistance

Apart from the direct electoral assistance provided by Canadian organizations, there are many individual Canadians doing electoral assistance work through a variety of international organizations. One of them, Ron Gould, a former deputy chief electoral officer of Canada, has been awarded the Order of Canada for his work in this area. In a recent conversation, Mr. Gould expressed his preference for the multilateral route because it avoids competition and promotes cooperation. In his experience, competition between countries and agencies to provide assistance to "highly visible elections" is the main problem facing electoral assistance. The competition often leads to donor driven, vendor driven assistance that is totally unsuited to the country and unsustainable. In general, Mr Gould finds "there is not nearly enough assessment of the realities on the ground."

Legislative assistance

Arguably, the international sharing of information about legislative practices and institutions is the oldest continuous form of cooperation in democratic development. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), to which all national legislatures belong, was founded in the 1890s and has promoted information exchange and discussion among legislators ever since. Within the Commonwealth, there are longstanding institutions that promote parliamentary cooperation, the most notable being the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). During the process of decolonization in the 1960s and 1970s, some of the former colonial powers, notably Great Britain and France, provided assistance to their colonies in building state institutions, including legislatures. More recently, legislative assistance has assumed an important place in the democratization and good governance programs of most donor countries as an important area of institutional capacity building. This assistance has often been focused on strengthening key legislative functions, such as research services and committee operations, as well as developing the personal capacities of members and staff.

Canada's role in legislative development

Canada has long participated in these international organizations, notably the IPU and the CPA. In addition there are international associations of Speakers and Clerks of parliament, to which Canada has been an important contributor. It is one of the successful democracies and is seen by many countries as having relevant experience and institutions. The Canadian model – strong government, independent courts, active and independent civil society, strong private sector, diverse population, multicultural and bilingual, federal – these and other traits speak to the desire of many countries to build peaceful and prosperous democratic societies.

For this reason, there was strong interest in Canadian legislative assistance from the moment CIDA began funding programs in the area. As noted earlier, CIDA initially provided modest funding for one-off activities or short-term partnership-building projects, but by the end of the 1990s, the agency was designing and letting contracts for substantial multiyear programs of legislative assistance in countries as diverse as Ghana, Vietnam, Lebanon and Russia.

The Parliamentary Centre goes global

During this period, the Parliamentary Centre emerged as the main Canadian organization providing assistance of this kind. An independent, not-for-profit organization, it was founded in 1968 to provide assistance to the Parliament of Canada, primarily through not exclusively in the area of international relations. From its founding until the mid 1990s, the centre – originally known as the Parliamentary Centre for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade – provided staff assistance to parliamentary committees and international parliamentary associations. At the same time, it built its knowledge of parliamentary practice and developed a series of initiatives to strengthen members' and senators' work. (Examples of its work include the magazine *Parliamentary Government*; a program that organizes exchanges between Canadian parliamentarians and their US counterparts; a program that arranges study visits for MPs to corporations and trade unions; and orientation programs for newly elected MPs.) For many years, the centre provided staff services to the foreign affairs and defence committees of the House of Commons and Senate, and it served twice as the research secretariat for foreign and defence policy reviews in the mid-1980s and mid-1990s. Much of this work was assumed in the early 1990s by the Research Branch of the Library of Parliament, leaving the Parliamentary Centre with an important but much diminished role in the Canadian Parliament and resulting in real uncertainty for a time about its future. It was then that the burgeoning field of international democratic development created the opportunity for the centre to begin a second challenging life. The centre's board of directors saw international legislative development as a logical and desirable continuation of the work being done in Canada, and with the strong encouragement and support of a number of CIDA officers, the centre began its climb up the steep learning curve of international cooperation.

Up the learning curve

Over the next 10 years, the centre redesigned itself from the ground up as an organization that designed and implemented international legislative development programs that were funded by CIDA and other organizations such as the World Bank and UNDP. The practical, on-the-job expertise that it had been slowly building over 25 years now became a valuable resource for international legislative assistance programming. Initially, the requests for assistance came through the Department of Foreign Affairs and CIDA, but as time passed and the centre established its reputation, more requests came directly from parliaments abroad. In tackling this capacity-building work, the centre had to build its own financial and managerial capacity to mount and operate large programs abroad. This meant developing fluency in the language of Results Based Management and learning to pay as much attention to the real life results of activities as to the activities themselves. Peter Dobell, the Founder of the Parliamentary Centre, has remarked that the Centre was one organization for the first twenty-five years and essentially a different organization over the past decade. At the same time, expertise acquired and lessons learned during our many years of working with the Parliament of Canada laid the foundation for success in our international work. In particular, our appreciation of the complexity and slowness of governance reform was acquired in Canada.

And now on to a learning organization

Between 1994 and 2004 the centre has undertaken parliamentary development programs in 20 or so countries in Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Much of this work has concentrated on building the capacity of individual parliaments, but it has also given a high priority to the building of interparliamentary policy networks. Indeed, work in this area has become an important part of its approach to legislative development, complementing, stimulating and extending our efforts to build capacity in individual national legislatures. The African Parliamentary Network against Corruption (APNAC) was the first of these networks, followed by the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC), the Inter-parliamentary Association of the Americas (FIPA), and regional networks on poverty reduction, gender, trade and social policy. As the centre's work grows in volume and diversity, we have become acutely conscious of the need to better mine that experience for lessons learned and best practices, both for the benefit of our own programs and to share with others in the international community. Making the transition from only a program-executing agency to a legislative-development learning organization as well will be the centre's top priority over next five years.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

State-building as capacity and accountability

Before turning our attention to the lessons learned by the Parliamentary Centre in doing its legislative development work, we should say something about what has been learned about democratic development generally. Notwithstanding the shortcomings of assistance programs (of which more below), the past decade has only confirmed the crucial importance of good governance and the building of effective state institutions. In the 1970s and 1980s, the ascendancy of economic liberalism produced the conventional wisdom of the smaller, less intrusive state but lost sight of the crucial importance to development of the effective and accountable state. It is that dual challenge of building state capacity and state accountability that should drive the agenda of governance programming in the future. Democratic institutions are at the heart of this enterprise, but not all of the institutions needed for an effective state are democratic in character. There is need for a professional public service, a requirement that is often frustrated by the exigencies of democratic politics. There is need for rule of law and respect for judicial independence, requirements that also collide more than occasionally with political forces. The point could be illustrated over and over again – an effective state is a complex amalgam of institutions, values and practices, some having their roots in the democratic impulse and others in different, though complementary, values like rule of law and the merit principle. Democratic development is the bumper sticker we use to describe our work but we should remember the reality is more complex than that.

Mixed results to date

Even as we recognize the importance to development of effective state institutions, we confront the fact that international programs to strengthen these institutions have produced decidedly mixed results to date. In some cases, one can explain this by pointing to the obvious inadequacies of the programs themselves, but the challenges go beyond inexperience and incompetence. An underlying lesson is that the transplantation of institutions and practices is even harder and riskier than the transplantation of organs. International assistance programs provide enormous help in supplying ideas, information and even motivation, but the challenge of getting all of this to root and grow in the local environment is largely beyond the capacity of these programs and the people running them Unfortunately, too often the design and

management of the programs has compounded the problem by being donor driven and ethnocentric. Regrettably, we must report that legislative strengthening is no exception when it comes to this track record of mixed results National legislatures are extremely weak, usually subordinate to the executive branch, poorly funded, equipped and staffed, lacking law drafting capacity and political experience and enjoying only minimal public respect. The success of efforts to strengthen legislatures is spotty at best for reasons that include lack of political will, poor understanding of the realities on the ground and meagre resources. There is a deeper problem here – legislatures tend to be marginalized and ignored by those interested in development. Many proponents of democratization focus their attention on civil society, the media and an array of independent watchdog bodies, dismissing legislatures as the hangouts and clubs of the old regime – which often they are. While these advocates of peoples' democracy are right to criticize the shortcomings of legislatures, they are wrong to neglect the importance of reforming them. Until someone comes up with a working model of direct democracy, the only available alternative – representative democracy – deserves our serious attention. National and state legislatures are at the centre of any such model.

An excellent synopsis of lessons learned

Rather than provide our own synopsis of lessons learned over the past ten years, we refer the reader to an excellent overview published by the Swedish International Development Agency, *The Political Institutions: Parties, Elections and Parliaments* (July 2002). This document surveys the field of international practice, concentrating on lessons learned and recommendations for improving the quality of assistance. Its key recommendations are outlined in the "Strategy to Promote Improvement of the Quality of Democracy," and apply very well to the work of the Parliamentary Centre We will now briefly review each of the lessons in turn, drawing on the centre's experience.

Lesson #1
Strengthening political institutions is to a large extent about how to promote a change in power relations between the executive and legislative branches of power.

Returning to an earlier point, state building is about simultaneously strengthening the capacity and accountability of the state. While the role of the legislature is essentially a facilitating one in the case of state capacity building – it approves the necessary budgetary and other means – it has a central role to play in ensuring state accountability. In the model employed by the Parliamentary Centre, parliament is represented as an institutional bridge between the state and the people, helping to ensure that government operates by democratic norms of transparency, participation and accountability. This is far from the case in many developing countries, where executive dominance of the legislature, judiciary and indeed of the whole society may be closer to the truth. In these circumstances, efforts to strengthen the ability of the legislature to hold the government to account are of fundamental importance and extremely difficult. As in Canada, the government often controls the legislative majority and so can pull the teeth of the legislature. How then is progress to be made towards greater parliamentary accountability? In the centre's experience it is essential to begin by strengthening the norms and practices of parliamentary democracy, including the rights and privileges of all members on the government and the opposition sides. We have found that parliamentary committees are the most promising parliamentary venues in which to build the necessary minimum of cross-party respect, as they offer opportunities for members to work together on important business somewhat out of the glare of the cameras. It is also important to develop the concept of parliamentary accountability in a way that does not promote zero-sum relations between the government and the legislature. Parliaments can fail in their accountability role by being subservient to government, the usual method, or by being the scene of never-ending and mindless political warfare (the case of

Bangladesh comes to mind). The Parliamentary Centre tries to encourage a third way – independent but constructive engagement between government and the legislature. Thus in strengthening the independence of parliamentary committees, the centre's programs regularly seek to bring members and government officials together to share information and get to know one another.

Lesson #2
Agencies supporting democratic change must conduct thorough analyses in order to understand where the real power in society lies.

As noted earlier, a lack of understanding of the local context is the commonest explanation for why legislative strengthening and other democratic development programs fail. Too many programs have been taken off the shelf of Western experience, with little or no serious analysis of realities on the ground or of the history of previous efforts to strengthen the legislature or other institutions. There are many reasons for this, but they all boil down to essentially one thing – a fixation with activities. In this mindset, democratic development was seen as an export industry where the aim was to maximize the volume of trade (activities) between donor and recipient country. The limitations of this approach are now coming to be recognized in a far greater emphasis on analysis during all stages of programming and dialogue between partners throughout the program. In the case of the Parliamentary Centre's program with the National Peoples' Congress of China, the promotion of "mutual understanding" has been recognized as an important program objective, and the two sides are planning a stream of joint research activities during the life of the project. In the case of our Cambodia program, we arranged at the beginning to have a leading Cambodian think tank prepare a base line study on the National Parliament as a reference point for project planning and the evaluation of project results. The resulting document was intensively discussed at a forum sponsored by the presidents of the National Assembly and the Senate, which was attended by many members of the two chambers. We have learned, however, that analysis without ongoing dialogue between the partners is likely to be of little value. It is all to easy for the two sides in projects of this kind to fall into the solitude of differences (cultures, languages, preoccupations) mediated only by a common interest in activities. This is when democratic development programs become dangerously undirected and can slide off the rails without anyone even noticing what is happening. The Parliamentary Centre, with the support of the CIDA China program, has just organized a workshop on strengthening dialogue between Canadian executing agencies of governance programs in China and their Chinese partners. Follow-up activities will focus on promoting greater understanding of commonly used but differently understood governance concepts, like the rule of law and citizen engagement.

Lesson #3
It is important to promote coherence, harmonization and complementarity among assistance programs.

As noted by Ron Gould about electoral assistance programs, competition among donors and executing agencies to get the best bits of democratic development programming and then hold on to them is among the most unedifying and destructive aspects of the business. More competition of the right kind – to produce better results – would be a good thing, but the type we are talking about here has more to do with putting the national brand on activities and throwing weight and money around than it does with the quality of the work. The Parliamentary Centre has had a number of bad experiences of this kind, the worst being with UNDP in Cambodia, where a retired Canadian parliamentary official showed up as expert advisor and then set about both ignoring the centre's field office and expropriating its work. Attempts to promote cooperation were largely fruitless. Among the destructive side effects of such behaviour is the failure to share experience and lessons learned with the result that everyone is always starting from scratch. This is

a lesson that was learned a long time ago in other fields of development, but so often we fail to apply it. Indeed, a recent major report of donor practices found that the problem is as serious as ever and is one of the factors causing some developing countries (e.g. India) to conclude that assistance is more trouble than it is worth. The Parliamentary Centre's recent experience suggests that networking may prove to be one of the tools to address the problem. For example, a poverty reduction network of the kind the centre has helped to build in Africa invites the participation of many legislatures and many contributing organizations, because it is evident that there is more than enough work to go around. In this way, the proprietary instinct that seems to be triggered by working with single parliaments is moderated if not eliminated entirely. Another way of tacking the problem is to attempt to develop performance standards in legislative strengthening programs, something that IDEA and IFES have worked on in the field of electoral assistance. When practitioners begin to be held to account for meeting standards of performance the pernicious forms of competition may give way to the more virtuous kinds.

Lesson #4
The promotion of democracy should not be about reproducing the institutions of donor countries but to nurture core political processes and democratic values.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and it is also the surest route to delusion and failure in international efforts to promote democracy. It cannot be repeated too often that, with rare exceptions, democracy promotion is not about copying the institutions and practices of others. Rather it is about building institutions and practices that are suitable to local conditions and rest on a solid underpinning of democratic norms and values. Too often governance has been approached as if it were a purely technical problem where once you have got the techniques right – the rules, procedures and organization – all else will fall into place. Nothing could be further from the truth. The real challenge is to achieve alignment between the tip of the iceberg – the rules and procedures – and the three-fifths that is below the surface – the norms, customs and values. Far more effort needs to go into dialogue between partners about that part below the surface, if for no other reason than to better understand the gulf between the two sides and the difficulties of promoting change. Interestingly, dialogue of this kind requires Canadians to understand their own institutions better than they typically do when describing them to others. Intercultural learning loves the visible and the tangible, but it is in the realm of the invisible and the intangible that the real snares of democratic transition lie. To some extent, the problem of democratic copying is solving itself as the recipients of assistance become more experienced and demanding. Democracy 101 just does not cut it any more. It follows that program activities must begin to shift from the merely technically correct to the substantively relevant, while not neglecting the technical. For example, it may be far more valuable from a democracy promotion point of view to have a workshop that brings parliamentarians together with other governance players from civil society, business, government to discuss health care than a half day workshop on how to conduct a parliamentary committee meeting. In other words, democracy promotion now demands more value added. Moreover, as local organizations develop the ability to deliver capacity-building programs for parliamentarians, or as the capacity becomes lodged within parliaments themselves, the role of the international organization lies in networking, providing the comparative perspective, and supplying high quality analysis of the home country experience.

Lesson #5
Relations with partners should be characterized by openness, transparency and participatory methods.

We have saved the hardest lesson for last – the importance of building trust and confidence with partners. In this area the Parliamentary Centre has had a number of worst practices over the years. One comes to

mind from a project we undertook in Lebanon to help build better relations between the national Parliament and civil society organizations (CSOs). In this case, our partner was not the Parliament but a network of CSOs led by a very ambitious and well-connected CSO mover and shaker. The individual in question was offended that CIDA had brought the Parliamentary Centre into the picture at all, feeling that Canada should have directly funded the network, which clearly had the capacity to do the work. CIDA had its own reasons for not entirely trusting the local partner and so we were involved, ostensibly as the honest broker, but in fact more as the sacrificial goat. From the beginning of the project, there was a kind of undeclared war between ourselves and the other side, with us being fired on more than we fired. In the end, the formal project outcomes were achieved, but at the price of considerable bitterness and a complete breakdown in our relations with the Parliament, a breakdown that is only now being repaired five years later. We have not since had so destructive a relationship with a partner, though we have come close once or twice. The lesson is easy to state but hard to practice: continuous communication with partners, including regular face-to-face meetings, is essential. Trust can only be earned gradually, though it can be lost ever so quickly. We incline to the view that field offices are an essential part of governance programs to ensure good relations with the partners, although we can think of a case where we had excellent relations and no office, and another case where we had high-level representation on the ground and relations with the partner deteriorated almost to the breaking point. What appears to matter more than full-time physical presence is the building and maintenance of good relations with a number of key people who have the power and motivation to make things work.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

At the micro level – becoming a learning organization

Our first obligation in looking to the future is to apply the lessons to our own work by becoming a continuous learning organization, which is something that will take a lot of thought and effort. As a general rule, it can be said that democracy promotion is not a field of endeavour that has been characterized by particular thoughtfulness. Practitioners have often made things up as they went along, or simply copied what had worked in the past. It is now incumbent on all of us to become far better at learning from our experience, applying that learning to our programming and sharing it with others. The Parliamentary Centre will now apply this insight into building a role for itself as an international resource centre supplying expertise in lessons learned and best practices in legislative capacity building. What this requires is that we add to our programming a focused and disciplined research and development component, and this we are determined to do over the next five years. This strategy is driven by our reading of how work in this field is going to be done in future. Much of the work now done by organizations like the centre will be done in future by indigenous organizations with a much better understanding of the local context. The work we will do in the future will support the work of such local organizations in three ways: first, by supplying them with comparative analysis of legislative capacity building; second, by building inter-parliamentary policy networks; and third, by supplying high quality information on the Canadian democratic experience.

At the intermediate Level – working and thinking with other Canadian organizations

One of the persistent criticisms of Canadian support for democracy abroad is the lack of cooperation and coordination among the many Canadian organizations flying around the world. Officials responsible for coordinating the foreign policy review said in a recent meeting that while lots is being done by many different organizations, they aren't sure what it all added up to. They have a point. Organizational silos populate this field of democracy promotion. Organization A works on parliament while organization B works

on watchdog agencies and organization C works on federalism, but they do not communicate, let alone cooperate, with each other. This describes current practice, even though all the practitioners know their silos are only a small part of what makes for a working system of governance. What to do about this problem? We would like to believe that individual organizations that recognize the problem will begin to solve it by forming working relationships, cooperatives, consortia and partnerships, but the track record is not encouraging. Tunnel vision – or at least tunnel behaviour – tends to be the mark of small organizations, as each focuses on the tasks at hand and meeting their individual needs. One encouraging development worth noting is the appearance of governance learning networks bringing practitioners and researchers together. One such initiative, the Governance Knowledge Network, has just been launched by the International Centre for Governance and Development at the University of Saskatchewan. Useful as such networks may be, we incline to the view that some other mechanism to build synergy in Canadian support for democratic development is needed. Lets now consider what that might be.

Searching for the big idea

In the spring of 2004, Ottawa was in the grips of a search for big, bold, new ideas – preferably the kind that don't cost much. Some of this search is being concentrated on the area of Canadian support for democratic development. Les Campbell, a Canadian is vice president of the National Democratic Institute in Washington, has proposed the creation of Democracy Canada, a substantial, new institution that would mobilize Canadian resources in support of democracy around the world. While acknowledging the good work of existing institutions (like the Parliamentary Centre), Campbell argues that Canada is simply not equipped to play in the same league as NDI, the German party foundations and others. As result, many talented Canadians wind up working for these other organizations rather than having the opportunity to work on behalf of Canada. This theme of strengthening the Canadian presence and identify in the field of democratic development – of putting the Canadian stamp on democracy promotion – runs throughout the proposal. There are strong indications that it resonates loudly with the government in Ottawa.

The risk in creating a new institution is that it will suck the resources and life out of the work of existing institutions. Would that be such a bad thing? Leave aside the evident self-interest of the Parliamentary Centre, there are good reasons why it would not be in the Canadian interest to damage the work now being done. As this paper has shown, organizations like the Parliamentary Centre have been on steep learning curves since they began to work in the field of democratic development in the early 1990s. While we have much to learn about how to do this work effectively, it would be self-defeating to throw away the institutional knowledge and capacity that has been acquired. Furthermore, the diversity of Canadian engagement in democratic development is one of its great strengths. It reflects the diversity of Canada and the complexity of its democratic experience. Organizations like the Parliamentary Centre, the Canadian Bar Association and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities have deep roots in the various institutional sectors of Canadian government, and they bring those connections and differing perspectives to the work of democratic development. No single organization can or should capture that diversity. If we have learned anything in the past decade, it is that democratic development is not a monoculture, and Canada should recognize and respect that fact.

All that being said, there is a strong case for Canada adopting new approaches to democratic development and an equally strong case for new mechanisms to promote, indeed deepen and broaden, our engagement. But let it not be at the expense of what we have accomplished. What we would recommend is the creation of a new fund, perhaps in the form of a public foundation, to do a number of useful things: identify and encourage the engagement of new Canadian actors in international democratic development;

strengthen Canada's capacity to provide timely assistance in trouble spots; promote cooperation between and among Canadian and partner organizations; support research on democratic development; and develop policy proposals. In all of those areas, a new entity could add value by tackling the weaknesses in current practice and building capacity. Make sure the new idea is also a genuinely useful idea. And finally, let it be a democratic idea that emerges from open discussion, not another made in Ottawa invention. Give Canadians a chance to contribute to its development and thereby to feel some commitment to its success.

APPENDIX

Table A1. Evolution of Democratic Development Programming over the Last 15 Years: The Parliamentary Centre's Experience

PROGRAM	TYPICAL ACTIVITIES AND FUNDING SOURCE	ADVANTAGES	LIMITATIONS	PARLIAMENTARY CENTRE EXAMPLE	COMMENTS
Phase I: Partnership projects" Early- to-late 1990s	• Consisted mainly of workshops, one-time seminars, and/or study tours to Canada • Varied from a single activity to a stream of loosely connected activities. In the latter case, projects sometimes lasted up to about 18 months • Largely funded by Partnership Program at CIDA	• CIDA was able to identify Canadian Organizations capable of governance • Allowed CIDA to build relationships with partners abroad • Low-risk, low-cost • Useful as a learning tool for Canadian governance organizations and a growth period for CIDA in governance programming	• Difficult to obtain and/or measure results • Weak in building lasting relationships between Canada and partners • Weak in contributing to longer-term development considerations • Posed significant administrative costs with marginal returns in terms of results • Tendency to raise partners' expectations without follow-up commitment	• Early 1990s Cambodia Project • Early 1990s Russia Project	
Phase II - Longer-term, multiyear, multimillion dollar bilateral programs Late1990s to 2004…and beyond???	• Bilateral programs as opposed to partnership projects • Establishment of a deepened and more recognized role for Canadian organizations, as Canadian Executing Agencies (CEAs) • An elevated degree of power and latitude afforded to the CEA in terms of determining and steering project objectives and results • A higher degree of	• Higher likelihood of obtaining longer-term, sustainable results • More likely to meaningfully assess results • Additional time to build effective relationships between CEA and partners based on trust and mutual understanding • Opportunity to have consistent field presence,	• Inherently difficult to rigidly identify objectives and measure results when it comes to governance programming • Funding is often limited to achieving specific results with specific activities and can limit the ability of the CEA to engage in research and development	• Project with Ghana • Project with China	• The beginning of this phase of programming reflected a growing recognition by CIDA that Canada, through a strengthened group of Canadian governance NGOs, was well-suited to undertake democratic development and that the partnerships developed overseas during Phase II were worth continuing and broadening. There was also a recognition at this point that longer-term results were possible and that longer-term strategies were required, which led to the multiyear, multimillion dollar investments that have come to characterize the period. Along with the added commitment came a demand and integration of deeper systems of accountability and

PROGRAM	TYPICAL ACTIVITIES AND FUNDING	ADVANTAGES	LIMITATIONS	PARLIAMENT ARY CENTRE EXAMPLE	COMMENTS
	accountability (results-based management begins to emerge) • Projects with longer-term goals and objectives as well as results-based management frameworks • PC projects now include working with various institutional actors/components simultaneously (projects engage parliamentary secretariats, parliamentarians, parliamentary committees, and in some cases civil society organizations).	allowing for an accurate understanding of local context	• Timeframes of 4-5 years still provide limited opportunity to achieve and measure longer-term impact • Emphasis placed on role of CEA limits the develop-ment of local capacity for governance development		results- based management. • By the end of the period, which is where we are now, there is wider agreement that effective and lasting democratic development necessitates even longer-term commitments. A commitment of 10-15 years is required if results at the impact level are to be realized. The Canadian government and Canadian governance organizations have developed a deeper understanding of the complexities and importance of a comprehensive approach to governance programming. It is widely recognized that democratic development needs to be tied to wider strategies and goals and that multiple institutions need to be addressed in a balanced approach, beyond focusing largely on the capacity of the executive.
Phase III: Networking phase • 2003 and beyond (will likely represent the next significant phase)	• Projects that go beyond a bilateral focus to support the development of regional parliamentary bodies or networks • Much more emphasis on engaging and building the capacity of local organizations or local representa-tion of CEA on the ground; in some respects represents a downplaying of the traditional role and power role of the CEA	• Helps to build regional momentum and develop common approaches to policy issues across a region (that then bolster the capacity and momentum for national approaches) • Project approach offers more flexibility in terms of responsiveness and iterative programming • More flexibility for building in opportunities for learning and research activities/ outputs	• Accountability issue arises – (CIDA feels confident that the CEA can manage programming risks, but can CIDA be as confident that local organizations can manage risks the same way?)	Africa-Canada Parliamentary Strengthening Program	• This phase recognizes that bilateral approaches are important and need to be continued, but that in order to bolster and catalyze development at the national level, democratic development approaches also need to be established and deepened at the regional level. Supporting the establishment of networks of dialogue and knowledge-sharing at the regional level, connected with programming support at the national level as part of a combined strategy, represents the evolution of democratic development programming. • This phase also involves a considerable shift to promoting the development of local capacity for program direction and leadership, and for identifying new and emerging opportunities. The CEA becomes a source for comparative knowledge and expertise. The CEA strengthens its field presence, or other locally based organizations gradually take over.

PROGRAM	TYPICAL ACTIVITIES AND FUNDING	ADVANTAGES	LIMITATIONS	PARLIAMENT ARY CENTRE EXAMPLE	COMMENTS
					gradually take over. • At this point, Canada has entered a period where democratic development serves to advance an increasingly differentiated set of foreign policy and international development objectives (see table A2).

Table A2: Policy Streams in Democratic Development

POLICY STREAM	POLICY OBJECTIVE	PARLIAMENTARY CENTRE EXAMPLE	COMMENTS
Democratic diplomacy	• To encourage support for democratic transition and human rights and rule of law through engagement and dialogue • Democratic development serves to advance the geo-strategic objectives of Canadian foreign policy interests • Represents a recognition that certain countries are influential and need to be engaged and that there is room for Canada to influence aspects of a transition in a positive direction • Democratic development serves to strengthen relationships and increase the number of and level of discussion with these nations • An emphasis is placed on two-way dialogue – "Canada among equals"	Russia Program China Program (in particular, the China-Canada Dialogue on Rule of Law)	• Sharing best practices and knowledge on democratic governance, through two-way dialogue, can be an effective way to develop deeper ties of mutual understanding and connections in order to advance foreign policy objectives. Knowledge sharing and dialogue as part of a longer-term governance cooperation program, serves as a less sensitive and less overt mechanism for addressing Canadian foreign policy interests, such as human rights and the rule of law. • As stated in the International Policy Statement (IPS), "There will be a limited number of countries for which a case can be made for continuing with targeted bilateral programming…These countries would be chosen, irrespective of their size, based on their continuing strategic importance to Canada and/or in their own region, or where Canada can continue to make a difference based on strong people-to-people ties…"
Democratic peacebuilding	• To contribute to immediate stability and help consolidate peaceful transitions through institutional capacity building; relationship building; and ongoing dialogue	Program in Sudan Possible program in Palestine	• Given the commitment to failed and failing states in the IPS, Canada will need to reconsider and refine its approach to governance programming if it wants to operate successfully in these contexts. Conflict-affected and postconflict environments raise unique risks and require unique programming approaches. The political situation in relation to failed and failing states is fluid and highly charged, making it a difficult context to assess and one that is more risky to engage. • This type of programming environment heightens the critical importance of having an early and solid presence on the ground in order to stay informed of highly fluid contexts. • CIDA and the CEA must respond to a greater degree in a timely and consistent fashion, remaining particularly flexible and more open to responding to short-term needs. As stated in the IPS, "We will provide…targeted bilateral support directly aimed at improving governance in a limited number of strategically significant poor-

POLICY STREAM	POLICY OBJECTIVE	PARLIAMENTARY CENTRE EXAMPLE	COMMENTS
			performing countries (from within the up to one-third of bilateral resources not earmarked for Development Partners).
Democratic development	• The objective for supporting democratic development and good governance is to provide a catalyst for achieving other development objectives, such as poverty reduction and gender equality • It is based on a recognition by CIDA that effective, democratic governance is a key requirement for achieving longer-term development goals	Parliamentary Networks to address poverty reduction, anti-corruption, gender equality…and in the future peacebuilding?	The role of the CEA in this policy stream is to act as a key mechanism of accountability and act as a facilitator for access to comparative knowledge and practices. The initiative and drive comes from local actors (i.e. a CEA regional/local office or a locally base, independent organization). As stated in the IPS, "These are countries that have demonstrated they can use aid effectively and the Government can be confident that programs which make effective and prudent use of taxpayers' dollars are possible. They are countries in which Canada is able to bring to bear the resources and expertise necessary to contribute significantly to their development priorities"