

# Rethinking Canadian Aid

**Second Edition**



**Edited by Stephen Brown, Molly den Heyer  
and David R. Black**

University of Ottawa Press



uOttawa

The University of Ottawa Press gratefully acknowledges the support extended to its publishing list by the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences through the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program and by the University of Ottawa.

Copy editing: Susan James  
Proofreading: Joanne Muzak  
Typesetting: Counterpunch Inc.  
Cover design: Édiscript enr.  
Index: Heather Ebbs

### **Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication**

Rethinking Canadian aid / edited by Stephen Brown,  
Molly den Heyer, David R. Black. – Second edition.

(Studies in international development and globalization)  
Issued in print and electronic formats.  
ISBN 978-0-7766-2364-1 (paperback).– ISBN 978-0-7766-2365-8  
(pdf).– ISBN 978-0-7766-2366-5 (epub)

1. Economic assistance, Canadian. 2. Canada – Economic policy.  
3. Canada – Foreign economic relations. I. Black, David R. (David Ross),  
1960–, editor II. Den Heyer, Molly, 1972–, editor III. Brown, Stephen, 1967–,  
editor IV. Series: Studies in international development and globalization

HC60 R47 2016

338.9171

C2016-903419-4

C2016-903420-8

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Printed in Canada

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## CONCLUSION

# Rethinking Canadian Development Cooperation—Towards Renewed Partnerships?

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David R. Black, Stephen Brown and Molly den Heyer

Taken together, the chapters in this collection paint a picture of a Canadian aid policy marked by varied and ambiguous purposes, unstable thematic and geographic focus, and insecure institutional modalities. Although many contributors place particular emphasis on the contours of aid policy under the Harper government, others (e.g., Black, Massie and Roussel, Swiss, Tiessen) explicitly track these characteristics over a period of decades. The question of long-term continuities *versus* regime-specific orientations has taken on a new degree of significance with the election of the Justin Trudeau-led Liberals; yet it is critical to think analytically beyond these partisan dynamics and transitions. In short, as suggested in this volume's Introduction, the need to "rethink" Canadian aid extends far beyond technical and institutional reforms or contemporary controversies over particular shifts in thematic emphasis, as salient as these may be. It must also involve an explicit emphasis on situating the study and practice of Canadian aid in relation to the diverse means through which Canadians engage with the people and countries of the global South.

In this Conclusion, we use the theme of "partnership" to sketch the multiple ways in which Canadian aid policies should be recast as policies of and for development cooperation. More specifically, we identify four domains of partnership that the various contributions in this collection point towards, explicitly or implicitly. These are:

foundations of development partnerships, partnerships within the changing international aid regime, partnerships with key “stakeholders” in Canadian society, and intra-governmental partnerships (sometimes captured by the idea of “horizontal” or “whole-of-government” collaboration). The dynamics within these four overlapping domains serve both as descriptive frames for analyzing Canadian development cooperation as it is or has been, and as prescriptive frames for thinking about Canadian development policies as they could or should be. They also highlight the changing *structures* — material, ideational, and institutional — within which Canadian development efforts are situated and the diversifying range of *agents* that undertake those efforts. While the reflections that follow can be no more than suggestive, they serve to highlight key directions for future research.

### Rethinking Development Partnerships

The idea of partnership has long been ubiquitous, dynamic, and contested in development cooperation, both within Canada and internationally (Black and Tiessen 2007; Brinkerhoff 2002; Fowler 1997; Macdonald 1995; Pearson 1969). Development scholars sharply critiqued the term in the 1990s and 2000s for the degree to which its benign image of equality and reciprocity masked deeply inequitable structures of power. However, the partnership motif has resurged and deepened in recent development praxis. There are several closely related explanations for this. First, it has been a core theme in several milestones within the international aid regime, beginning with its incorporation as the eighth Millennium Development Goal (MDG) in 2000 (“Develop a Global Partnership for Development”), running through the adoption by the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011 of a new “Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation,” and culminating most recently in the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, with SDG 17 calling for sustainable multi-stakeholder partnerships (see respectively United Nations 2013; OECD 2013; United Nations 2016). Second, it captures both the inevitability and the necessity of complex collaborative relationships in the pursuit of development — and the costs of failure to achieve them. Third, it brings attention to a variety of relatively novel actors and relationships that have become crucial features of contemporary development cooperation. These include: “emerging economy aid providers” (e.g., Brazil, China, India, Turkey)

and South–South cooperation; private sector actors and public–private partnerships; the “new philanthropists” associated with wealthy and highly focused foundations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Bishop and Green 2011; Brown 2012b; Kharas 2012; McGoey 2014; Quadir 2013; Ramdas 2011); and civil society organizations, now recognized as “independent development actors in their own right” (*Accra Agenda for Action* 2008). These trends have increasingly challenged and complicated the work of traditional bilateral and multilateral development agencies. They have also provided a key justification for various institutional reorganizations — notably the incorporation of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) into the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD, now Global Affairs Canada, or GAC).

A focus on the main dimensions of partnership as they relate to the evolving dynamics of Canadian development cooperation is particularly apt, for two reasons. First, it is critical that the new architecture of the integrated GAC, and specifically its role in development cooperation, be informed by these trends. Second, Canadian non-state development actors, both old and new, face unprecedented challenges requiring fresh and sustained analyses, particularly in the context of the new, ambitious, and encompassing SDGs. The chapters in this collection serve to highlight some of the questions, issues, and relationships that need to be (re)considered.

### ***Foundations of Development Partnerships***

In a policy domain centrally concerned with reducing global poverty and deprivation, it is unsurprising that several chapters in this collection highlight the need to revisit the ethical foundations of Canadian aid, moving it from simplistic and often paternalistic underpinnings to more just and equitable ones (Black, Cameron, den Heyer). In particular, cosmopolitan ethics and narrative frames can be used to interrogate traditional motifs such as enlightened self-interest, charity, generosity, and North–South dichotomies, or the newer emphasis on mutual benefit that emerging economy aid providers and South–South cooperation have brought to the fore. In doing so, these frames expose the contested normative underpinnings that guide, or should guide, Canada’s engagement with the developing world. They also highlight the relationship between the positive duty to “do good” through the provision of aid and the relatively neglected but arguably more important negative duty to “do no harm” in the various

other ways Canadians engage people and countries in the global South (e.g., through trade, investment, immigration, environment, security, and defence — see Cameron, this volume).

Other contributors, however, are skeptical about the need for an explicitly ethical foundation for Canadian aid. Indeed, Chapnick argues that a long-term and “enlightened” notion of self-interest derived from the realist tradition is not only sufficient, but also far more likely to persuade the policy and political elites that are pivotal to policy renewal, given the relative indifference of Canadian public opinion to development aid and the resulting absence of public pressure for improved performance. Smillie, while not directly engaging the logic of cosmopolitan or “humane internationalist” ethics, has made the case for “self-interest, properly understood” as the most persuasive foundation for Canadian aid (see also McAskie 2013). In his contribution to this collection, he stresses the many more basic and pragmatic ways in which Canadian aid policy could be reformed to produce improved development results in the field (and far from the tarmac), along with a more mature and sensible policy debate.

Flowing from this discussion of ethical foundations is a critical analysis of “donor–recipient” or “North–South” development partnerships. As Brown (2012a; also Lalonde 2009) has emphasized, “aid effectiveness” became a pervasive theme in Canadian and international development policy and practice during the first decade of the new century, epitomized by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD 2005) to which Canada remains formally committed. A question posed (implicitly or explicitly) by several authors is whether the previous Conservative government, in stressing its own conception of effectiveness and the need to place aid policy at the service of Canadians, engineered a *de facto* policy shift that sharply diverged from Canada’s international commitments to aid effectiveness (Audet and Navarro-Flores, Brown, Goyette, Macdonald, and Ruckert). The corollary question, in light of the Conservatives’ defeat in the 2015 federal election, is whether the Liberals will take Canadian development aid policy back towards greater conformity with international norms of aid effectiveness. Brown (this volume), for one, is skeptical about the extent of such a reversion, both because of domestic conditions as the Canadian economy falters and because the donor community as a whole has become more concerned with seeking national advantage through aid.



Assuming they continue to hold some influence however, the Paris principles of aid effectiveness also highlight the linked objectives of “harmonization” among donors and “alignment” with “recipient-owned” development objectives. The emphasis on recipient ownership could anchor a more genuine partnership with recipient governments and societies. Yet, in practice, this emphasis has been compromised by the intense and power-laden politics of inter-donor harmonization. In short, given the difficulty of achieving agreement on “harmonized” policies and practices among donors, the ability of recipient governments to insist on the primacy of *their* priorities is likely to be limited (den Heyer). Moreover, because donor–recipient partnerships are principally with developing country governments, their responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of relatively poor and marginalized communities and people, or even elected officials, is often doubtful. This makes the perspectives of scholars and “partners” from developing countries vitally important. The relative absence of these perspectives is a key limitation of this collection. In future research, it will be necessary to probe the choice and character of relationships between Canadian aid policies and programs on the one hand, and Canada’s designated “countries of focus” on the other. What would more substantial recipient country ownership mean within these privileged bilateral relationships, and what are the prospects of achieving it?

### ***Partnerships within the International Aid Regime***

To what extent has Canada’s approach to foreign aid and development cooperation been shaped by transnational norms and dynamics, aggregated within what has been termed the international aid regime? Several contributors (Carment and Samy, Clark-Kazak, den Heyer, Swiss) consider the impact of the increasingly complex array of actors in this regime on where and how Canada can both follow and lead – and the continuing relevance of the aid regime itself in the wider context of development cooperation. Historically, Canada has been relatively responsive to the changing thematic and administrative priorities, or fashions, of the aid regime, orchestrated largely through the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD/DAC) and other multilateral organizations (Black, Thérien, and Clark 1996). Occasionally, Canada has provided a significant measure of leadership on key themes such as gender equality (Swiss 2012; Tiessen, this

volume). In other cases, such as Fragile and Conflict Affected States, promising opportunities for leadership have arguably been squandered (Carment and Samy; see also Baranyi and Khan). Meanwhile, the process of and opportunities for influence within the regime have become increasingly complex as the regime itself has mutated to encompass a range of significant new players. One prospective focus for future research, therefore, is how “traditional” OECD donors, Canada among them, can and should adjust to their diminished centrality in the aid regime, and what opportunities persist for thematic leadership, especially in multilateral settings and in such key areas as climate change and food security. A second focus is how we understand the roles and influence of emerging economy aid providers and South–South cooperation – both individually and collectively (Bilal 2012; Schoeman 2011). In this new context, for example, should Canada attempt to resurrect its traditional (if intermittent) role as interlocutor, in this case between DAC and non-DAC aid providers? Should it explore and exploit new opportunities for “trilateral development cooperation,” combining established and emerging donors in support of recipient governments and communities (e.g., Besada and Tok 2016; Masters 2014)?

Finally, what is the record of Canadian collaboration with the “new philanthropists” and other private actors in the international context? What is the balance of risk and opportunity in these novel partnerships (see Black and O’Bright 2016)? How do partnerships at this level affect the prospects for southern “ownership” of their own development agendas? And what role will the newly recast GAC play in relation to the emerging, multi-dimensional “Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation” launched at Busan (Kharas 2012; Kindornay and Samy 2012) and elaborated in the ambitious SDGs’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development? How will the new Canadian international policy architecture affect the propensity and capacity of Canadian representatives to play an influential role in this new context?

In general, these forward-looking issues receive less attention in this collection than they warrant. To be sure, Tiessen’s discussion of the Harper government’s approach to maternal and child health issues through its Muskoka Initiative, which she regards as a backward step in Canada’s approach to gender issues, indirectly highlights the relevance of partnerships with the Gates Foundation and other non-traditional philanthropic and multilateral agencies.

However, as bilateral aid budgets tighten and as these novel actors further refine their already formidable agenda-setting capabilities, greater attention needs to be paid to their roles in relation to Canadian development cooperation, particularly as the Trudeau government defines its own approach to development policy.

### ***Partnerships with Key Canadian Stakeholders***

Historically, the best-known Canadian development partnerships were with Canadian civil society and non-governmental organizations (CSOs/NGOs). Indeed, CIDA was long regarded as a leader in responsive partnerships with this vibrant sector of Canadian society (Morrison 1998, 21), which was in turn closely connected with CSO partners in developing countries. Beginning in the mid-1990s, however, and accelerating under the Harper Conservative government, Canada's community of development-oriented CSOs has faced a series of unprecedented challenges, including growing intra-sectoral divisions and estrangement from the government of the day (Plewes and Tomlinson 2013; Smillie 2012). At the same time, the civil society landscape has become more diverse as diaspora groups from developing countries have become an increasingly important locus of partnerships, offering new opportunities and challenges through such connections as remittances, advocacy, and inter-community relationships (Brinkerhof 2008; Carment, Nikolko, and Douhaibi 2013). In this context, it is particularly timely and important to take stock of the sector's achievements and capacities and to begin to map the changes required for renewed partnerships with both Canadian and transnational non-governmental partners. A starting point would be an assessment of the impact of the new partnership policy adopted by the Harper government in early 2015 (FATDC 2015) – a policy which was generally welcomed by CSOs as a step towards repairing the damaged relationship between their sector and the federal government. Here as elsewhere, however, it will be some time before it becomes clear how the new Liberal government will choose to retain and/or modify the approach set out in this policy.

More recently, in parallel with the international aid regime as a whole, much attention has been focused on partnerships with the private sector, including a wide array of actors and issues that often fall under the broad rubric of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Black and O'Bright 2016; Felsen and Besada 2013; Kindornay and Reilly-King 2013; SCFAID 2012). In fact, the Canadian government

has prioritized the role of the private sector in development cooperation policies since the early 2000s, albeit under several different labels. Following the election of a majority Conservative government in 2011, this emphasis became more forthright and strategic — as reflected in the government’s controversial decision to initiate several collaborative projects involving prominent Canadian mining companies and NGOs (Besada and Martin 2013; Blackwood and Stewart 2012). This trend presents important new challenges to all partners, notably (though not only) in relation to the extractive sector, where Canada is a world leader and the activities of its “corporate citizens” have important — and controversial — developmental and societal repercussions.

These shifting societal and state–society dynamics are an important recurring theme in this collection. Several contributors analyze the increasing emphasis of the Harper government on partnerships with the private sector — particularly extractive companies — and how this shaped country and regional as well as project priorities (Brown, Goyette, Macdonald, and Ruckert). They discuss how these and other shifts affected relationships with and among civil society actors, leading to divisions between those (often large and multinational) NGOs that are prepared to collaborate with extractive companies and the government on specially funded projects that, among other things, burnish the image of Canadian extractives in their host communities, and those NGOs that are sharply critical of these initiatives and the record of the extractive sector more generally. Others note the controversial way that the Conservative government appeared to have favoured some, particularly religious and “proselytizing” NGOs, over other, secular and/or “progressive” ones in its funding decisions, with dubious implications for the oft-repeated priority of effectiveness (Audet and Navarro-Flores). Yet other authors counsel caution in overstating the significance and durability of these trends, given limited evidence of “commercialization” and the continued salience of more ethical, poverty-focused priorities in the policy practices of the Harper government (Baranyi and Khan, Swiss). The election of the Trudeau Liberals raises new questions about the depth and durability of these trends. Can we expect to see a reversion to what Brown (this collection) characterizes as a less commercialized approach in the first half of the 2000s, or will the trend towards commercialization persist, given the fiscal and competitive pressures facing the Trudeau government?

### ***Intra-Governmental Partnerships***

Finally, the question of how Canadian governmental institutions can and should concert their efforts to maximize development effectiveness has become a major preoccupation of both practitioners and analysts (e.g., Kindornay 2011). Most immediately, the Harper government's abrupt announcement in its March 2013 budget of the merger of Canada's main aid agency, CIDA, with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to form a new, integrated department encompassing diplomacy, trade, and development (now GAC) continues to reverberate. This new intra-departmental "partnership" (or "forced marriage" — Swiss 2013; see also Foster 2013) could ultimately enhance the coherence of Canadian engagement with development issues, but it could also reinforce the subordination of development concerns and aid resources to Canadian commercial and security priorities. In an important sense, this debate circles back to the changes occurring in the international aid regime, with many pro-business commentators arguing that Canada and other traditional OECD donors are losing out to emerging economy aid providers, such as Brazil, China, India, and Turkey, that are less constrained in linking aid to commercial objectives. On the other hand, others argue that Canada's "comparative advantage" in the global South is best advanced by a reputation for generosity and responsiveness in its development cooperation policies. Tracking how the integrated administrative arrangements of the merged department navigate these crosscurrents, and at the same time informing the thinking of those responsible for development issues within GAC, will be a key priority for Canadian development researchers.

For most authors in this collection, it remains too soon to tell what the consequences of the merger will be, particularly now that a new federal government has been installed — though several have ventured informed commentaries on what to expect (Brown 2013; McLeod Group 2015). Early indicators include a workforce adjustment that saw the elimination of over 300 CIDA positions (Duggal 2014) and the discarding of CIDA hiring pools (Foster 2014), exacerbating concerns about the privileging of commercial and diplomatic expertise over development knowledge and priorities. While many contributors remain critical of the merger decision and concerned that it will strongly reinforce the trend towards commercialization, others see it as "a significant opportunity to effect real political change" towards a better performing aid program, whatever that

might entail (Chapnick). Regardless, this new institutional structure and the bureaucratic partnership it internalizes clearly represent an important conjuncture that will have lasting effects on the future trajectory of Canadian development cooperation. Close attention will have to be paid to a range of novel dynamics, including the new balance of bureaucratic interests that will be brought to bear on development policy making and the personnel policies and career paths within GAC. They could play an important medium-term role in shaping the extent to which Canada's development cooperation adopts a truly developmental perspective *versus* one shaped principally by diplomatic or commercial imperatives.

Beyond GAC, however, there has been a longer-standing concern with the need to “de-centre” aid within development policy, and enhance “policy coherence for development” (Brown 2015; Büllens and Kindornay 2013). Much of this concern arose in the context of post-9/11 efforts to foster “whole-of-government” collaboration in key fragile and conflict-affected states, notably Afghanistan, Haiti, and Sudan (Baranyi and Paducel 2012; Carment and Samy, this volume). Though efforts to understand and respond to the critical interplay of development and security dynamics have intensified since 9/11, the more or less explicit pursuit of “complementarity” between development and security policies — and bureaucracies — has been on the agenda of Canadian governments for several decades, as Massie and Roussel show. Moreover, Baranyi and Khan argue for the need to take closer account of the security–development relationship and to pursue conflict-sensitive development policies in a much wider array of Southern partners than the focus on the more extreme cases of state fragility has heretofore contemplated. This, in turn, challenges an array of both security- and development-oriented government agencies (including GAC, Defence, Public Safety, CSIS, and the RCMP) to explore the potential, risks, and limits of more systematic collaboration.

The imperative of intra-governmental partnership is much broader, however, than the “security–development nexus,” encompassing the need to promote coherence (or at least mitigate contradictions) between trade, investment, environment, immigration, health, agriculture, and natural resource policies towards the developing world, to cite some of the more obvious examples. This suggests a requirement for greater collaboration between the relevant departments and agencies — an exceptionally challenging task

that the integrated structure of GAC might or might not enable. Moreover, in the Canadian context, policy coherence for development requires attentiveness to the important responsibilities of provincial governments, including their various engagements with developing countries. For instance, the Quebec government, under the Parti Québécois, announced plans to create its own international development agency (Salvet 2013), and maintains an “International Solidarity” branch within its Ministry for International Relations and *la Francophonie*. Studying the challenges and prospects for intra-governmental partnerships in development cooperation must therefore be a key focus of Canadian development researchers in the years ahead. Moreover, the imperative to “do no harm” (or at least minimize it) – whether understood as a consequence of cosmopolitan ethical imperatives or simply as prudent policy in pursuit of a more secure and prosperous international system (see Cameron and Chapnick respectively) – is a good place from which to launch this inquiry.

The Canadian government’s technical solutions (notably the whole-of-government approach and CIDA’s absorption into DFATD/GAC) could fit within the cosmopolitan ethical framework, but appear to lack a commitment to cosmopolitan values and the political will to carry through with the “do no harm” imperative. DFATD’s most substantial policy paper under the Harper Conservatives, the *Global Markets Action Plan*, made no mention of poverty reduction or a development perspective; its only reference to foreign aid expressed a desire to “leverage development programming to advance Canada’s trade interests” (FATDC 2013, 14). To the extent that the plan promoted policy coherence, it was not for development, but rather to ensure that “all diplomatic assets of the Government of Canada will be marshalled on behalf of the private sector” (FATDC 2013, 11). Thus, while some authors (e.g., Chapnick) would argue that a more coherent policy process guided by “enlightened realist” thinking could yield significant advances for development policy, others argue that intra-governmental policy coherence may actually be “a bad thing” for development (Brown 2014). As Black suggests in this collection, ensuring the “relative autonomy” of an intellectually and politically robust capacity for thinking about the world through a development lens and advocating the importance of this perspective within the international policy process will be an important marker of whether



“policy coherence for development” represents a step forwards or backwards for Canada’s role in global development.

## Conclusion

We have entered a new era of fluidity and uncertainty in development cooperation, globally and in Canada. Yet many of the challenges that foreign aid has aspired to address — poverty, inequality, marginalization, and (in the critical theoretical tradition) the quest for greater human solidarity and emancipation — remain stubbornly entrenched or elusive. Similarly, while aid has clearly diminished in significance relative to other forms of exchange with the developing world (e.g., trade, investment, migration, remittances), it nevertheless remains an important component of the wider politics of global development, with a historical record of both beneficial and retrograde repercussions. In this fluid and contingent context, the chapters in this collection should be understood as stimulants to a more open, expansive, and constructive conversation about Canada’s changing role in development cooperation and how it can be strengthened. The urgency and opportunities associated with this conversation have been further reinforced by the changing political landscape in Ottawa, as well as the adoption of the ambitious SDG framework at the UN.

There is no easy solution to the problems that bedevil Canadian foreign aid or the challenges that lie ahead. This chapter’s use of a “partnership” lens focuses on four specific dimensions of development cooperation that warrant close attention: the foundations of development partnerships, partnerships within the changing international aid regime, partnerships with key “stakeholders” in Canadian society, and intra-governmental partnerships. Only through solid, theoretically informed empirical research, analysis, debate, and renewal in all four areas will it be possible to do justice to the challenge of rethinking not only Canadian aid, but also Canada’s broader role in development cooperation.

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