

Global Citizens for Change

A case study of Canadian VCAs
collaborating to engage the public

Monday, February 19, 2007

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Carrefour Canadien International

Volunteer cooperation, public engagement and international development

- What is public engagement
- Why engage the public
- History and context
- What we've learned
- Global Citizens for Change – A case study in collaboration
- Outputs and interim results
- Looking forward and questions for the future



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VCA Partners

- Canadian Crossroads International
- Canada World Youth
- CECI
- Canadian Executive Service Organization
- CUSO
- Oxfam Quebec
- SUCO
- WUSC
- VSO Canada

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What is public engagement?

- Public engagement is the process of engaging citizens
- It refers to a set of processes and activities which enable people to move from basic awareness of international development priorities and sustainable human development, through an understanding of the causes and effects of global issues, to personal involvement and informed action.

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Why engage the public in international development?

- In order to bring about the changes require to eliminate poverty and promote global justice and sustainable development, stronger democratic support and action by citizens is required.
- Government development agencies find it difficult to communicate and educate the public beyond official communications
- Engaging citizens creates social capital



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History

- VCAs in Canada have more than 50 years history successfully engaging citizens in development. Throughout our history volunteers have:
 - Selected overseas partners and defined placements
 - Selected, trained and supported Canadians volunteers to serve overseas and Southern volunteers to come to Canada
 - Carried out a variety of global education activities in communities across the country.



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What we know

- A review of the Volunteer Cooperation program in 2005 found that VCAs had an impact on a wide range of Canadian citizens and organizations
- Everyone interviewed had been affected by VCAs public engagement:
 - They gained increased knowledge of development, greater understanding and openness to different cultures, world views and perspectives.
 - Were motivated to get involved
 - And did get involved
 - As a result public support has increased for VCAs
- Most effective strategy was to engage citizens at the local level through a returned volunteer or an individual from a developing country



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Challenges

- Most activities were one-off events or actions largely due to initiative of individual staff or volunteers at the local level rather than as a result of a cohesive national strategy
- More RVs would have gotten involved if provided the opportunity and support to do so
- Although VCAs are reaching wider sectors of the public, some significant opportunities to achieve results have been missed
 - Reaching the converted
 - Lack of cohesive or coordinated public engagement strategy
 - Lack of dedicated staff time and resources
- Decentralized public engagement and global education activities in Canada have not had a discernable impact on influencing policy nationally or internationally
- Independent local activities cannot influence public opinion to a sufficient degree to effect systemic change.



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What we've learned?

- Nationally or internationally coordinated campaign's such as Oxfam's Fair Trade have had some success in influencing public opinion and in changing behaviour.
- Working in partnership with others organizations can go a long way toward maximizing results and reaching the public.



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Context

- In **1995** the Canadian International Development Agency drastically cut back on investment in public engagement
- VCAs and other NGOs lost infrastructure to support volunteers
- VCAs got mixed messages from CIDA about the perceived value of engaging Canadians
- In **1999** Public Engagement remerged as key priority for CIDA, but no new or significant resources were allocated
- Given our limited resources for public engagement and advocacy (money and staff) what can we do to build this social capital and mobilize the public in support of key issues?

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Global Citizens for Change A case study

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Why collaborate on public engagement?

- Need to raise the profile and credibility of volunteer cooperation as integral component of Canada's development strategy
- Canadians can influence national and international policies which impact development goals
- The number of volunteers we are sending is in decline, particularly in any one community. Local committee structure is not sustainable by individual VCAs
- The profile of volunteers we are sending overseas is changing – more diverse, older and more established and requires different strategies to reengage
- Fewer VCAs have regional offices, need to support local action from great distances
- VCAs do not have resources to support large scale campaigns on their own.



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Challenges of collaboration

- VCAs in Canada collaborate on funding challenges, policy influence, and program support, but this is relatively recent, no history of collaborating on programs in Canada
- VCAs in competition for resources and public support
- few resources to support collaboration or emerging public engagement initiatives
- VCAs share common struggle to keep up to date contact information, and to engage RVs where they live



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Global Citizens for Change

- Established new sub-committee of coalition of nine agencies to look at collaborating on public engagement
- Received small grant for a collaborative pilot project in eight communities
- Strategy was to engage returned volunteers in the Make Poverty History Campaign
- Specifically to mobilize others in their communities organize events to raise public awareness of global poverty and campaign demands and to write and meet with their elected representatives



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Why Make Poverty History

- An existing campaign structure
- Part of a global campaign
- The goals are achievable
- Citizens can make a difference in their own way in their own community



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Goals

- In 2006 received funding from CIDA to expand the project across the country

Purpose

- To support the effective engagement of Canadians, with a particular focus on returned volunteers, to mobilize on international development issues, and
- To raise the profile of volunteer cooperation as an effective development strategy



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Strategies

Continue to use Make Poverty History and MDGS as a vehicle to achieve systemic change on key barriers to development

Regional Mobilization/Campaigning

- Engage and support returned volunteers across the country to mobilize their communities in support of sustainable development globally.



Strategies

Communications and Web

- Implement a proactive media relations and marketing strategy which highlights volunteer engagement in addressing key development issues in particular: poverty, HIV/AIDS, aid and debt.
- Develop website to enable returned volunteers and interested Canadians to take action on international development issues and to inform Canadians about volunteer cooperation.

Events

- Raise the profile of volunteer cooperation within CIDA and among Parliamentarians through specific events featuring returned volunteers and Southern partners
- Foster sense of community and identity among returned volunteers

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Global Citizens for Action Against Poverty

- Hosted two face to face leadership trainings for returned volunteers from across the country
- Hosted two telephone training sessions to provide more in-depth knowledge on trade and AIDS
- Developed joint resources
 - Defined common themes, messages and goals for campaigning
 - Training
 - Skills development modules and on-line tools: how to mobilize volunteers, make presentations, support volunteer committees, meet your Member of Parliament; tell your story, work with media, MPH and AIDS mobilization kits.
 - Visual identity
 - Web site
 - Communications/Media Relations
 - Pre-departure training manual for all VCAs



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Outputs and interim results

- Local Action Committee leaders identified and trained in all provinces and two territories
- Over 16,000 people took part in events organized by local leaders in the first 6 months of activities
- Activities took place on 35 campuses and in 38 different communities in the first year and growing
- Implementation by volunteer local action leaders almost immediate with events and work plans being developed
- Many LAC leaders have established groups and committee from their own networks. Some established new committees and others are working with coalitions of existing groups
- Volunteers are developing stronger analysis and awareness of the issues and taking action



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Kelowna local action committee

A week in the life of one LAC Leader, a returned volunteer from CUSO who went overseas in 1998 and who is a mother with two children and runs her own business. She lives in Kelowna, a city in the southern interior of British Columbia; with a population of 105,000

- Met with MP
- Letter to editor of student paper countering the assertion Canadian MPH White Bands made in sweatshop (they are union made in Toronto)
- MPH training with a group of Eco-Media Canada World Youth participants from Canada, Botswana and South Africa who are currently on placement in Kelowna.
- Group develops poster and “fact sheet” about local poverty to try and bring the campaign closer to home for local residents
- Group creates a local Click Ad to get local leaders involved and on board with the campaign.
- Initiated Brown Bag Lunch Hour Discussion Series and Movies that Matter on issues related to poverty

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Kelwona local action committee

- Oct 26 - Booth and facilitated discussion at the Youth Forum where approx. 125 youth discusses the UN-Economic Social Council (ECOSOC) High Level Segment topic for 2006. Recommendations presented to the NGO/UN forum. Out of the Forum a UN Youth association pilot project formed.
- Oct 26 - Musical Event called One World Beat ~ 800 in attendance
- Oct. 27 - Participation and booth at speakers series taking place around the MDGs with attendance of 300.
- Oct 28 – booth and participation at UN (ECOSOC) Canadian NGO Regional Network Meeting which is a preparation meeting of the High Level Segment statement from Canadian NGOs to the UN for 2006. The theme is “how to sustain economic growth for social development including the eradication of poverty and hunger with a focus on micro-enterprise”.
- Oct 29 - Table and MPH video at invitational speaking tournament for multiple school districts. Attendance approximately 125 .
- Oct 29 – evening - Booth and material at Taste of the World dinner hosted by the Kelowna Community Resource Program. Attendance approximately 300.

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Lessons learned

- There are tangible benefits that come from collaboration. Our reach and impact is greater than anything we could achieve on our own
- It takes time and resources to build committees and coalitions; define shared goals, objectives and secure required resources.
- It takes time and sustained investment to re-engage returned alumni, especially those with whom we have lost contact
- Recruiting self-motivated committed leaders is critical to success. Recruitment is facilitated by direct and personal contact and this requires dedicated resources



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More lessons

- Ongoing training, encouragement and support are critical. Once local leaders are identified we must invest in them
- Volunteers care deeply about international issues and Canada's role in the world. Many are highly motivated to take action and are seeking concrete ways to be engaged, but also appreciate autonomy in determining the course of action. They want to collaborate with others, to feel part of a group.
- Opportunities for face-to-face trainings and meetings are essential to coalition building, and generating commitment with committee leaders, but new technology can help support ongoing engagement once relationships have been established.
- Re-engaging returned volunteers remains a challenge for all VCAs
- Dedicated staff time and resources are required
- Integration into the life of VCAs remains a challenge



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Looking forward

Legislated Mandate for aid

International Cooperation Days

International Microcredit Summit in Halifax

International Day of the Volunteer – December 5th

Launch of joint website

Canadian federal election

WTO

Project evaluation

IVCO 2007

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Key questions for the future

- What will be required to effectively integrate collaborative public engagement activities and individual engagement activities of each VCA partner?
- Is our collective capacity to engage returned volunteers and interested Canadians enhanced?
- Is collaboration a more effective mechanism to engage returned volunteers and interested Canadians in taking action on policies which impact development globally?
- Will this collaboration enhance individual VCAs' ability to engage with their alumni?
- Will more engaged Canadians help deliver development results?



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