

## A SAMARITAN STATE REVISITED: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CANADIAN FOREIGN AID

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ISBN 978-1-77385-041-2

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## CIDA and Aid to Africa in the 1990s: A Crisis of Confidence

*David Black*

There exists now such a degree of cynicism and despair about CIDA that the situation can fairly be described as having reached a crisis of confidence.

—Patrick Johnston, 2010<sup>1</sup>

The March 2013 announcement in the federal budget that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) would be “merged” with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) to form an integrated Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development (now Global Affairs Canada) was both immediately surprising and long anticipated. It was surprising because, true to form, Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s Conservative government had engaged in no discernible consultations with the traditional development policy community prior to this abrupt and far-reaching institutional restructuring. It was long anticipated because, for at least a decade, CIDA had been repeatedly portrayed as deeply and probably irredeemably flawed: chronically defensive, risk averse, inefficient, and lacking in clear vision or purpose. By 2013, therefore, it was widely perceived as (in John Stackhouse’s phrase) a “dead agency walking.”<sup>2</sup>

While much of the commentary on CIDA's weaknesses was arguably overstated, it had become entrenched by the mid-1990s largely because of the absence of robust rebuttals from the agency or its political masters. This, in turn, reflected an institution that had come to think of itself as uncertain, weak and vulnerable, and that lacked powerful advocates and allies among the political and administrative elites of the federal government. In bureaucratic politics terms, its "organizational essence" had become embattled and unclear. In short, it was suffering from a chronic, collective crisis of confidence.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter argues that, while the roots of this condition are long, they were dramatically deepened (and arguably rendered irreversible) by a series of blows over the course of the 1990s, many of them related to CIDA's policies and performance in Africa, where its programming was most heavily concentrated. Together, these blows led to chronic uncertainty and a lack of conviction concerning its organizational essence, making it an easy mark for the many skeptics and critics that beset it.

## "Organizational Essence" and the Aid Agency

In an article on "Canada and the Bureaucratic Politics of State Fragility," focusing on DFAIT and the Department of National Defence/Canadian Forces (DND/CF), Marie-Eve Desrosiers and Philippe Lagassé argue that "governmental organisations—agencies, services, or departments—are driven to defend their essences. In basic terms, an organizational essence is an identity that is reproduced through institutional practices, norms, and culture. An organizational essence is that which forms an organisation's *raison d'être*. It is a self-definition of what an agency, service, or department is, what it does, and how it does it, how it relates to other agencies, services, departments, and to the government or the state as a whole."<sup>4</sup> Drawing from the work of former US national security bureaucrats Morton Halperin and Priscilla Clapp,<sup>5</sup> Desrosiers and Lagassé contend that organizational essences are composed of "missions, roles, and capabilities." Like other socio-cultural identities, an organizational essence is not unchanging, nor is it uncontested. Nevertheless, it typically has a high level of stability and durability. Indeed, if it does not, this can be seen as a sign of institutional infirmity.

If we accept that such essences are key determinants of the health and behaviour of public sector institutions, what sort of essence can we ascribe to CIDA? As anyone familiar with the agency will quickly realize, and as the various chapters in this collection make clear, this is not a straightforward question to answer. However, there are a few general points we can make. First, CIDA was (and now forever shall remain) a relatively young organization, certainly compared with its key interlocutors in international policy: Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Defence, and Finance. As a result, it was inevitably beset by a certain level of insecurity and inexperience within the bureaucratic politics of the federal government. Second, it was legislatively, and thus politically, subordinate to DFAIT. Much of its institutional history was therefore spent seeking to protect and, periodically and cautiously, enlarge its relative autonomy. Third, it was self-consciously an institution apart. It was an organization of outsiders, often recruited from non-governmental development organisations, “who brought to the agency a commitment to development and a desire to build a career around it.”<sup>6</sup>

In terms of core mission(s), there was some foundational ambiguity. As has been habitually noted, at least since Keith Spicer’s path-breaking analysis in 1966 (see Brown’s exploration in this collection), the motives underlying development assistance programming are inescapably mixed, including geo-strategic, diplomatic, commercial, and ethical objectives. Whereas the other agencies with significant responsibilities for dispensing portions of Canadian aid, including Finance, DFAIT, and to a lesser degree Defence, were much more attuned to the first several of these motivations, CIDA (by far the largest dispenser of development funds) was indissolubly linked to the objective of “provoking development,” in the words of former agency president Marcel Massé.<sup>7</sup> This meant a core commitment to the ethical or moral purpose of aid. In the words of the 1994 Special Joint Parliamentary Committee Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy, “help for those most in need expresses the basic moral vision of aid and corresponds closely to what the vast majority of Canadians think development assistance is all about.”<sup>8</sup> While CIDA personnel clearly understood the need to design their policies and programs in ways that also achieved other, narrower purposes, if only to sustain the support they required from other bureaucratic and political actors, the basic *developmental* purpose of poverty alleviation and, beyond this, progress toward a more just international society was at

the core of their organization's self-defined essence.<sup>9</sup> Quite what this meant and how it was to be achieved remained a matter of ongoing contestation.

Finally, in terms of roles and capabilities, by the late 1980s there was a core tension concerning what CIDA could and *should* be doing, and what capabilities it required to fulfill the roles it sought to perform. Historically, CIDA was principally a policy taker rather than a policy maker, with a strong bias toward institutionally (though *not* geographically)<sup>10</sup> decentralized operational capacities aimed at successfully navigating projects through the shoals of local dynamics "in country." The agency's heavy emphasis on applied operational capacity and contextual understanding meant that its capacity for research and reflection was limited.<sup>11</sup> It also meant that it forged particularly close though often fraught relationships with Canadian non-governmental (or civil society) development organizations, resulting in a robust, diverse, and growing complex of state-civil society "partnerships"<sup>12</sup> on which its operational activities relied.

This relatively decentralized structure, within and beyond the agency, ran up against a different kind of imperative in the late 1980s. In the context of debt crises in Africa and Latin America, as well as the rise of neo-liberal thinking, key international financial institutions (notably the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and the World Bank) instituted structural adjustment lending, requiring recipient countries to undertake market-oriented policy reforms as a condition of new development finance. Major bilateral donor agencies increasingly followed suit, supporting structural adjustment "conditionalities" in their development programming. In this policy environment, CIDA's leadership tried to embrace a more macro, country-wide, policy planning and advising orientation toward recipient countries, in line with neo-liberal policy prescriptions. Increasingly, the agency sought to become a locus of expertise on the development *problematique* more broadly, albeit with a narrowly macro-economic emphasis. In this regard, it sought a key role as a policy *player* if not a major policy *maker*, rather than just a taker of big ideas generated elsewhere. By the early 1990s, this had become a source of contestation within the agency, and with its partners in the non-governmental development community, concerning its organizational essence and its bureaucratic relationships with other international policy agencies. The tension between CIDA's claim to specialized capacity in the understanding of project-based operational

challenges in developing countries, and its aspiration to become a locus of high-level expertise on the more long-term, structural challenges facing these countries, became a source of intra-agency uncertainty concerning (in Halperin and Clapp's terms) its core missions, roles, and capabilities.

By the early 1980s, CIDA's organizational essence had also become tightly bound up with its practices and performance in its proliferating array of African aid recipients. From 1980 onward, Africa overtook Asia to become, and remain, the largest regional recipient of Canadian aid.<sup>13</sup> It is also the region where poverty and human insecurity were and remain most prevalent, and therefore humanitarian need is greatest; and where aid is proportionately most significant as a source of development finance, and thus most implicated in the results (both positive and negative) of development interventions.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, it became an ongoing testing ground for various, evolving innovations in development assistance, Canadian and global. Finally, African recipients took on a high level of political prominence because the continent's heavy concentration of francophone and anglophone countries, often members of either *la Francophonie* or the Commonwealth, meant that Canada had both a relatively high level of prominence as a donor and a strong identity-based interest in highlighting its continental role.

In the course of the 1990s, each of these aspects of CIDA's "organizational essence" was brought under scrutiny and challenge. It is worth emphasizing that this challenge was bipartisan, unfolding during both the final years of Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government and the early and middle years of Jean Chrétien's Liberal government.

## CIDA, Aid Policy, and Africa in the Late Mulroney years

With hindsight, CIDA's fortunes arguably reached their apex in the late 1980s, with the publication of the highly regarded "Winegard Report" (*For Whose Benefit?*) in 1987 and the subsequent release of CIDA's policy document, *Sharing our Future*.<sup>15</sup> The former was seen as a thoughtful and forthright effort to set aid policy on a firmly "humane internationalist" footing.<sup>16</sup> The latter was rightly seen by critics as watering down Winegard's message and prescriptions, but it still carried many of them forward.<sup>17</sup> Of these, the one that, in David Morrison's assessment, "probably had

the greatest potential for changing CIDA's organizational thinking and behaviour" was the proposal to decentralize key decision-making and implementation functions away from headquarters in Gatineau to a number of field-based hubs, including Dar es Salaam, Dakar, Abidjan, and Harare in Africa.<sup>18</sup> It was anticipated that this would lead to more efficient and grounded policy and program decision making, with a higher degree of responsiveness to local needs and requirements (what later came to be known as "ownership"). The costs of decentralization were to be underpinned by slow but steady growth of the aid budget, from 0.5 per cent of GDP when *Sharing our Future* was released, to the longstanding target of 0.7 per cent of GDP by 2000.<sup>19</sup> On these premises, CIDA and DFAIT expeditiously initiated a substantial process of decentralization beginning in 1989, more than doubling the number of field-based aid personnel in nine diplomatic posts and a number of satellite offices.

These plans were almost immediately thrown into doubt, however, when the 1989 budget imposed an unexpectedly large cut of \$360 million on the CIDA base budget (a 13 per cent cut). A succession of "streamlining" measures were adopted as further cuts ensued, and by the summer of 1992 it became clear that the short-lived experiment with decentralization was dead.<sup>20</sup> Decentralizing steps that, in 1988, had been projected to "significantly improve the quality and efficiency of Canada's assistance, as well as bringing our programs closer to the people we are trying to reach—the poorest"<sup>21</sup> were within four years deemed expendable.

Decentralization was not only a casualty of austerity. In the first years of the 1990s, new leadership at CIDA under the "second coming" of Marcel Massé as president sought to steer the agency away from its more organizationally decentralized emphasis on a policy approach that was "'tailor-made' locally and incrementally,"<sup>22</sup> and toward a more strategic, knowledge-intensive policy leadership role. The reasons for this were several. As noted above, they reflected the new primacy of controversial "policy lending" or structural adjustment programs (SAPs) as the centrepiece of development assistance policies, reflecting the "high neo-liberal" tenor of the times and the intrusive policy approach adopted by the IMF and World Bank in response to the debt crisis of many developing countries, particularly in Africa and Latin America. CIDA had been a relatively late adopter of structural adjustment and was a "policy taker" in the process.<sup>23</sup>



**FIGURE 12.1**  
Marcel Massé  
returned to CIDA as  
its president in 1989,  
attuned to the new  
global emphasis on  
neo-liberal structural  
adjustment programs.  
(Source: Global Affairs  
Canada/LAC)

Given the controversy surrounding the draconian social impacts of these policies and the sharp opposition to them among many of CIDA's non-governmental "partners" in Canadian civil society, they were undoubtedly a source of controversy within and beyond the agency. CIDA's own role and emphasis in relation to SAPs became one of mitigating their negative social impacts in key "partner" countries such as Ghana and Guyana.<sup>24</sup> SAPs and CIDA's role in enabling them were a jarring challenge to the agency's sense of its core mission as an organization committed to poverty alleviation. But for Massé, fresh from a term as Canada's Executive Director at the IMF and World Bank, they were a matter of intellectual conviction.<sup>25</sup>

SAPs were also part of a strategic vision for the agency that emphasized its role as a policy leader on issues of international development and Canada's role therein. This vision sought to carve out greater autonomy



in Ottawa's policy-making process to pursue this goal. Toward this end, *Groupe Sécore* from Montréal was commissioned to undertake a comprehensive Strategic Management Review in 1990–91. Based largely on its recommendations, senior management decided in early 1991 to recommend to the minister of state responsible for international cooperation, Monique Landry, that it adopt “sustainable development” as its overarching framework; that it focus more attention on influencing and supporting the core policy functions of recipient governments; and that it “work ‘horizontally’ in attempting to influence the areas of Canadian government policy affecting developing countries.”<sup>26</sup> By early 1992, CIDA had prepared a recommendation seeking cabinet's approval for the new policy direction.

Given CIDA's historic role as an implementing agency and policy taker, this approach (resting on overarching country programming frameworks and more proactive strategies in support of African regional integration) required the acquiescence of other powerful players in Canadian development cooperation policies, notably DFAIT and Finance.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, University of Toronto political scientist Cranford Pratt interpreted the agency's embrace of structural adjustment as partly a reflection of its desire to earn the trust of these players, committed as they were to a more “realist” view of aid policy. “It was as if CIDA wanted to prove to DFAIT and to cabinet that it could be trusted with decisions that had important commercial and foreign policy dimensions,” he wrote.<sup>28</sup> If this was the intention, it failed. DFAIT effectively blocked consideration of CIDA's policy paper at cabinet and, at the behest of Foreign Minister Barbara MacDougall, had an alternative “international assistance policy update paper” prepared by a senior departmental official that outlined a far more forthrightly self-interested vision of Canadian foreign aid as an instrument of key foreign and trade policy priorities. “There could hardly be more dramatic evidence,” Pratt summarized, “that DFAIT was far more preoccupied with commercial and foreign policy concerns than with any commitment to reach and help the poorest people and countries.”<sup>29</sup> The policy update paper generated a storm of controversy among Canadian development CSO's and sympathetic scholars, and was eventually put on hold. Nevertheless, it clearly signalled DFAIT's opposition to a substantially more autonomous policy role for CIDA.

Finally, and in some respects most shockingly, CIDA responded to a third successive round of budget cuts in 1993 by making an abrupt decision to cut bilateral aid programming to an entire region, central and east Africa, rather than adopt a “lawnmower approach” that would cut programs across the board. The primary upshot was a decision to slash the bilateral program in Tanzania, one of Canada’s largest and longest-standing development and Commonwealth “partners.” In doing so, CIDA took a strategic decision to prioritize a variety of political and commercial considerations over the obvious and ongoing humanitarian and developmental case for aid to Tanzania.<sup>30</sup> This decision, so clearly at odds with the core of CIDA’s organizational mission, demonstrated how shallow and fragile this mission was. Although the specific decision on aid to Tanzania was reversed not long after the defeat of the Progressive Conservative government in the 1993 federal election, it portended more traumas to come, later in the same decade.

By the time the Chrétien Liberals took power in 1993, therefore, CIDA’s efforts to reinforce its mission and expand its role had been twice rebuffed, through the dismantling of decentralization and the sidelining of its aspirations for an enlarged policy role. Meanwhile, its “partnerships” with Canadian civil society had been seriously strained by the agency’s prioritization of structural adjustment. And it had demonstrated a high degree of sensitivity to more narrowly self-interested political and commercial priorities, in contravention of “humane internationalist” considerations and long-standing bilateral and civil society partnerships, through its program cut to Tanzania. As uncertainties about the direction and viability of its “organizational essence” grew, morale came under unprecedented strain. Yet, there was reason to hope for improved fortunes under the new Liberal government.

## CIDA, Africa, and the Chrétien Liberals

The pre-election references to foreign aid in the Liberal Party’s platform, expressed in its *Red Book* and *Foreign Policy Handbook*, were not extensive, but they strongly criticized the decision to cut aid to Tanzania and contained relatively clear humane internationalist statements of intent.<sup>31</sup> Once the party was in power, there was further encouragement for those with a humane internationalist bent from the report of the Special Joint

Parliamentary Committee Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy. While the report was not as authoritative on foreign aid issues as the Winegard Report, the committee made clear its view that “the primary purpose of Canadian Official Development Assistance is to reduce poverty by providing effective assistance to the poorest people, in those countries that most need and can use our help.”<sup>32</sup> It then laid out a set of proposed priorities (basic human needs, human rights, good governance and democratic development, the participation of women, private sector development, and public participation) that, though broad and imprecise, were generally consonant with this core purpose.

In contrast, the government’s own 1995 White Paper on foreign policy, *Canada in the World*, clearly compromised this clarity of intent, situating aid, first, in the service of Canadian jobs and prosperity; second, as a contribution to global security; and third, as an expression of Canadian values and culture.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the foreign affairs minister, André Ouellet, while admired within the agency for his energy and efficiency, was primarily concerned with “the Canadian side of the operation, especially in the distribution of work to private-sector suppliers and the use of ODA to promote trade.”<sup>34</sup> In the absence of strong political leadership and a confident sense of purpose, the agency was exceptionally vulnerable as, under the leadership of Chrétien and Finance Minister Paul Martin, the government decided to prioritize dramatic budgetary restraint and eliminating the fiscal deficit over all other policy priorities in the mid-1990s.

The hammer fell in a series of devastating budgetary blows, beginning with the 1995 federal budget, which announced a three-year, 20.5 per cent decrease in international assistance spending. Foreign aid became “ground zero” for Martin’s deficit cutting project. As the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) later noted, “Canadian aid was hit harder by budget cuts than any other federal programme area, falling in real terms by 37 per cent between 1991–92 and 1999–2000, while federal spending as a whole fell by 11 per cent, and defence spending (in the course of what has been characterized as a ‘decade of darkness’ for the Canadian Forces) was cut by 20 per cent.”<sup>35</sup> Nor can it be said that other donors were behaving in a comparably draconian manner. Despite overall declines in aid spending during the 1990s, among OECD Development Assistant Committee (DAC) members only Finland cut more deeply. Thirteen of the then twenty-two



**FIGURE 12.2**

When Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's Liberal government prioritized tackling Canada's deficit, CIDA and its aid programming were especially vulnerable. Chrétien watches while Finance Minister Paul Martin defends his budget in the House of Commons in February 1995. (Source: The Canadian Press/Tom Hanson)

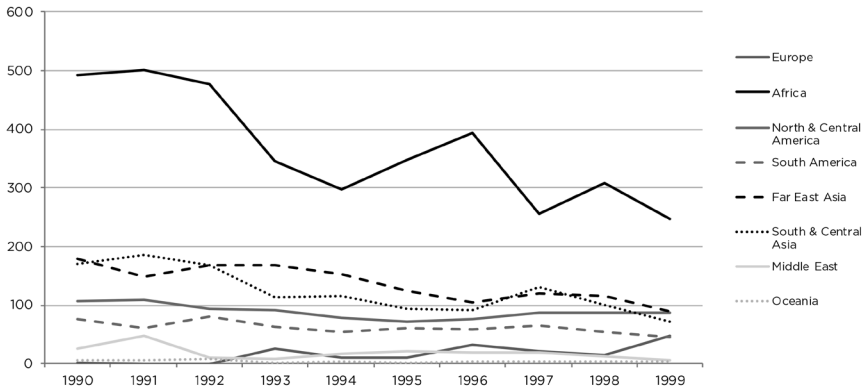
DAC members actually *increased* their aid spending. As a percentage of GDP, Canadian aid fell from 0.45 per cent in 1991 to 0.25 per cent in 2000, and to a low of 0.22 per cent in 2001—the lowest level since the mid-1960s.

Particularly devastating to CIDA's core sense of mission was that the cuts fell hardest on Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)—the region where impoverishment and insecurity were most acute. Between 1992–93 and 1997–98, Canadian aid to SSA fell in nominal dollars by 29.1 per cent, compared with the overall rate of decline in ODA of 24.3 per cent, and of all bilateral aid of 23.1 per cent (see Figure 12.3)—this, despite the fact that Africa's relative fortunes and rates of absolute poverty continued to worsen as the continent struggled through a second successive “lost decade.”<sup>36</sup>

There were several possible ways of interpreting this trend. All of them profoundly challenged CIDA's organizational essence. One was that the political leadership in Ottawa had lost any real confidence that aid could effectively address the manifold challenges confronting the countries and

**FIGURE 12.3**

Canadian Aid to Africa versus other regions, 1990–99.



people of Africa. While this was never explicitly acknowledged, such an existential challenge to the core mission of aid would be profoundly discouraging. It was reinforced externally by the emergence of a new round of devastating critiques of aid failures in practice. A striking example was Peter Uvin's study of the role of the "aid system" in unwittingly enabling the genocidal violence in Rwanda.<sup>37</sup> A second interpretation, just as disheartening, was that aid, notwithstanding its obvious challenges and limitations, *could* make a difference in ameliorating the condition of the poorest people and countries, but that the government cared too little about these conditions to act as if they mattered. A third, and related, view was that the government was simply reflecting the concerns of its electorate, which, despite persistently high levels of support for aid in the abstract, saw development assistance as a priority that came after almost *every other* policy priority subject to the government's deficit-cutting scrutiny.<sup>38</sup> Any and all of these interpretations were deeply discomfiting to the agency's sense of collective purpose and morale.

Further eroding CIDA's sense of mission were a series of assaults on its long-standing and mutually supportive ties with Canadian civil society organizations. A budget-linked decision in 1995 abolished the agency's

Public Participation Program (PPP) and cut all funding to the broad network of community-based development education NGOs in Canada. Similarly, CIDA cancelled the Global Education Program, which supported the efforts of teachers' associations to build global education into school curricula and teacher training.<sup>39</sup> A small but vital element of CIDA programming for over twenty years (see Brushett in this collection), PPP and responsive public education funding were likely, and ironically, targeted due to the sharp criticism levelled by many development CSOs against the agency, particularly as it prioritized the unpopular structural adjustment policies of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Nevertheless, these cuts eroded the foundation for CIDA's organizational essence directly and indirectly. Directly, they meant that CIDA lost important voices in Canadian communities advocating engagement with the challenges of global poverty and inequality. Indirectly, the cuts signalled to CIDA that the government was prepared to "ride out" public opposition in this policy domain, judging the development education and advocacy community to be politically marginal. None of this was promising for efforts to defend CIDA's organizational essence in caucus and cabinet, let alone with the Canadian public.

A further challenge to CIDA's organizational essence came from a resurgence of tension with DFAIT, revolving around the ascendant "Human Security Agenda." When Lloyd Axworthy became minister of foreign affairs in 1996, he brought to the portfolio an activist agenda seeking to recast and expand the idea of security as the foundation for a re-energized Canadian foreign policy.<sup>40</sup> Supported bureaucratically by the new Global Issues Bureau within DFAIT, Axworthy undertook an array of initiatives, most of which were concentrated in Africa or bore particularly on the "security-development nexus" there.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately for Axworthy, the foreign ministry had insufficient resources to underpin his activism. CIDA, though battered by cuts, still had far more money for programming than DFAIT, which made it a ripe target for what Pratt characterized as a "takeover bid."<sup>42</sup> Though this never became a serious possibility at the time, there were various encroachments on CIDA's budget—for example, the \$10 million per year Peacebuilding Fund established within the agency which, though wholly inadequate to the scale of the challenges associated with the new multilateral emphasis on peacebuilding in complex post- or peri-conflict situations, nevertheless

reinforced a growing trend toward the “securitization” of Canadian aid.<sup>43</sup> While the need for serious engagement between development and (human) security issues had become increasingly self-evident, particularly in Africa, deploying aid funds to meet security imperatives compelled CIDA to divert resources from the slow and patient work of fostering sustainable development in its broadest sense. This disturbing trend reached its apex with the rapid emergence of Afghanistan as the largest bilateral program in agency history under the Harper government, alongside Canada’s costly twelve-year military deployment to the Afghan war.

## Conclusion: The Long Demise

Beginning in the early 2000s, CIDA’s fortunes experienced a partial revival, as the Chrétien government, in the company of other donors, substantially reinvested in development assistance to support its commitment to the UN Millennium Development Goals as well as the G-8’s Africa Action Plan, launched (with energetic leadership by Chrétien) at the Kananaskis Summit in 2002. Over the remainder of the decade, Canada committed to doubling ODA, and to doubling aid to Africa marginally faster. Notwithstanding some controversy over the base from which this growth was to occur, the commitment was formally met, even when the Harper government that took office in 2006 signalled its intention to de-emphasize Africa and prioritize Latin America.<sup>44</sup>

Yet by the end of the decade and the years of re-investment in development aid at a rate of 8 per cent annually, Canadian ODA had reached a mere 0.34 per cent of GDP—well below the 0.45 per cent where it had stood when the Mulroney cuts began in 1991.<sup>45</sup> More to the point of this chapter, even in this relatively expansive and hopeful period, CIDA was routinely maligned by critics and supporters of foreign aid alike. A year after the Harper Conservative government took office, for instance, the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade issued a damning report entitled *Overcoming Forty Years of Failure: A New Road Map for Sub-Saharan Africa*. Though rightly critiqued as “deeply flawed in its assumptions, methodology and argumentation,”<sup>46</sup> its criticisms of the agency as “ineffective, costly and overly bureaucratic” and of Canadian development assistance as “slow, inflexible, and unresponsive to conditions



on the ground in recipient countries” typified many other assessments.<sup>47</sup> Its stark conclusion was that “despite the dedication and hard work of CIDA employees over the years, the Government of Canada should undertake an immediate review of whether or not . . . CIDA should be relieved of its duties. The experiment of creating an independent aid agency to strengthen Canadian development assistance has not produced the intended results.”<sup>48</sup> While widely panned at the time, this conclusion turned out to be prescient.

The argument in this chapter is that the sense of CIDA as weak, vulnerable, and defensive, and the various procedural and policy pathologies that flowed from it, was rooted in the agency’s inability to defend its organizational essence—its core sense of corporate identity—and to adequately articulate and sustain the mission(s), roles, and capabilities on which it was based. Indeed, over time, weakness and vulnerability came to at least partially *define* CIDA’s organizational essence. This largely unanswered challenge was strongly and irreversibly advanced by a series of blows inflicted during the 1990s by the leadership of both major political parties. Despite the agency’s efforts to adapt, it ended up failing both to expand its autonomy to pursue its core mission(s) in relation to other government departments concerned with international policy and to sustain the vitality of its “partnerships” with Canadian development CSO’s.

To be sure, much of this failure was rooted in structural, political, and ideational factors beyond CIDA’s control. These included the perennial controversy over the appropriate role(s), utility, and limits of foreign aid, a controversy which, as the chapters in this collection indicate, is as old as the Canadian aid program. Nor does this conclusion diminish the achievements of CIDA personnel, projects, and programs in various times and places over the course of its forty-five years of existence. But it does highlight the importance of carving out a distinctive organizational space whose identity and capacities are firmly linked to addressing the challenges of global poverty and inequality. As Nilima Gulrajani has argued about the architecture of development agencies more broadly, whether this space is lodged within the foreign ministry (as now seems certain for the foreseeable future) or elsewhere is less important than that this institutional home has a distinct identity and a robust political and intellectual foundation.<sup>49</sup> Without it, Canada’s ability to address these acute global challenges and the multiple problems arising from them will remain enfeebled.



## Notes

- 1 Patrick Johnston, “*Modernizing Canadian Foreign Aid and Development: Challenges Old And New*” (Toronto: Walter and Gordon Duncan Foundation, 2010), 3.
- 2 John Stackhouse, “CIDA was long dead. Harper only buried it,” *Globe and Mail*, 22 March 2013.
- 3 It can be argued that this crisis of confidence was three-dimensional, involving: an internal dimension, concerning the agency’s capacity to make, defend, and sustain key policy decisions; a prescriptive dimension, reflecting uncertainty and division concerning the best uses of development aid; and an external dimension, entailing a lack of confidence among other international policy institutions in Ottawa concerning CIDA’s capacity to succeed in its core mission, and questioning the utility of that mission.
- 4 Marie-Eve Desrosiers and Philippe Lagassé, “Canada and the Bureaucratic Politics of State Fragility,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 20, no. 4 (2009): 660.
- 5 Morton Halperin and Priscilla Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2006).
- 6 Philip Rawkins, “An Institutional Analysis of CIDA,” in *Canadian International Development Assistance Policies: An Appraisal*, ed. Cranford Pratt (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 160.
- 7 Rawkins, “An Institutional Analysis of CIDA,” 166.
- 8 Cited in Cranford Pratt, “Development Assistance and Canadian Foreign Policy: Where We Now Are,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 2, no. 3 (1994): 80.
- 9 On the persistent centrality of poverty alleviation to the mission of Canadian foreign aid, see Ian Smillie, “Institutional Corruption and Canadian Foreign Aid,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 23, no. 1 (2017): 47–59.
- 10 CIDA’s operations were notoriously heavily concentrated at headquarters in Gatineau, with only very limited decision-making authority decentralized to missions in recipient countries. Geographic decentralization has long been mooted as a key requirement for enhanced responsiveness and effectiveness, but it has never been sustainably implemented.
- 11 It can also be argued that the decision to establish a dedicated development research institution—the International Development Research Centre—in 1970, shortly after CIDA’s own establishment, reinforced the operational and somewhat anti-intellectual bias of the agency. On the decentralized and operational orientation of CIDA, see Rawkins, “An Institutional Analysis of CIDA.”
- 12 See, for example, Betty Plewes and Brian Tomlinson, “Canadian CSOs and Africa: The End of an Era?” in *Canada Among Nations 2013: Canada-Africa Relations – Looking Back, Looking Ahead*, ed. Rohinton Medhora and Yiagadeesen Samy (Waterloo, ON: Centre for International Governance Innovation and Carleton University, 2013), 213–26.
- 13 See David Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide: A History of CIDA and Canadian Development Assistance* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 455; Stephen Brown, “Canadian Aid to Africa,” in Medhora and Samy, *Canada Among Nations 2013*, 181.

- 14 Though the share of aid in external financial flows to Africa has steadily declined, from 62 per cent in 1990 to 22 per cent in 2012. See Amadou Sy, "Africa in Focus: How Finance Flows to Africa," Brookings institution, 20 May 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2015/05/20/how-finance-flows-to-africa/>.
- 15 For a detailed account of this period, see Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, 277–312.
- 16 Humane internationalism was defined by Cranford Pratt as "an acceptance by the citizens of the industrialized states that they have ethical obligations towards those beyond their borders and that these in turn impose obligations on their governments." See Pratt, "Humane Internationalism: Its Significance and Variants," in his edited collection *Internationalism Under Strain: The North-South Policies of Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 13.
- 17 Pratt was among the critics. See Pratt, "Canada: A Limited and Eroding Internationalism," in his edited collection *Internationalism Under Strain*, 24–69.
- 18 Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, 311.
- 19 CIDA, *Sharing our Future* (Gatineau: CIDA, 1988), 22.
- 20 Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, 311.
- 21 CIDA, *Sharing Our Future*, 35.
- 22 Rawkins, "An Institutional Analysis of CIDA," 173; Massé had previously been president in 1980–82.
- 23 Marcia Burdette, "Structural Adjustment and Canadian Aid Policy," in Pratt, *Canadian International Development Assistance Policies*, 210–39.
- 24 David Black and Peter McKenna, "Canada and Structural Adjustment in the South: The Significance of the Guyana Case," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 16, no. 1 (1995): 55–78.
- 25 Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, 313.
- 26 Rawkins, "An Institutional Analysis of CIDA," 176.
- 27 CIDA, Africa and the Middle East Branch, *Africa 21: A Vision of Africa in the 21st Century* (October 1991).
- 28 Pratt, "Development Assistance and Canadian Foreign Policy," 78.
- 29 Cranford Pratt, "DFAIT's Takeover Bid of CIDA," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 5, no. 2 (1998): 4.
- 30 See Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, 373.
- 31 Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, 380–81.
- 32 Pratt, "Development Assistance and Canadian Foreign Policy," 80.
- 33 Government of Canada, *Canada in the World*, Government statement (1995), 40; Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, 399–401; Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC), *Canada in the World: A Review and Analysis of the Government's Foreign Policy Statements*, February 1995.

- 34 Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, 377.
- 35 CCIC, "Renewing Canadian Aid: A CCIC/in common Fact Sheet," 2000.
- 36 See CCIC, "Renewing Canadian Aid"; and Larry Elliott, "The lost decade," *Guardian* (Manchester), 9 July 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/09/population.aids>.
- 37 See Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1998).
- 38 For an insightful critique of the proposition that Canadians were supporters of a generous humane internationalist aid program, see Alain Noël, Jean-Philippe Thérien, and Stephane Dallaire, "Divided over Internationalism: The Canadian Public and Development Assistance," *Canadian Public Policy* 30, no. 1 (2004): 29–46.
- 39 Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide*, 416–17.
- 40 See Lloyd Axworthy, "Canada and Human Security: The Need for Leadership," *International Journal* 52, no. 2 (1997): 183–96; and Greg Donaghy, "All God's Children: Lloyd Axworthy, Human Security and Canadian Foreign Policy, 1996–2000," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 10, no. 2 (2003): 39–58.
- 41 For examples, see Rob McRae and Don Hubert, eds., *Human Security and the New Diplomacy: Protecting People, Promoting Peace* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).
- 42 See Pratt, "DFAIT's Takeover Bid."
- 43 See, for example, Stephen Brown and Jörn Grävingholt, eds., *The Securitization of Foreign Aid* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2016).
- 44 For details, see David Black, *Canada and Africa in the New Millennium: The Politics of Consistent Inconsistency* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015), especially chaps. 2 and 5.
- 45 And from 2010 onward, ODA experienced another round of deep cuts, as the Harper government, like its Liberal predecessor, leaned disproportionately on foreign aid to bring the budget deficit back toward "balance."
- 46 Stephen Brown, "CIDA under the Gun," in *Canada Among Nations 2007: What Room for Manoeuvre?*, ed. Jean Daudelin and Daniel Schwanen (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 91–107. See also Stephen Brown, "Le rapport du Sénat sur l'aide canadienne à l'Afrique : une analyse à rejeter," *Le Multilatéral* 1, no. 3 (2007): 1, 6–7.
- 47 The generally sympathetic study by Patrick Johnston of the Walter and Gordon Duncan Foundation noted that "bureaucratic, hidebound, out-of-touch, ineffectual, risk averse, contradictory, vacillating—these and many similar criticisms of CIDA have now become commonplace." See Johnston, "Modernizing Foreign Aid and Development," 3.
- 48 Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Overcoming Forty Years of Failure: A New Road Map for Sub-Saharan Africa* (Ottawa, 2007), 96–97.
- 49 See Nilima Gulrajani, "Bilateral Donors in the 'Beyond Aid' Agenda: The Importance Of Institutional Autonomy For Donor Effectiveness," Global Economic Governance Working Paper 2015/106, August 2015.

## *A Samaritan State?*, Canadian Foreign Aid, and the Challenges of Policy Coherence for Development

*Stephen Brown*

In 1966, when Keith Spicer's seminal book, *A Samaritan State? External Aid in Canada's Foreign Policy*, first came out, Canada had been providing foreign aid for fifteen years, with responsibility split between the Department of External Affairs and the Department of Trade and Commerce.<sup>1</sup> Pierre Trudeau's government created the semi-autonomous Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) only two years later, in 1968. *A Samaritan State?* was the first book ever published on Canadian foreign aid and, in fact, the only one for another one and a half decades.<sup>2</sup> Roughly fifty years on, Spicer's ground-breaking analysis is ripe for revisiting, and for comparison to current perspectives, policies, and practices.

Oddly enough, the book never answered its titular question: Was Canada a "Samaritan State"? In fact, the book never used the term, other than in its title. One can surmise that the expression was adopted after Spicer had completed the manuscript, as part of discussions with the publisher on how to market the book. Ironically, the title's undefined expression has become the book's most lasting legacy.

The term refers to the Biblical parable of the Good Samaritan, told by Jesus to his fellow Jews. In it, a half-dead naked man, presumably Jewish,

lies on the ground, after having been beaten by robbers. Two successive men, both also Jews, see him lying there but keep walking. The third person to walk by, a Samaritan, stops to help the severely injured man, nursing his wounds and putting him up at an inn at his own expense, despite the general antipathy between their respective peoples.<sup>3</sup> A Good Samaritan has thus come to mean someone who helps a complete stranger out of the goodness of his or her own heart. Good Samaritanism corresponds to the concept of altruism or humanitarianism in the literature on foreign aid: the idea that a state, like a person, should be generous to complete strangers without any self-interested motive.

*A Samaritan State?* covered a wide range of topics, conducted several case studies, and provided a lot of empirical data.<sup>4</sup> This chapter focuses on Spicer's views on two key overarching issues that remain extremely relevant today: (1) the goals of Canadian foreign aid; and (2) the optimal relationship between Canada's aid policy and its other international policies. It examines each of these in turn, comparing Spicer's beliefs to Canada's recent policies and practices, mainly under the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper. It then examines the short record and current thinking of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal government in these two areas. Five decades after the book's publication, there is much to retain, in Spicer's vision for foreign aid and policy coherence for development, that past and present governments seem to have forgotten.

## Why Give Foreign Aid?

In his book, Spicer very clearly disapproved of Samaritanism/altruism. He was not interested in morality as a basis of public policy:

Philanthropy is plainly no more than a fickle and confused policy stimulant, derived from the personal conscience. It is not an objective of government. Love for mankind is a virtue of the human heart, an emotion which can stir only individuals—never bureaucracies or institutions. Governments exist only to promote the public good; and, as a result, they must act purely in the selfish interest of the state they serve. Altruism as foreign policy is a misnomer, even if sometimes

the fruits of policy are incidentally beneficial to foreigners. To talk of humanitarian “aims” in Canadian foreign policy is, in fact, to confuse policy with the ethics of individuals moulding it, to mix government objectives with personal motives.<sup>5</sup>

Though this might seem like realism at its bleakest, completely devoid of compassion, with no place for ethics, Spicer embraced many positions that would make altruists happy. For instance, he recognized the fundamental need to have a peaceful, stable world, as a prerequisite for most other policy goals. He even supported the use of humanitarian rhetoric in order to help generate public support for aid.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, there is much convergence between what he recommended and what altruists advocate. The motive might be different—self-interest versus selflessness—but the result is very often the same, as long as one takes, as Spicer usually did, a long-term perspective based on “enlightened self-interest.”<sup>7</sup> In this, his perspective resembled what Alexis de Tocqueville called “*l’intérêt bien entendu*,” usually translated as “self-interest rightly understood” or “self-interest properly understood.”<sup>8</sup> For Spicer, helping others was good for Canada in the long run, and that was justification enough.

As David Black recently argued, too much emphasis has been placed on labelling the motives underlying Canadian aid and setting them up against each other. For instance, he discusses how the valuable work of the late Cranford Pratt, Canada’s top scholar on foreign aid throughout the 1980s and 1990s, analytically opposed “international realists” and “humane internationalists” in ways that were sometimes counterproductive.<sup>9</sup> In a sense, these perspectives do not matter as much as the common ground that can be found between them on policies and practices. Accordingly, it is of lesser import whether something is the right thing to do for purely ethical reasons or because it is in the interest of global peace and prosperity and thus in Canada’s long-term interests.

Regardless of whether one agrees with Spicer’s perspective or not—and he himself might not hold today some of the views he expressed over fifty years ago—many of his observations remain valid. For instance, he was skeptical of aid’s capacity to promote democratization and stability, which have proven much more difficult to achieve than many scholars and policy

makers naively believed, for example, in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. It seems to be a lesson repeatedly learnt and then forgotten. Similarly, he warned against expectations that aid would easily engender economic growth, reminding readers that domestic factors matter a lot.

Spicer believed that Canada should provide generous levels of aid spending, in large part because the contact it generates would give Canadians a greater understanding of the Global South and thus help it engage as a “middle power” able to “keep the peace.”<sup>10</sup> Still, recognizing that there is no clear correlation between aid and peace and security, Spicer was very supportive of aid as a “*symbol* of Canada’s concern,”<sup>11</sup> and seemed less interested in the actual development that should result from aid than in the goodwill that the aid would generate for the Canadian government. He was also concerned that a lack of generosity would generate ill will, which would hamper any Canadian global leadership ambitions. While Spicer acknowledged that results can be mixed, in hindsight it is clear that he placed too much trust in the power of symbols and overestimated recipients’ degree of gratitude. For example, he praised the wisdom of the Soviet Union in obtaining Afghans’ allegiance by paving the streets of their capital, providing in his words a “paved thoroughfare for the camel-filled metropolis of Kabul.”<sup>12</sup> However, the nine-year war against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s demonstrated that providing infrastructure was not a lasting guarantee of Afghan loyalty, though Western countries seem to have forgotten that lesson a couple of decades later.

The book’s most interesting case study is of the Warsak dam in Pakistan near the Afghan border. This challenging project, discussed in Ryan Touhey’s chapter in this volume, provided electricity and water for irrigation for decades following its inauguration in 1961. Writing soon after its completion, Spicer lauded the project, not least for having employed, albeit only temporarily, some 10,000 Pakistani men (whom he described as “wandering Pathan tribesmen”), which the Pakistan government greatly appreciated.<sup>13</sup> In his account, Pakistani gratitude to Canada was the main goal and measure of success, as documented in local press coverage. Spicer also highlighted the importance of the school and clinic that were set up alongside the dam, primarily to serve expatriate Canadians and their families. In his words, they “probably won for Canada the gratitude of more ordinary foreign nationals than any other single Canadian project. . . .



**FIGURE 13.1**

Like the Warsak Dam in Pakistan, the Dahla Dam was a 1950s-style Canadian signature project in Afghanistan, drawing regular visits from Ottawa. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, second from right, walks with Canadian Ambassador to Afghanistan Ron Hoffmann, right, Chief of the Defence Staff Walter Natynczyk, second from left, and Chantal Ruel, CIDA's Assistant Deputy Director of Development in Kandahar as they visit the Dahla Dam in May 2009. (Source: The Canadian Press/Sean Kilpatrick)

Through this care, the tribal folk [*sic*] obviously understood in simple human terms the message of international solidarity that the great concrete dam itself was partly intended to convey.”<sup>14</sup>

The gratitude that Spicer valued and carefully documented, however, did not last. As he himself noted in passing, Pakistan's goodwill toward Canada all but disappeared when the latter provided military support to India in 1963.<sup>15</sup> Although Spicer obviously could not know how hated the Soviets would become in Afghanistan, he should nonetheless have drawn some conclusions from the ephemerality of Pakistani gratitude that he witnessed.

The parallel with Canada's support for the Dahla Dam across the border in Afghanistan's Kandahar Province in the late 2000s and early 2010s is inescapable. Like the Warsak Dam, the Dahla Dam was a 1950s-style



“signature project”—a stand-alone scheme closely identified with the donor. It ignored decades of learning in development assistance that strongly suggested that aid is more effective when integrated with national programs and systems, rather than carried out independently to provide visibility for the donor.

Canadian assistance to the Dahla Dam was plagued with problems from the start, including inflated security costs that drained \$10 million out of the dam’s \$50 million budget to pay for the services of a private security company with ties to an Afghan warlord, in what is best described as a protection racket.<sup>16</sup> Although the Canadian government declared success, it had ignored local Afghan calls for the height of the dam to be raised, severely hampering its utility, and left the dam unfinished when Canadian troops left the province.<sup>17</sup> An evaluation commissioned by the Canadian government recognized that the aid program in Kandahar, where Canadian aid was concentrated, “failed to ensure sustainable, long-term development results.” Moreover, it pointed out that Canadian assistance incorrectly assumed that the main local Afghan grievances were economic, which explains why they were not won over by building infrastructure.<sup>18</sup>

For many decades, virtually all critiques of the effectiveness of Canadian aid, including from parliamentary committees, NGOs, and scholars—and of foreign aid more generally, not just Canada’s—have emphasized the fact that aid has served many purposes other than fighting poverty, which governments have always presented as aid’s primary purpose.<sup>19</sup> The overall confusion of purpose, the mixing of development goals with political and economic ones, is overwhelmingly seen as one of the main reasons why aid has not been more effective in achieving development goals. All too often, it is not meant primarily to serve that purpose. This chapter therefore looks more closely at the relationship between aid policy and other foreign policy objectives.

## Aid’s Relations with Other Components of Foreign Policy

Spicer strongly believed in the value of a Canadian aid program. In addition to earning gratitude abroad, he believed that it encouraged contact with other countries and improved interaction between Canada and the wider world. Beyond the aid relationship, it also leads to a more enlightened

foreign policy, more effective diplomacy, and better participation in the international system. Many of the recommendations in *A Samaritan State?* have in fact been implemented, though not necessarily as a result of the book.

Though Spicer believed in linking aid and non-aid policies, he recognized the need for a dedicated aid program, separate from other areas of foreign policy. He suggested a distinct career stream for government aid officials “because aid administration demands specialized knowledge that cannot be absorbed and usefully exploited by men [*sic*] whose primary career [*is*] in trade or diplomacy.”<sup>20</sup> The government did, in fact, adopt this practice after creating the semi-autonomous aid agency CIDA in 1968. However, CIDA’s absorption into the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) in 2013 has devalued development expertise and otherwise marginalized staff who came to the department from CIDA.<sup>21</sup>

Although he did not frame it in these terms, much of Spicer’s vision for aid and trade was based on the concept of self-interest, provided that it was “properly understood” à la Tocqueville to pursue a long-term systemic vision rather than evanescent short-term gains. Thus, letting aid recipients exercise ownership of their development plans and aligning Canadian aid with their strategies would actually benefit Canada in the long run (articulating some of the Paris Principles on Aid Effectiveness almost forty years before they were adopted). He therefore strongly opposed tying aid to the purchase of goods and services in Canada, rather than obtaining them where they were cheapest, even if he considered the practice “inevitable.”<sup>22</sup> Though he slightly overstated how hard it would be to eliminate tied aid, it did take until 2012 for Canada to completely phase it out. Even so, a large proportion of aid grants are still channelled through Canadian NGOs and used to hire Canadian consultants, even though there is no formal obligation to do so.

A key quandary in global development today is the appropriate role of the private sector. No other actor has the potential to unleash the trillions of dollars required to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, however controversial an actor it may be. Spicer, writing in a very different historical context, barely even discussed private investment because, he argued, “It is probably safe to assume . . . in view of Canada’s own notorious need of foreign capital, that Canadian private investment

in overseas development is now very small and is unlikely soon to become significant.”<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, much has changed over the past fifty years. Canadian direct foreign investment in the developing world was worth \$295 billion in 2015, which is about sixty years’ worth of foreign aid at current spending levels.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the Canadian government has, for the last few years, begun to promote quite actively the role of the private sector in development, especially the Canadian extractive industry. CIDA’s partnerships with mining companies, first announced in 2011, have elicited a fair bit of attention—and criticism.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it is important to remember that Canadian aid and other mechanisms, such as credit insurer Export Development Canada, have long promoted the Canadian private sector’s involvement in developing countries.

Spicer advocated greater coordination of “aid, trade, defence, cultural relations, immigration and classical diplomacy,” which is the core of what is now referred to as *policy coherence*, and saw aid as “simply one of several sometimes useful techniques of pursuing national goals abroad.”<sup>26</sup> He thus favoured the instrumentalization of aid, not for short-term commercial or electoral gains, which undermine aid effectiveness, but over the long term.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, greater policy coherence is an old idea, but it has seen a surge of popularity in Ottawa since at least the mid-2000s. It was manifest first in the “3D” approach—diplomacy, defence, and development—adopted by Prime Minister Paul Martin’s Liberal government, and later in the broader “whole-of-government” approach championed by the Conservatives. In fact, Minister of International Cooperation Julian Fantino invoked the need for greater policy integration as the main reason for CIDA’s abolition and merger with DFAIT, citing twin objectives: “To enhance coordination of international assistance with broader Canadian values and objectives, and to put development on an equal footing with trade and diplomacy.”<sup>28</sup>

Most foreign policy and trade analysts applauded the CIDA-DFAIT merger, but many development specialists believed that the move would facilitate the increased subservience of aid to non-development objectives. Spicer might have approved, though, as he saw aid as an instrument of Canadian policy and decried how it had become “a cause in itself, a self-justifying crusade, a powerful Messianic magnet for a generation of liberals hungry for a purpose to fit a uniting world.”<sup>29</sup> Spicer would not, however, have

endorsed the blatant commercialization of aid envisaged in the 2013 *Global Markets Action Plan*, the first policy statement after the merger, which advocated “leverag[ing] development programming to advance Canada’s trade interests.”<sup>30</sup> Spicer would have considered such a short-term approach ineffective for promoting Canada’s longer-term interests. Indeed, that part of the plan actually appears to contravene Canadian law, which mandates that the primary purpose of Canadian aid is to be poverty reduction.<sup>31</sup>

Advocating a form of policy coherence for development, Spicer presented some concrete steps outside the realm of aid that Canada could take to help developing countries, including ones that provide greater benefits than aid. For instance, he advocated trade concessions, which he recognized as improbable, and greater flows of immigrants, which would increase the amount sent to the developing world in the form of remittances.<sup>32</sup>

Contemporary development-oriented scholars and activists, however, favour policy coherence that will promote the interests of developing countries and reinforce their capacity to fight poverty, which is for them the ultimate goal. Spicer advocated it because it would help developing countries achieve their objectives and thereby gain Canada international praise, as well as increase the chances of long-term peace and stability. Despite their differences, these two perspectives are compatible at the policy level. However, they are not universally shared. Many Canadian politicians and taxpayers want aid to provide clear short-term benefits at home. Conservative Bev Oda, toward the end of her five-year tenure as Minister for International Cooperation, admitted that she did not separate Canada’s trade and foreign policy interests from its development goals.<sup>33</sup> The OECD subsequently reminded the Canadian government that “there should be no confusion between development objectives and the promotion of commercial interests.”<sup>34</sup> Still, Oda’s successor, Julian Fantino, insisted that “Canadians are entitled to derive a benefit” from Canadian development assistance.<sup>35</sup>

If Canada is unwilling to protect the aid piggy bank from being raided by non-development interests, it would be preferable to insulate the aid bureaucracy. A separate aid ministry would be the obvious institutional mechanism, though no guarantee. The United Kingdom and Germany provide good, albeit not perfect, examples of independent ministries that are better able to defend their development mandate. Canada, however, has taken the path in the opposite direction and “de-merging” CIDA does not

seem to be on anyone's agenda. Therefore, the role of development within Global Affairs Canada (GAC) is a crucial factor to monitor closely.

One of Spicer's key recommendations on aid was for periodic, independent, evidence-based policy reviews. In fact, he devoted most of the book's conclusion to that topic. This chapter therefore turns to a discussion of the International Assistance Review launched by the Liberal government in 2016 and resulting in a new policy in 2017.

## Reviewing Canada's International Assistance Policy

Between May and July 2016, the Canadian government held 300 consultations in Canada and across the world as part of its International Assistance Review. It interacted with over 15,000 people and organizations in 65 countries and received over 10,000 contributions—a massive investment of time and other resources.<sup>36</sup> The consultations in Ottawa, however, were stage-managed around sectoral themes, rather than discussing how to make more fundamental improvements to Canada's aid program, including asking deeper questions on what the weaknesses of Canadian aid have been.<sup>37</sup> One of these underlying problems is the continual shifting of thematic and sectoral priorities, which is disruptive and actually harms aid effectiveness.<sup>38</sup>

Despite some genuflecting before the altar of policy coherence, the review was limited to “international assistance,” i.e., aid, with the exception of some activities under the peace and security rubric. This limited approach did not augur well for the new aid policy, especially since no review of broader foreign policy seemed to be in the works, leaving aid without a larger context and the relationship between the two unexamined, *contra* Spicer's recommendations.

GAC subsequently published a web page on “What We Heard,” making available to the public a summary of the results of the consultations, an unprecedented and very welcome action.<sup>39</sup> It mentioned the need “to build greater complementarity among Canadian policies and initiatives in the fields of defence, trade, diplomacy, security and development,” a form of policy coherence Spicer firmly endorsed. It provided no indication, however, of the nature of this complementary relationship. Would development considerations have an important sway over the other fields, or would aid be subservient to short-term Canadian interests, as has all too often been the



**FIGURE 13.2**

With its new “feminist international assistance policy,” Canadian aid policy headed off in a direction unimagined by Keith Spicer, though its troubling shortage of funds was a familiar part of the story. Two of the policy’s leading supporters, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and International Development Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau, are shown here at the opening of the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit at UN Headquarters in September 2018. (Source: The Canadian Press/Adrian Wyld)

case in the past? In other words, was the Canadian government aspiring to policy coherence *for development* or to policy coherence for other purposes?

The government finally published its new aid policy in June 2017. Billed as “Canada’s first feminist international assistance policy,” its most notable commitment was that within five years “at least 95 per cent of Canada’s bilateral international development assistance investments will either target or integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls,”<sup>40</sup> an area of focus unexamined by Spicer. The new policy was widely applauded for this emphasis, but concerns remained regarding how it would be implemented and what the impact would be on other programming.<sup>41</sup>

The policy makes some references to policy coherence, for instance: “When it comes to gender equality and the empowerment of women and

girls, a more integrated approach is needed—one that also includes diplomacy, trade and the expertise of a wide range of Canadian government departments and agencies.<sup>42</sup> However, no detail was provided on how other government institutions would internalize this new priority.

A major flaw in the new aid strategy is that the government, after a decade or more of dismantling its development expertise and cutting its aid budget, is not interested in providing the financial resources required to rebuild the aid program. The Liberals' first three federal budgets (tabled in 2016, 2017, and 2018) provided only modest nominal increases in aid spending, leaving ODA as a percentage of gross national income around 0.26 per cent (see discussion in this volume's introduction). As a result, any new programming in one area will have to come at the expense of programs in others. As Spicer warned, important cutbacks to bilateral programming in certain countries actually generate ill will and can be harmful to Canada's interests.<sup>43</sup> The Conservatives' clumsy cutting of African countries of focus may have contributed to Canada losing its bid to be elected to the UN Security Council in 2010, an important fact for the Liberals to consider as they campaign for a seat in 2021.

Given its own lack of financial contributions, the government places much emphasis instead on contributions from the private sector. The new aid policy reintroduces the use of aid to provide loans (euphemistically referred to as "repayable contributions"), a practice abolished long ago by CIDA, and highlights the creation of a Canadian development finance institute (DFI) under the name FinDev Canada. The latter, originally announced by the Conservative government in 2015, has a budget of \$300 million and is housed not at GAC but—tellingly—at Export Development Canada.

Such mechanisms risk repeating the errors of the past, focusing on commercial self-interest, supporting Canadian businesses rather than ones in developing countries, and wasting vast sums of money. Here, the experience of CIDA's long-standing Industrial Cooperation Program (known as CIDA-INC), founded in 1978, is highly relevant. It had a success rate of only 15 per cent and was shut down in 2012 amid fraud investigations.<sup>44</sup>

DFIs in other donor countries have been severely criticized for supporting "big businesses" rather than poverty reduction.<sup>45</sup> Although the government has charged FinDev Canada with empowering women, mitigating climate change, and reducing poverty, it is not clear how such



endeavours will be able to generate sufficient short-term profits to make the required loan repayments.

While the “feminist” components of the new aid policy have attracted the lion’s share of public attention, the policy and subsequent government pronouncements demonstrate remarkable continuity with the previous government in promoting the role of the private sector in development.<sup>46</sup> Despite all the fanfare, it might be business as usual on that front. The private sector’s poor collective record in promoting women’s rights and gender equality suggests that there may be an unaddressed fundamental contradiction between the two core characteristics of the new aid policy. Moreover, the potential use of ODA funds in “innovative” mechanisms that are not truly focused on poverty reduction might even break Canadian law again. Spicer, who called for independent, evidence-based reviews, would have been disappointed with the result of Canada’s latest iteration.

An additional major limitation of the new aid strategy is that it was designed, as mentioned above, in a foreign policy vacuum. What is actually required is an overarching policy that goes beyond aid, to encompass all dimensions of international policy, and provides clear guidance on the promotion of international development and the needs of poor people in poor countries.<sup>47</sup> Such an integrated approach is the only way countries, not just Canada, can hope to even come close to achieving the SDGs. Canada’s aid review may prove to be a lost opportunity in that sense.

## Looking Beyond Aid Policy

Spicer clearly considered aid to be part of Canada’s broader foreign policy and thought that aid policy should be designed within that context. Similarly, today’s scholars should not examine Canadian aid in isolation but rather as part of all of Canada’s activities that have an impact on developing countries. John Cameron makes this point very convincingly and reminds us of the basic ethical principle: first, do no harm.<sup>48</sup> For instance, the foreign operations of Canadian mining companies provide benefits to the countries where they operate, including jobs and royalties, often augmented by their corporate social responsibility activities. Yet it is important to weigh the negative effects too. The extractive industry often does a lot of harm, and has been implicated in causing environmental destruction, the



abuse of human rights, the creation of health problems, and the displacement of people and the loss of their livelihoods. According to a damning report commissioned by a Canadian extractive industry association but never publicly released, “Canadian companies are far and away the worst offenders.”<sup>49</sup> Still, the Canadian government provides considerable support for the mining industry’s investments abroad, including practical support through Canadian embassies and by subsidizing their philanthropic activities. As Cameron argues, scholars should therefore not limit the scope of their enquiry to the aid sector while ignoring the others as if the realms were independent of each other, rather than related manifestations of broader government support and policies.

It is not yet clear if the emphasis on Canadian business interests, and those of the extractive sector in particular, will differ considerably under the Trudeau Liberals. Minister of International Development Marie-Claude Bibeau told *Le Devoir*, “My mandate is development . . . not Canadian economic interests.”<sup>50</sup> This may mean that the Canadian aid program may distance itself from the promotion of mining, though she did not say that it would. On the contrary, the government specifically affirmed its continued support for the controversial Canadian International Resources and Development Institute, created by CIDA and housed at the University of British Columbia, which receives \$5 million in ODA funds annually.<sup>51</sup>

So far, under the Liberal government, one of the biggest failures of policy coherence for development, the feminist foreign policy, and the “do no harm” principle has been the sale of \$15 billion in weaponized vehicles to Saudi Arabia, despite the severe human rights abuses in the country and strong reasons to believe that the arms would be used against civilians in Saudi Arabia or in Yemen. The government’s justifications were lamentable: that it had “no choice” because the deal had been finalized by the previous government, that jobs in southern Ontario were at stake, and that if Canada did not sell them, someone else would. The first statement was a lie, and the remaining two arguments could be marshalled to justify selling weapons to any regime in the world, no matter how violent and dictatorial. In addition, the government argued that there was no “conclusive evidence” that Saudi Arabia had used Canadian vehicles for human rights violations in the past. In doing so, regardless of the credibility of the claim, the government ignored the fact that the legal criterion is actually the risk of

such violations in the future.<sup>52</sup> Though the Federal Court eventually ruled that the minister had the discretionary power to approve the sale, doing so made a mockery of Canadian claims to have a robust process in place that takes into account human rights before approving such sales.<sup>53</sup>

The Trudeau government's aid policy states that it is "committed to strengthening our policy framework to ensure Canadian companies reflect Canadian values, respect human rights and operate responsibly."<sup>54</sup> However, the government will likely, as in the past, invoke human rights mainly when Canada has no other significant interests at play. Together, these practices will not win the plaudits abroad for which Spicer hoped.

Another conundrum in achieving policy coherence for development is how to reconcile the government's commitment to fighting climate change with its promotion and massive subsidization of the petroleum sector, providing over \$3.3 billion annually to oil and gas producers and promoting pipelines that will encourage the extraction from the very environmentally destructive oil sands.<sup>55</sup> Policy coherence, and especially policy coherence *for development*, require sacrifices in policy areas that will undermine the short-term interests of some Canadian sectors and actors. To live up to commitments for such policy coherence requires not only a clear overarching vision to provide a cogent rationale but also the political will to implement it.

## Conclusion

Many lessons that Spicer drew in his study over fifty years ago are crucial to recall today. Though Spicer was misguided in his quest for gratitude from aid recipients, his Tocquevillian emphasis on self-interest in the long run, which requires a peaceful, prosperous world, is a valuable reminder not to be distracted by short-term political or economic considerations. Seeking quick gains by supporting Canadian commercial interests, for instance, a key concern of the Harper government, makes for ineffective development policy and will not be of lasting benefit to Canada or developing countries. Spicer concluded, rightly, that ambitious global goals cannot be met by aid alone but require the coordination of all of Canada's international policies and better coordination with other international actors, a fact too often forgotten when faced with the desire to fly the flag. It remains to be seen to what extent the Trudeau government will be able or even willing to adopt

a long time horizon and seek systemic benefits, such as global peace and prosperity.

Spicer's presumed rejection of the Samaritan State can be embraced to a certain extent, not, like him, out of contempt for the Good Samaritan's altruism, which can be a useful motivation, but in recognition that aid and other means of promoting development are not simply charitable activities, despite the way they are often portrayed for fundraising purposes. Rather, supporting development is part of a shared imperative to create a more equitable, peaceful, and environmentally sustainable world.

## Notes

For generous support, the author thanks the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS), Wallenberg Research Centre at Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch 7600, South Africa, where he was Fellow at the time of writing this chapter. He is also grateful for funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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- 5 Spicer, *Samaritan State*, 11.
- 6 Spicer, *Samaritan State*, 12.
- 7 Ibid.
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- 14 Ibid., 137.
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