

Civic-Driven Change and Aided Development

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The Civic-Driven Change (CDC) Initiative provides a story and frame of reference which can add value to the work of (private) aid agencies. However, aid agencies vary, and the stage of development of this understanding - which competes with other methods - is such that a first engagement with CDC would be for agencies to critically reflect on their 'being' and 'doing' as civic agents of change. In focusing on what this might mean in practice, this briefing paper draws on essay 10 in the CDC volume and complements others policy briefs. It is not prescriptive. Illustrations of what CDC could entail for development strategy, principles and practices can help initiate public discussion, foster organizational debate and invite 'rediscovery' of civic agency in aided development.

The Value of CDC for Aided Development

A common reading of trends in private aid agencies (PAAs) is one of an erosion of 'being' under the pressures of 'doing' and delivering services. This imbalance reflects security-driven humanitarian efforts and Millennium Development Goal (MDG)-related service priorities which overshadow the current development decade. Concerns about this scenario - and difficulties in showing a distinctive added value, particularly for northern PAAs - are the original reasons for support of this CDC Initiative.

Externally, agencies may profile themselves differently. However, the geographic locations of their work and their methods are becoming more 'harmonized' and standardized. Terminology and language pioneered by PAAs, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have become officially 'mainstreamed', with meanings depoliticized. Articulations and practices demonstrating 'alternative' sets of development ideas or theories of change are hard to find. Reactions against this homogenizing trend, seen in social forums, are emerging. But they have yet to offer a new vocabulary, or (want) to embark on concerted programmes of action that can generate new methods and language of civic action to help (re)claim citizen control of the institutions that influence their lives.

The practical cases and their analyses in the essays provide a view of CDC summarized in Policy Brief #1. Through illustration rather than prescription, this policy brief interprets CDC as a grounded framework for adding value to private aid agencies in their being and doing. The approach starts by restating central features of CDC as an 'alternative' way of thinking about and pursuing social change. It then describes a 'multi-directional' approach to strategies, offers ideas about where to focus efforts within them and, finally, suggests a way of opening up organizational reflection on what CDC might have to offer.

CDC as Guiding Philosophy and Principles

Essays identify the failure of politics to effectively address socio-economic and environmental problems - that is, to manage the 'global commons' as a sustainable and equitable collective good. An overarching philosophy of CDC is therefore one of (re)making

local to global governance a guiding thrust of support to citizenship and civic agency.

CDC has self-determined principles and logics with 'spiritual' origins and human predispositions to imagine futures and live with others. When these attributes are translated into citizenship, history, context and vocabulary matter a lot. As a principle, CDC avoids undemocratic means to reach democratic ends. But rights of citizenship are a prerequisite. Where denied, they need to be fought for. Power and risk analysis are part and parcel of civic agency, which is a value-based responsibility of everyone - it should not be 'sectoralized'. The division between public and private domains is not fixed or sacrosanct: paying taxes does not absolve one from concern for the whole. Party politics is not a likely route to deep democratization, as it brings successful citizens, who turn a blind eye to the needs of the society as a whole, to positions of power. New political instruments need to evolve.

From this type of framework, what could strategies for aided development look like?

A CDC Strategy: Five Directions for PAA Effort

Private aid agencies are already involved with some elements of a CDC approach to development. However, divisions characterize the aid system, which is premised on institutional comparative advantages, making it less likely that a full range of CDC initiatives are to be found within a PAA's repertoire. In addition, CDC requires practices, like critical analysis of language, context and assessments of (political) risk, to be explicitly undertaken.

Institutions are vital in making aid operational. A practical CDC strategy can therefore direct itself to this commonly used structure. Figure 1 is a 'CDC compass'. Its quadrant points are four major institutional domains in society: civil society, governance, family and markets. A CDC compass needle always points 'north' towards civic behaviour. Fully rotating the compass makes a complete scan of the institutional landscape. This action gives 'directions' to multiple strategies, as a comprehensive development approach to change uncivic behaviour in all walks of life. But a compass is not a model. It cannot say what direction to take, nor how to get there. Agencies must work this out for themselves.

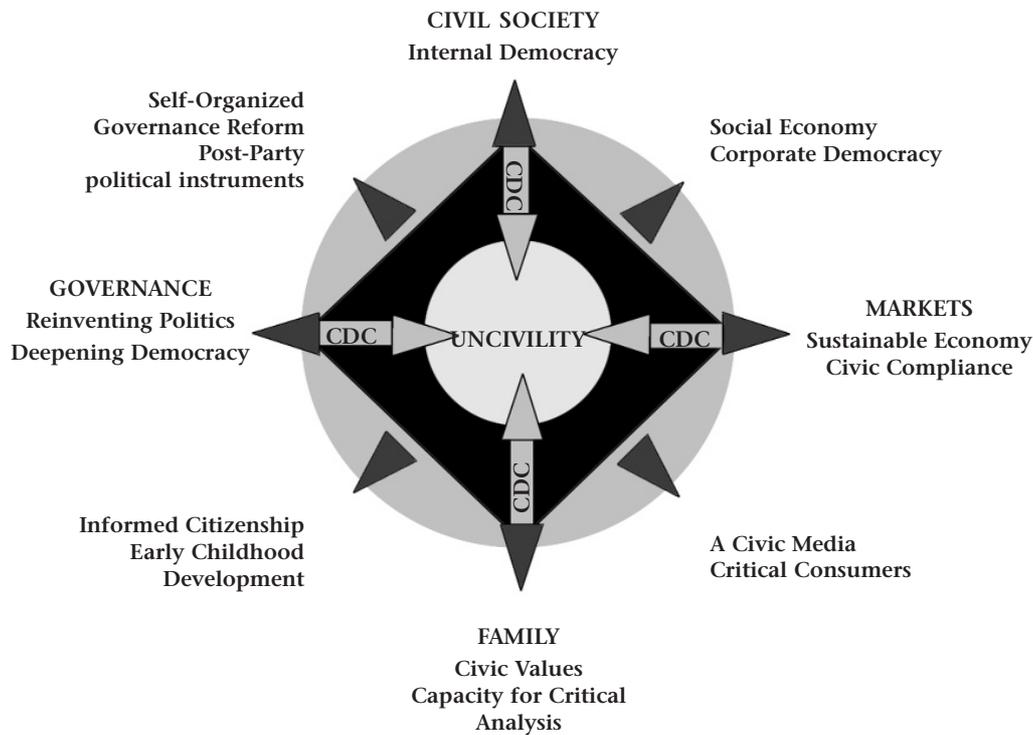


Figure 1. CDC Compass Strategy

The fifth point of the compass is time. This critical dimension of change needs to be considered in every strategic choice. Three time frames are particularly relevant. These are: political cycles, the pace of substantive institutional reform, and intergenerational transformations.

Civil society: Making ‘civic’ society democratic is a major undertaking. Leadership, public accountability, transparency and credibility are already major concerns. CDC would intensify and expand these efforts beyond aided entities towards a general ethos of civility, relying on self-driven reform, not legislation. More significant elements would be active ways of reducing factionalism in society from which intolerance flows. Bridging divides by relational brokering and convening dialogues would merit attention.

A challenge of particular immediacy is to work on reforming systems of governance based on local civic agency, for example, with a public work methodology applied towards tangible gains in people’s lives. Investment in connecting these efforts ‘horizontally’ could be consciously directed at exploring new forms of political organization and communication.

Governance: Much can be, and is being, done to improve existing electoral processes. But they are unlikely to remedy pathologies of party politics and penetrate to the roots of public mistrust. A crucial, long-term avenue for action would be to explore and build from the real, living, political culture of societies towards forms of democracy that work in terms of the principle of citizen control over public authority. This approach would ‘deepen’ democracy in a more fundamental way.

Family: Reforming governance requires a well-informed, critically aware citizenry. Technological advances open up these possibilities. The values and attitudes that reflect civic agency in adulthood stem from world views formed in initial socialisation and language acquisition, giving significant inter-generational return on investment in early childhood. CDC could usefully prioritize pre-

schooling to foster respect for diversity and equity in (gender) relations. Developing children’s capacities for critical analysis of media and of the consumer society brings reform of politics into the classroom!

Markets: A CDC perspective would argue that democracy and concern for the sustainability of the whole needs to become a commonplace feature of how markets operate and how businesses are governed. Shareholder activism for greater transparency, removal of perverse management incentives and regulation against the – still legal – conflicts of interest rife in today’s capital markets are examples. A game plan could be for employees – as responsible citizens – to work towards corporate compliance with civic values, perhaps using corporate ethics as an existing reference.

In addition, there are a range of entities – mutual societies, cooperatives, barter associations – that cluster under the term ‘social economy’. Marginalized by privatization, these entities could be reinvigorated. Further impetus can be given to public benefit organizations (PBOs) that fulfil social development functions working on pacts with government rather than contracts.

Meeting points: By and large, there are too few venues where different types of institutions meet with equitable ground rules: one party often tends to dominate. Paradoxically, conflicts can generate more balanced relational arrangements. Tripartite councils in European countries are an example, as are forums like the Marine Stewardship Council, where contending interests openly engage and negotiate. CDC would build intermediation resources as well as expand negotiating sites and mechanisms, where dispute or conflict are recognized and worked with.

While only indicative, CDC re-accentuates the worth of some existing initiatives, offers new areas of concentration and coherently holds together multiple strategic directions and efforts. But, there is no ideal course. History, context and timing all play a part in choosing and making CDC journeys.

CDC and Aid Agencies: Tests for Self-Reflection

An immediate challenge for organizations is to sift through the many angles of CDC to see if it offers added value in terms of self-understanding, positioning and more effective practices. To help with this task, are three question-based tests for Monday morning.

Test 1: Identity. CDC is overtly political and multi-institutional. Does this resonate with the agencies 'desired' self-perception, public image, espoused values and ideas about social change? What does an agency's language tell itself and others about its development philosophy, for example, as regards its being a public or private affair, and the scope of its responsibility?

Test 2: Portfolio. Does the profile of analysis, work, projects or grant objectives reflect the political 'c' of civil society and citizen, or the 'c' of client, customer or consumer? Can it be both at once? Is a political-economic agenda supported on the ground as claims rather than services? What types of power are being addressed? Is attention paid to the interface between civic agency and political system? What do the profile say about the public-private divide? Are all types of social institutions being addressed? Are the results of this test consistent with test 1?

Test 3: Interventions. Do methods on the ground embody CDC philosophy, principles and concerns? For example, are rights (to rights) in the frame? Are self-determination and self-organization in play? Are micro-politics understood and factored in? How will the types and distribution of risks be altered with local players and with outsiders? Can 'small' scale-up to 'large' by connecting with many?

The quality of discussions about the question 'where is innovation in CDC to be found' – and reflection on answers that CDC itself provides – will be as important for the value to organizations as the answers themselves.