

# Symposium Report

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## Rethinking Canadian Aid: Foundations, Contradictions and Possibilities<sup>1</sup>

*Centre for Foreign Policy Studies*

*with*

*The School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa*

*Report prepared by:*

*David Morgan*

*Dalhousie University*

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## Executive Summary

This report summarizes the key findings and insights of a two-day symposium entitled “Rethinking Canadian Aid,” held 21-22 September 2013 at Dalhousie University. Hosted by the Centre for Foreign Policy Studies (Dalhousie University) in conjunction with the School of Political Studies (University of Ottawa), this symposium explored the principles, motivations and justifications of Canadian international aid efforts. The objective was to foster debate and advance scholarly analysis of Canadian aid policy, a task that became even more relevant and urgent with the merger of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) into the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in March 2013. Specifically, the symposium set out to examine: (1) the first principles of Canadian aid; (2) the context and structure of Canadian international development efforts; and (3) the contributions that Canadian assistance could make. Its ultimate aim was to contribute to the ‘rethinking’ of Canadian aid, by bringing together academics and policy analysts with a diverse range of thematic and regional expertise.

Reflecting the principal themes emerging from the symposium discussions, this report is divided into four sections. The first section explores the *first principles* of Canadian development assistance, including the motivations underlying its aid policy, its rationale and purpose, and the role of ethics and interests. It questions the prevalence of the humane internationalist perspective in Canada, which over the past 30 years has assumed that this country *should* provide foreign aid as part of its ethical obligation to help those in need. While this tradition remains relevant to the debate today, the report concludes that diverse and sometimes competing motives have in fact underpinned the delivery of Canadian aid. The participants agreed that there must be greater clarity, consistency and coherence to the first principles that guide Canadian aid policy, as Canada’s development assistance efforts have traditionally lacked this sense of direction or purpose.

The second section traces the *structure and context* of Canadian aid, exploring how disparate ‘first principles’ have been put into practice and what factors have influenced Canadian development assistance policies. It first considers current trends in the formulation and delivery of Canadian aid, focusing on the prominence of aid effectiveness and policy coherence discourses in recent years. It then investigates the various international, national and societal dynamics that have influenced Canada’s aid policy and have contributed to its securitization, commercialization and politicization over time. It ends with the troubling conclusion that Canadian aid policy – always buffeted by competing interests and priorities – has become increasingly susceptible to various political, economic and ideological interests, while simultaneously closing off space for the input of civil society and public opinion.

The third section reviews the *contributions* of Canadian development assistance, assessing its role in international development and its strengths and weaknesses in recent years. Focusing on such thematic priorities as food security, gender, war-affected children and youth, fragile and failed states, and the extractive sector, it reveals a number of emerging and persistent weaknesses in Canadian aid policy and practice. A lack of clear direction and purpose, weak and declining leadership, and reluctance to ‘think big’ all emerged as central themes. For this reason, the participants generally agreed that the impact of Canadian aid policy in the issue areas addressed has been modest at best, and hampered by its inconsistent and, at times, ambiguous approach.

The concluding section provides suggestions for *rethinking Canadian aid*, based on the insights and contributions of the symposium discussions. It highlights the need to revisit and

clarify the first principles of Canadian aid policy in order to understand better the motivations and foundations of Canada's development assistance efforts. It calls for a coherent and principled approach to development, based on a clear policy framework, strong leadership at the ministerial level, greater learning, and the will to think big in policy commitments and funding allocations. Finally, it recognizes the importance of engaging with a range of actors in the formulation and delivery of aid, including civil society, aid researchers, aid recipients, and non-traditional development actors such as the private sector and diaspora communities. All of these factors, it concludes, are necessary first steps in a much longer conversation on the future of Canadian aid policy.

## Introduction

Why does Canada provide foreign aid? How has Canadian aid policy evolved over time and what has been its impact? How does it relate to other diplomatic, security and economic policy goals – and how *should* it relate? What have been the key determinants in shaping Canadian aid policy? What role have state and non-state actors played in its provision? With Canadian aid policy entering a period of significant restructuring, these questions have grown in prominence within policy circles, civil society and academia. Each is now struggling to keep up in a rapidly changing environment. For this reason, the Centre for Foreign Policy Studies at Dalhousie University, in conjunction with the School of Political Studies at the University of Ottawa, hosted a two-day symposium to revisit the principles, motivations and justifications of Canadian international aid efforts. Bringing together a diverse range of thematic and regional expertise (see Appendices), the objective of this symposium was to foster debate and advance scholarly analysis on Canada’s development efforts, with the ultimate aim of ‘rethinking Canadian aid.’

As one participant noted, however, Canadian aid has already been ‘rethought’ to a certain extent. In the omnibus budget legislation of March 2013, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the primary architect of Canada’s aid policy since 1968, was folded into the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, forming the new Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD). This surprise announcement sparked considerable debate and commentary across the country, with many fearing that CIDA’s traditional commitment to poverty reduction would be subsumed by policies advancing Canadian commercial and political national interests. Others have been more sympathetic, seeing an opportunity to align Canadian aid policy within a broader and more coherent development agenda.<sup>2</sup> In any case, it is clear that this country’s development assistance efforts have entered a period of significant and fundamental reform. Although the original grant proposal for the Rethinking Canadian Aid symposium was conceived before the March announcement, these recent changes only added to the timeliness of this event. The symposium was thus approached as an opportunity to revisit the foundations of Canadian aid policy, investigate its contradictions, and explore various possibilities moving forward.

To this end, the participants of this symposium set out to examine: (1) the first principles of Canadian aid; (2) the structure and context of Canadian international development efforts; and (3) the contributions that Canadian assistance has and could make. More specifically, they first explored the motivations underlying Canadian aid policy, its rationale and purpose, and the role of ethics and interests in this regard. They then assessed the evolution of Canadian aid, looking into how these principles and rationales have been put into practice and what factors have influenced Canadian development assistance policies. Finally, they considered Canada’s role in international development, reviewing the different priorities that Canadian aid has aimed to meet in the world and its specific contributions to date.

Using this same thematic framework, this report will summarize and analyze the principal insights and perspectives emerging from the symposium discussions. The first three sections will address the themes identified above considering, in turn, the first principles of Canadian aid, the evolution and structure of Canadian development assistance efforts, and Canada’s role in

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Lloyd Axworthy, “Ending CIDA is a bold and admirable move,” *The Globe and Mail*, 22 March 2013; David Hornsby, “The cost of ad hoc aid,” *OpenCanada.org*, 22 April 2013; Janice Gross Stein, “Ending CIDA’s independence can only make our foreign policy more coherent,” *The Globe and Mail*, 22 March 2013; Roland Paris, “CIDA merger is fine, but fundamental questions of policy remain unresolved,” *The Globe and Mail*, 22 March 2013.

international development. The fourth and final section will discuss how these insights can help to inform the formulation and delivery of Canada's development assistance policy, and will provide suggestions for rethinking Canadian aid.

## The First Principles of Intervention

As was clear from much of the discussion, the humane internationalist perspective has been highly influential in framing the debate around development assistance. Referring to the ethical obligations of industrialized states and their citizens towards those beyond their borders,<sup>3</sup> this perspective is largely driven by the assumption that foreign aid *should* be the product of 'right intentions,' mainly the ethical and cosmopolitan desire to help those who are less fortunate. As espoused by Cranford Pratt, and recounted by one of the symposium presenters, humane internationalism is seen to have robust, but eroding, support in Canadian political culture. It is broadly supported and sustained by a coalition of civil society organizations – the 'counter-consensus' – in opposition to the more narrowly defined self-interests of the 'dominant political class.' According to this participant, this normative and prescriptive framing of Canadian aid policy has been central to the debate around development assistance for the past 30 years.

The presenter further argued, however, that the humane internationalist tradition has also become a significant obstacle in advancing the conversation on Canadian aid policy. The symposium participants largely agreed that this tradition has never been as robust as once thought by its advocates. They highlighted, for instance, the frequent compromise of development assistance goals in the face of other foreign policy priorities. They further contended that it has helped to foster a simplistic, and ultimately false, dichotomy between the ideals of humane internationalists, on the one hand, and the self-interested motives of realists, on the other. The humane internationalist perspective, they acknowledged, has never been divorced from self-interest; rather, the ethical obligation to help has been seen as a true reflection of the long-term interests of Canadian society. For this reason, one presenter provocatively questioned whether we need to consider ethics at all within this discussion, positing that many realists typically advocate the same ends as humane internationalism but through the lens of self-interest. Finally, the participants noted that the debate that has unfolded around the humane internationalist tradition has been highly introverted in nature. It has centred primarily on the political skirmishes in Ottawa, and the efforts of CIDA to protect its relative autonomy and altruistic objectives from the persistent incursions of the Department of Foreign Affairs. In the process, this debate has focused almost exclusively on Ottawa, neglected the impact of Canadian aid policies in developing countries, and made few attempts to incorporate the voices of recipients.

Despite its many problems, however, the symposium participants acknowledged that the ideals of the humane internationalist perspective have largely persisted as a justification of Canada's development assistance, and must therefore be considered in relation to other motives for Canadian aid policy. Most notably, they pointed to the enduring tension between ethics and the desire to 'do good' on the one hand, and the concern with national interests and meeting other foreign policy priorities on the other. Recognizing the complex interplay of these

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<sup>3</sup> See Cranford Pratt, "Canada: A Limited and Eroding Internationalism," in Cranford Pratt (ed.), *Internationalism Under Strain: The North-South Policies of Canada, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

dynamics, they concluded that there is no clear ‘moral compass’ for Canadian aid policy. Instead, policymaking around development assistance has oscillated between the poles of ethics and self-interest, depending on the national and international context. Moreover, they observed that Canadian aid policy cannot be considered in isolation from other development processes – for example, trade, investment, migration and remittances – but must be seen as influencing and being influenced by other aspects of Canadian foreign policy.

Given these inherent tensions in the first principles of Canadian aid policy, one presenter suggested that Canada’s development assistance should, at a minimum, strive to do no harm in its provision. He argued that the humane internationalist perspective has typically emphasized the positive obligations of industrialized states to do good in the world, while neglecting their negative duties not to cause harm in the first place. In contrast, a truly cosmopolitan perspective on Canadian aid would adhere to both its positive and negative obligations, recognizing that the failure to live up to the latter may often be a greater affront to human dignity. It further suggests that aid cannot be considered in isolation from other development processes; rather, scholars and policymakers must look at how all aspects of Canadian foreign policy affect the ‘developing world.’ This ‘do no harm’ perspective generated considerable interest, but was also challenged on a number of fronts. One participant, for instance, suggested that while CIDA may be doing much to avoid causing harm in its day-to-day work, these efforts might not be visible to the outside observer. Alternatively, another participant argued that this agenda may encourage risk aversion among development actors, by compelling them continually to weigh the possible consequences of their actions. Notwithstanding these critiques, it is clear that there must be greater awareness of the capacity of aid to do both good and harm in the world.

Finally, one presenter observed that scholars should delve deeper into the discourse of aid, tracing the hidden and invisible forms of power that inform the first principles of Canadian aid. Has the focus on humane internationalism, for instance, obscured underlying power dynamics, shaping who is involved in the provision of aid and how? Some suggested that this tradition invokes an image of ‘do-good’ Canadians in international politics, leading to the conflation of aid with charity and the perpetuation of a ‘saviour-victim’ dichotomy. Others noted that the voices of southern recipients have been largely absent within the humane internationalist tradition, leaving little space for their demands to be heard within the supply-side provision of aid. This presenter argued that these hidden and invisible forms of power are apparent throughout the aid regime, both nationally and internationally, thereby limiting the possibility of transformation and pulling instead towards the continuation of more mainstream norms.

While many would argue that Canada *should* provide aid as part of its ethical obligation to help those in need, it is obvious from the above discussion that diverse and sometimes competing motives in fact underpin the delivery of Canadian aid. Nonetheless, while the ideals of the humane internationalist perspective have proven elusive and problematic in practice, this tradition continues to frame much of the debate around Canada’s development assistance efforts. The enduring appeal of this legacy suggests the continuing desire within this country to ‘do good’ on the international stage, and should be leveraged in any attempt to define better the guiding principles of Canadian aid policy. The participants further agreed that there must be greater consideration of how to reconcile aid priorities with other foreign policy interests and embrace the tension between the two. Clearly, Canada’s development assistance efforts have long been influenced by other aspects of the country’s foreign policy; however, we know comparatively less about how the former influences the latter or how the two might be successfully united. Above all, the participants agreed that there must be greater clarity, consistency and coherence to the first principles that guide Canadian aid policy. As will be

shown in the next section, Canadian aid has traditionally lacked this sense of clear direction or purpose. As a result, its provision has often been undercut by self-interested and partisan motives.

## From Principles to Practice: The Canadian Context

In recent years, two trends have become increasingly prominent in Canadian aid policy: its concentration around the notion of effectiveness; and its convergence with other foreign policy issue areas. Both are rooted in the broader, global shifts towards aid effectiveness and policy coherence,<sup>4</sup> and carry considerable potential to improve the delivery of Canadian aid. In the Canadian context, however, the tension between ethics and various political, economic and ideological interests has significantly shaped these trends, with the latter exerting considerable and increasing influence over their development. This section will first consider these recent trends in Canadian aid policy, as discussed by the symposium participants. It will then explore the various international, national and societal dynamics that have moulded their development and have contributed to the securitization, commercialization and politicization of Canada's development assistance efforts.

As one presenter suggested, aid effectiveness has become 'Job One' among CIDA (now DFATD) officials. In line with the principles of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which prioritize ownership, alignment, harmonization, mutual accountability and managing for results in an effort to improve cooperation and coherence among aid donors and partner countries, the discourse in Ottawa has shifted in recent years to emphasize the results and accountability of Canadian aid policy. This presenter, however, argued that the enormous emphasis on 'effectiveness' has led to what he called the "obsessive measurement disorder" of Canada's aid bureaucracy, as policy has become increasingly centralized, top-down, paper-bound, and conceived and managed entirely outside of the countries in which Canadian development efforts are taking place. Its focus has been almost entirely inward looking and has prioritized accountability to Canadian taxpayers as opposed to the recipients of aid themselves. With future funding often tied to evidence of effectiveness, risk aversion and a fear of failure have become commonplace among aid workers, at the expense of learning from past mistakes. In striving to enhance its effectiveness, he concluded, Canadian aid has become decidedly self-absorbed and badly out of sync with the realities faced in developing countries.

In addition to the centralization of Canadian aid, participants highlighted the growing convergence of Canadian aid policy with other foreign policy priority areas. In some cases, Canadian aid has been highly securitized, most notably in Afghanistan but also in several other Canadian aid programs. Two presenters traced this trend back to the early days of the Cold War, observing that Canadian aid has, over time, been used both to prevent further military escalation and to complement the use of force. The latter, in particular, was more fully institutionalized in Afghanistan with the adoption of the '3D' approach, now labelled the whole-of-government approach.<sup>5</sup> Participants observed that Canadian aid has also become increasingly

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<sup>4</sup> The concepts of aid effectiveness and policy coherence are both widely employed in development policy circles, and are captured in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and other notable declarations and high-level forums.

<sup>5</sup> The 3D approach called for the integration of defence, diplomacy and development, thus formally institutionalizing the security-development nexus in Canadian aid policy. The whole-of-government approach has, in principle,

commercialized, with industry and the private sector playing a greater role in development assistance. While not a new trend, this issue has been particularly prominent in recent years with the Conservative government's highly publicized shift towards the Americas at the expense of aid programs in Africa, and its active support for Canadian mining activities in developing countries.

While the securitization and commercialization of Canadian aid is in line with similar developments among other Western donors, and coincides with the growing emphasis on policy coherence within the international aid regime, many of the symposium participants worried that this trend has led to the instrumentalization of aid for other purposes. As several participants noted, many of the efforts to securitize or commercialize aid have effectively sidelined development goals in favour of advancing Canadian national interests. Some even argued that this approach has led to a new *de facto* aid policy in which aid is seen as little more than a tool of foreign policy. They thus highlighted the risks involved in striving for greater policy coherence, as integrated policies may often cohere around an agenda that is not at all related to poverty alleviation or development.

To a certain extent, the trends toward centralization and coherence have mirrored developments at the global level. Asking whether the country has been a 'maverick' or 'mockingbird' in its aid allocations, one presenter concluded that Canada has been inclined to mimic the actions of other donors and has increasingly resembled the aid programs of the United States and United Kingdom in recent years. His longitudinal analysis highlighted considerable change in the first principles of Canadian aid over time, as it has gradually gravitated away from humane internationalist ideals in response to an evolving international context. Similarly, other participants argued that the securitization of Canadian aid has broadly followed changing international norms around conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Among Western donors in particular, they noted, security and aid are now largely seen as complementary tools in the promotion, enforcement and maintenance of a Western-led liberal order.

Other participants focused more on the national-level determinants of these trends, emphasizing the partisan or ideological motivations of Canadian aid policy. Drawing on such examples as the shift in focus to Latin America, the increase in funding to religious organizations, and the open support for Canadian mining activities in developing countries, they found that funding has often been allocated on the basis of partisan political interest and ideology, as opposed to the effectiveness or quality of the policy or program. Two presenters, for instance, noted that Peru and Honduras were chosen as countries of focus in 2009, despite the former's classification as a middle income country and the latter's checkered political past and human rights record. They highlighted the various economic, political and ideological interests that prompted the increased support for these countries, including the free trade agreements that were later signed with both countries and Canadian mining interests in Peru. Another presenter argued that Canadian aid funding in support of the mining sector has been driven primarily by a desire to rehabilitate the image of Canadian mining companies and thus increase national investment opportunities overseas, while only marginally addressing issues of corporate social responsibility or community development. Numerous other examples of the instrumentalization of Canadian aid were discussed over the course of the symposium, all of which pointed to significant political interventionism in the administration of aid programs at the expense of a more explicit poverty reduction agenda.

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expanded this level of integration in order to allow for greater horizontal policy alignment across various areas of government.



In contrast to these political and partisan influences, several participants observed that civil society organizations (CSOs) and the broader public have been much less influential in setting the course of recent Canadian aid policy. One presenter noted that CSOs have faced a number of challenges in engaging the Canadian government on development issues in recent years, despite contributing well over one billion dollars a year to development aid. Most notably, he suggested that the current government has closed much of the policy space formerly available to CSOs by restricting their funding and centralizing control over foreign aid. Another participant observed that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating alongside Canadian mining operations in developing countries have been similarly constrained in their ability to criticize or challenge these activities, as their funding has been tied to their ongoing cooperation. At the same time, it was noted that international civil society and NGOs operating in Canada and other countries have increasingly targeted their advocacy at the transnational or global level, thereby limiting their capacity to engage Canadians at the local level. For these and other reasons, many of the participants shared the sentiment that Canadian civil society is currently in a ‘dark place,’ with many progressive organizations on the run or closing down and others reduced to the role of service providers.

The participants presented a similarly stark view of the role of public opinion in shaping or influencing Canadian aid policy. While acknowledging that the rhetorical support for aid remains high, even following the financial crisis of 2008, one presenter noted that the public has been largely disengaged on issues of Canadian aid policy. By and large, he argued, the Canadian public continues to demonstrate a poor understanding of foreign aid and its purposes, often conflating aid with charity and failing to appreciate the importance of poverty alleviation efforts abroad. Public disinterest, in turn, has led to minimal public consultation, so that the federal government has few incentives to improve the performance of aid. While similarly critical of the role of public opinion in Canadian aid policy, other participants observed that the perceptions and influence of new Canadians on aid policy has been largely unrecognized and understudied to date. They agreed that more research is needed to explore the perceptions of foreign aid among diaspora communities and the ways in which they engage home and host governments.

Together, these observations point to a troubling trend in Canada’s development assistance. With the centralization of aid and its convergence with other foreign policy priority areas, Canadian aid policy has become increasingly susceptible to various political, economic and ideological interests. Civil society, the traditional bastion of humane internationalist ideals, has been increasingly handicapped in its capacity to engage the government or the public, thus limiting its ability to moderate the pull of narrowly self-interested motives. The Canadian public, in turn, remains largely disengaged and ultimately disconnected from the activities of its government in this regard. In this context, Canadian aid has become increasingly commercialized and securitized, without necessarily advancing more traditional development objectives. While perhaps an old critique, some participants suggested that this trend has accelerated in recent years. Some went so far as to label Canadian aid a mere tool of foreign policy, which now primarily benefits Canadians and Canadian corporations at the expense of developing countries.

## **Canada’s Role in International Development**

With political, security and commercial interests exerting a greater influence on Canada’s development assistance efforts, has the direction and coherence of Canadian aid policy suffered as a result? Focusing on such thematic priorities as food security, gender, war-affected children

and youth, fragile and failed states, and the extractive sector, the participants painted a rather bleak picture of Canada's role in international development. A lack of clear direction and purpose, weak and declining leadership, reluctance to 'think big' and the limited impact of Canadian aid all emerged as central themes. This section will consider these emerging and persistent weaknesses in Canadian aid policy and practice. The concluding section will explore how these weaknesses can be addressed and corrected.

As is obvious from the above discussion, Canadian aid policy has been beset by a lack of purpose or direction. Most notably, without a solid ethical foundation or clear rationale for its development assistance efforts, this country's aid policy has often fallen victim to changing government priorities or has been subsumed by other foreign policy interests. Two presenters, for instance, argued that in spite of Canada's significant funding allocations to fragile and conflict-affected states, its approach in such challenging contexts has been "ad hoc, unstructured, and unsystematic" at best. Key tools and programs developed in the 1990s were not institutionalized after a change in government in 2006, resulting in a significant loss of capacity and leadership. A similar problem was observed in relation to gender equality, as the limited understanding of this term among policymakers has contributed to its recent 'erasure' from official discourse. The resulting confusion over priorities and language has contributed to significant delays in implementation and a shift away from the concept of gender. Food security, in turn, has surged and faded in Canadian policy over the years, depending on national and international priorities.

Focusing on the extractive sector, another panel noted that this country has consistently failed to connect its other foreign policy objectives to broader development goals. While observing that the extraction of resources is not necessarily incompatible with development, presenters worried that the Canadian government in recent years has used aid funds and the language of corporate social responsibility to promote Canadian mining companies abroad, rather than the interests of poor people in developing countries. Stronger regulation and greater support for global initiatives around mining, such as the African Mining Vision,<sup>6</sup> were viewed as essential to augmenting the accountability of mining companies. With no clear vision for Canada's development assistance efforts, Canadian governments, both past and present, have struggled to maintain a coherent and principled approach to the advancement of the country's aid policy.

With little direction at the national level, the participants observed that Canada's leadership on the world stage has suffered. As noted above, shifting government priorities in the areas of fragile and conflict-affected states and gender equality have significantly undermined Canada's institutional capacity in this regard, ensuring that it is no longer on the leading edge of these issue areas. In the area of children and youth affected by war, it was similarly noted that this country has lost much of the leverage it once had. Despite prioritizing the rights of children in the late 1990s and hosting the groundbreaking International Conference on War-Affected Children in 2000, one presenter argued that this country was unable to sustain much of this momentum. Once thought a leader in this area, Canada's absence has since been noticed in policy and diplomatic circles. More generally, the participants agreed that the country's gradual withdrawal from previous commitments and initiatives has adversely affected its leadership and reputation internationally.

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<sup>6</sup> The African Mining Vision was formulated and agreed upon by members of the African Union in 2011, and sets out an action plan for linking mining activities to continental development.

The symposium participants further suggested that Canada has been reluctant to think big in its aid policy, as it has frequently prioritized short-term initiatives over more long-term and holistic approaches. In the area of food security and rural development, declared a priority area in 2009, one presenter argued that Canadian aid policy has often “talked the pro-poor talk” while failing to “walk the redistribution walk.” More specifically, while food security and agricultural development have featured prominently in official discourse, CIDA has been reluctant to support structural change or agricultural reform on the ground. Instead, its approach has remained rooted in a neoliberal conception of food security that emphasizes market access and, as a result, has largely preserved local power structures. While some participants questioned whether a more transformative approach would be feasible or appropriate, this observation does reveal the significant gap between discourse and practice in Canada’s food security policy. In the area of war-affected children and youth, another presenter similarly noted that Canadian aid policy has gradually drifted away from the preventative and holistic approach adopted in the late 1990s, which emphasized the rights and security of children and youth, to a more narrow and issue-specific focus. In the process, however, it has sacrificed much of the innovation and strategic thinking that once defined Canada as a leader in this policy area.

As a result of its lack of direction, declining leadership and reluctance to engage in more transformative efforts, the participants generally agreed that the impact of Canadian aid policy in the issue areas addressed has been modest at best. At the national level, there has been little effort to establish a coherent and principled aid policy; as a result certain initiatives and priority areas have come and gone with changes in government. At the international level, it appears that Canada has lost much of the goodwill it once enjoyed, affecting both its leadership and its reputation. As a result, the impact and influence of Canadian aid policy has been limited and inconsistent, particularly on the ground in developing countries.

## **Rethinking Canadian Aid**

As Canadian aid policy enters the current period of reform and restructuring, it is clear from the above discussion that there are a number of lingering tensions, contradictions and weaknesses to be addressed. The first principles of intervention remain murky, resting somewhere between the poles of ethics and self-interest. International, national and societal factors all exert considerable pull over Canadian aid policy and further confuse the justifications for its provision. The direction and coherence of Canada’s development assistance efforts have suffered as a result, damaging the country’s reputation on the world stage and limiting the impact of Canadian aid on the ground.

There is therefore a clear need to rethink Canadian aid. Over the two days of the symposium, the participants identified a number of insights, challenges and reforms that may help to clarify the first principles of intervention, establish a coherent and principled approach to development, and engage the necessary actors in the provision of aid. These insights are captured below, and will hopefully help to inform a new debate about Canadian aid.

The need for leadership and clear policy direction emerged as a central theme of the symposium. Without a distinct rationale for Canadian aid or strong leadership at the ministerial level, the country’s aid policy has had little protection against changing government priorities or competing foreign policy interests. It has struggled to maintain any sense of coherence or direction, and has frequently succumbed to various security, commercial, or political imperatives. At the international level, Canada has largely mimicked the actions of other

Western donors, preferring to follow in the wake of others than set the course. However, if Canada wishes to become a ‘maverick’ as opposed to a ‘mockingbird,’ there is an obvious need to establish a clear and coherent policy framework, garner the support of key leaders at the ministerial level, think big in funding allocations, and follow through on policy commitments.

Sustained pressure from civil society, aid researchers and the Canadian public is further needed to generate the political will for a more disciplined approach to aid policy. Among the symposium participants, which included both academics and policy analysts, there was an obvious desire to work with the government, if given the opportunity to do so. At the same time, it was recognized that civil society organizations and aid researchers have a responsibility to engage the Canadian public, in order to increase their awareness and understanding of Canadian aid, increase pressure on a traditionally disengaged government, and initiate a broader discussion around global citizenship. This engagement was seen as essential to rousing greater political will and moving the conversation “beyond the echo chamber” encompassing the usual cast of policymakers and aid critics.<sup>7</sup>

The symposium participants further agreed that non-traditional development actors need to be brought into the rethinking of Canadian aid. The private sector, in particular, was identified as a key player in this regard. Several of the participants argued that there is a clear need to work with, rather than against, the private sector, in order to explore the potential complementarities with more traditional aid programming. Aid, they suggested, can no longer be considered in isolation from commercial, security, or political interests. Instead, it must be located alongside other aspects of Canada’s foreign policy, under the assumption that each can contribute to the broader development process. Diaspora communities were identified as another potential partner, in recognition of their considerable but largely unacknowledged contributions to development processes in their home countries. As was noted in the discussion, these communities may often have a different perspective on aid and development assistance, or may actively engage Canadian aid policy with respect to their home countries. As such, they clearly warrant further attention in research and policy. Any attempts to rethink Canadian aid, the participants concluded, should therefore expand the scope of the conversation, taking into consideration Canadian development efforts more broadly and the various actors that are central in this regard.

The voices of recipients must also be represented within the discussion concerning Canadian aid. As was noted above, the humane internationalist tradition that framed much of the debate around Canadian aid became highly introverted in nature, focusing on the political skirmishes in Ottawa as opposed to the impact of Canadian development assistance efforts on the ground. In much of the research on Canadian aid, this symposium included, the focus has largely remained on what Canada can provide, to the neglect of what is in demand in the global south. In any future research program, scholars must therefore look beyond this supply-side perspective in order to involve the voices of recipients and assess the impacts and consequences of Canadian aid on the ground. In the process, they may move the conversation beyond the insular, technical and political discussions that have shaped much of the research and policymaking on Canadian aid, and enhance awareness of the broader ramifications of this country’s development assistance efforts.

These insights all entail a more flexible approach to Canadian aid: one that is willing to work with different partners, adapt to changing international contexts, and learn from past mistakes. To date, the push for greater aid effectiveness and accountability has centred squarely on Ottawa, to the neglect of what is occurring on the ground in developing countries.

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<sup>7</sup> See Liam Swiss, “Beyond the Echo Chamber,” *OpenCanada.org*, 1 August 2013.

Policymakers and aid workers are often reluctant to admit failure, thus limiting understanding of what has and has not worked in the past. Denouncing this rigid, bureaucratic, and top-down approach, several participants called for greater learning and remembering in Canadian aid policy. They argued that we must expand the knowledge base around Canada's development assistance efforts, in order to capture lessons emerging from the field, foster institutional memory, and ultimately improve the effectiveness of Canadian aid. At the same time, it was noted that we must be humble about what we can accomplish, and recognize that aid is, at best, a catalyst for processes already occurring on the ground.

Above all, there is a clear need to revisit the motivations and first principles of Canadian aid policy. As was obvious from the symposium discussions, changes to the policy or organizational structure of Canadian aid will ultimately have limited effect without an understanding of the purposes and foundations of Canada's development assistance efforts. For this reason, we need to consider the wider discourse around aid, assessing the ethical and self-interested motives that have underpinned its provision and the ways in which these principles and power dynamics have been translated into practice. This understanding of the motivations and justifications of intervention is a necessary first step in a much longer conversation on the future of Canadian aid policy.

## Appendix A: Agenda

### Rethinking Canadian Aid: Foundations, Contradictions and Possibilities

Dalhousie University, 21-22 September 2013

Day 1
<p><b>Opening Remarks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ David Black, Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, Dalhousie University</li> <li>○ Stephen Brown, School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa</li> <li>○ Molly den Heyer, Coady International Institute, St. Francis Xavier University</li> </ul>
<p><b>THEME I: FIRST PRINCIPLES OF INTERVENTION</b></p>
<p><b>Panel 1: Foundations – Ethics and Obligations</b></p> <p>Chair: Laura Macdonald</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ David Black, “Humane Internationalism and the Malaise of Canadian Aid Policy”</li> <li>○ Adam Chapnick, “Refashioning Humane Internationalism in Twenty-first Century Canada”</li> <li>○ John Cameron, “Rethinking Thinking about Canadian Aid from a Cosmopolitan Perspective: From Aid Policy to Development Policy”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Panel 2: Policy Narratives and Aid Effectiveness</b></p> <p>Chair: Stephen Baranyi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Molly den Heyer, “Power and Policy: Lessons from Aid Effectiveness”</li> <li>○ Ian Smillie, “Results, Risks, Rhetoric and Reality: The Need for Common Sense in Canada’s Development Assistance”</li> </ul>
<p><b>THEME II: THE CANADIAN CONTEXT</b></p>
<p><b>Panel 3: Motivations and Justifications</b></p> <p>Chair: Rebecca Tiessen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Liam Swiss, “Mockingbird or Maverick? Canadian Aid Allocation in Longitudinal Perspective”</li> <li>○ Laura Macdonald and Arne Rückert, “Continental Shift: Rethinking Canadian Aid to the Americas”</li> <li>○ Justin Massie and Stéphane Roussel, “Preventing, Substituting, or Complementing the Use of Force? The Place of Foreign Aid in Canadian Strategic Culture”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Panel 4: Canadian, Civil Society and Aid Policy</b></p> <p>Chair: Dominique Caouette</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dominic Silvio, “Why Aid: Canadian Perception of the Usefulness of Canadian Aid in an Era of Economic Uncertainty”</li> <li>○ François Audet and Olga Navarro-Flores, “Changes in the Management of Canadian Foreign Aid: Tensions and Dynamics”</li> <li>○ Brian Tomlinson, “The Evolution of Canadian CSO Roles in Canadian Development Cooperation”</li> </ul>

<b>Day 2</b>
<b>THEME III: CANADA'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>
<p><b>Panel 5: The Evolution of Canadian Aid – Thematic Priorities</b></p> <p>Chair: Stéphane Roussel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dominique Caouette, “Rural Development and Food Security: Towards a Critical Understanding of CIDA’s Narratives and Policies Looking at the Philippines”</li> <li>○ Rebecca Tiessen and Krystal Carrier, “The Erasure of ‘Gender’ in Canadian Foreign Policy: Shaping the New Canadian State Identity”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Panel 6: Canadian Aid to Failed and Fragile States</b></p> <p>Chair: Liam Swiss</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Shelly Whitman, “Reassessing Canadian Foreign Policy and Development Aid for Children and Youth Affected by War”</li> <li>○ Stephen Baranyi and Themrise Khan, “Canada and Development in Lower-Profile Fragile States”</li> <li>○ David Carment and Yiagadeesen Samy, “Canada’s Fragile States Policy: What Have We Accomplished and Where Do We Go from Here?”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Panel 7: Canadian Aid and Extractive Industries</b></p> <p>Chair: John Cameron</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Gabriel Goyette, “Charity Begins at Home: The Extractive Sector as an Illustration of the New <i>de facto</i> Canadian Aid Policy”</li> <li>○ Stephen Brown “Undermining Foreign Aid: The Extractive Sector and the Commercialization of Canadian Development Assistance”</li> </ul>
<b>THEME IV: PLANNING THE NEXT STEPS</b>
<p><b>Canadian Aid Research Initiative Meeting</b></p> <p>Chair: David Black</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Discussion about the creation and funding of a research network on Canadian aid</li> </ul>

## Appendix B: Participants

**François Audet:** Professor and Scientific Director of the Canadian Research Institute on Humanitarian Crisis and Aid (OCCA), Université du Québec à Montréal, Montréal, QC. Email: [audet.francois@uqam.ca](mailto:audet.francois@uqam.ca)

**Stephen Baranyi:** Associate Professor, School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON. Email: [stephen.baranyi@uottawa.ca](mailto:stephen.baranyi@uottawa.ca)

**David Black:** Symposium Organizer and Director of the Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, Professor of Political Science, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS. Email: [david.black@dal.ca](mailto:david.black@dal.ca)

**Stephen Brown:** Symposium Organizer and Professor, School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON. Email: [brown@uottawa.ca](mailto:brown@uottawa.ca)

**John Cameron:** Associate Professor, Department of International Development Studies, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS. Email: [john.cameron@dal.ca](mailto:john.cameron@dal.ca)

**Jill Campbell-Miller:** PhD Candidate, Department of History, University of Waterloo, Waterloo ON. Email: [jmscampb@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:jmscampb@uwaterloo.ca)

**Dominique Caouette:** Associate Professor and Director of the Centre for the Study of East Asia, Université de Montréal, Montréal, QC. Email: [dominique.caouette@umontreal.ca](mailto:dominique.caouette@umontreal.ca)

**David Carment:** Professor, Norman Patterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON. Email: [david\\_carment@carleton.ca](mailto:david_carment@carleton.ca)

**Adam Chapnick:** Associate Professor, Canadian Forces College, Toronto, ON. Email: [chapnick@cfc.dnd.ca](mailto:chapnick@cfc.dnd.ca)

**Molly den Heyer:** Symposium Organizer and Senior Program Analyst, Coady International Institute, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, NS. Email: [mdenheye@stfx.ca](mailto:mdenheye@stfx.ca)

**Gabriel Goyette:** PhD Student and Coordinator of the Centre d'études de l'Asie de l'Est, Université de Montréal, Montréal, QC. Email: [gabrielgoyette@gmail.com](mailto:gabrielgoyette@gmail.com)

**Themrise Khan:** Independent Researcher and Policy Analyst, Ottawa, ON. Email: [khan.tnk@rogers.com](mailto:khan.tnk@rogers.com)

**Shannon Kindornay:** Researcher, North-South Institute, Ottawa, ON. Email: [skindornay@nsi-ins.ca](mailto:skindornay@nsi-ins.ca)

**Laura Macdonald:** Professor and Director of the Institute of Political Economy, Department of Political Science, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON. Email: [Laura\\_Macdonald@carleton.ca](mailto:Laura_Macdonald@carleton.ca)

**Andréanne Martel:** Researcher, Centre interdisciplinaire de recherche en développement international et société, Université du Québec à Montréal, Montréal, QC. Email: [martel.andreanne.2@uqam.ca](mailto:martel.andreanne.2@uqam.ca)



**Justin Massie:** Professor, Department of Political Science, Université du Québec à Montréal, Montréal, QC. Email: massie.justin@uqam.ca

**David Morgan:** Symposium Coordinator and PhD Student, Department of Political Science, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS. Email: david.morgan@dal.ca

**Olga Navarro-Flores:** Professor, Département de Management et Technologie, Université du Québec à Montréal, Montréal, QC. Email: navarro-flores.olga@uqam.ca

**Benjamin O’Bright:** PhD Student, Department of Political Science, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS. Email: benobright@dal.ca

**Fraser Reilly-King:** Policy Analyst, Canadian Council for International Co-operation, Ottawa, ON. Email: freillyking@ccic.ca

**Stéphane Roussel:** Professor, Department of Political Science, École nationale d’administration publique, Montreal, QC. Email: stephane.roussel@enap.ca

**Arne Rückert:** Research Associate, Institute of Population Health, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON. Email: aruckert@uottawa.ca

**Yiagadeesen Samy:** Associate Professor, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON. Email: yiagadeesen\_samy@carleton.ca

**Dominic Silvio:** PhD Candidate and Reference Librarian, Reference and Research Services, Killam Memorial Library, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS. Email: d.silvio@dal.ca

**Ian Smillie:** Development Consultant, Chair of the Diamond Development Initiative, and founding member of the McLeod Group. Email: ismillie@magma.ca

**Liam Swiss:** Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Memorial University, St. John’s, NL. Email: lswiss@mun.ca

**Rebecca Tiessen:** Associate Professor, School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON. Email: rebecca.tiessen@uottawa.ca

**Brian Tomlinson:** Executive Director, AidWatch Canada, NS. Email: brian.t.tomlinson@gmail.com

**Shelly Whitman:** Director, Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, Halifax, NS. Email: shelly@childsoldiers.org