



CIVIL SOCIETY AND AID EFFECTIVENESS

CASE BOOK

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VOLUNTEER SERVICES AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT: THE UNITERRA PROGRAM

Description of the initiative

Uniterra is a development and public engagement program with operations in 13 African, Asian, and Latin American countries and a public engagement program for Canada. It is centred on volunteering and international partnership. It is being implemented by two Canadian NGOs: *Centre d'étude et de coopération internationale* (CECI) and World University Service Canada (WUSC).

Its goals are twofold: to build the capacities of local development actors in targeted sectors (agriculture and rural development, private sector development, health and HIV/AIDS, basic education, and youth citizenship); and to mobilize the contributions of individual Canadians for development. The program draws on the principles of aid effectiveness, which it has adapted from a civil society perspective.

The current Uniterra program is funded by CIDA and the two Canadian partners, and runs from July 2004 to March 2009¹. It mobilizes more than 400 Canadian and Southern volunteers each year on long- and short-term assignments to directly support over 120 local partners, who are key actors in the targeted sectors in their countries, and are working to strengthen the capacities of more than 800 grassroots organizations offering services to the public.

The program has developed an innovative volunteering arrangement in Canada known as "Leave for Change," which is directed at the private or institutional sectors. The employer becomes a program partner and bears some of the costs of its employee's assignment. The program also makes available a small sectoral fund to support partner initiatives and activities. Activities in Canada include informing the public through a network of partners and volunteers, and providing opportunities for tangible engagement in international solidarity work.

¹ The Uniterra program was later renewed for a second phase, from 2009 to 2014. In this second phase, it has concentrated even further its sector interventions, going from 2 sectors per country to 1 sector per country.

Uniterra's model of development cooperation rests on the principle that Southern CSOs are best placed to offer services to populations and communities or to advocate on behalf of excluded or vulnerable groups, but that these CSOs need to build their capacities in certain areas and require access to resources in order to carry out their activities.

Uniterra's activities are focused both geographically and by sector to allow for a more comprehensive approach to development. Key actors or stakeholders (domestic CSOs working in a sector, relevant government departments, and donors) undertake an analysis of the issues from a civil society perspective, with support from Uniterra.

Local program partners (usually 5-10 CSO organizations in a sector) develop five-year sector action plans and establish sectoral program management committees that set annual goals and allocate resources. These committees identify capacity development needs that a volunteer partnership program could help to address and identify priority activities. They also monitor progress on results with the support of Uniterra field staff and volunteers. The committees also act as fora for dialogue and coordinated action between CSOs in a given sector. Committee members are supported in their analysis of relevant policies and programs, and their capacity to engage in policy dialogue is strengthened. In many cases, relevant national authorities also participate in the work of these committees.

Results

Results of the program to September 30, 2007 include the following:

- In total, more than 120,000 persons, 56% of them women, have developed better skills and aptitudes due to direct support or the work of Uniterra volunteers. The beneficiaries are paid employees, members, or volunteers of organizations offering services to the public. For example, in a partnership with Botswana's Department of Vocational Education and Training, some 700 teachers received HIV-AIDS training. The teachers were provided with curriculum materials for use in the classroom that enabled them to reach thousands of young people in the country.
- More than 800 organizations have strengthened their capacities to offer services to the public through human resource skills development and capacity development to mobilize resources and implement effective strategies in their respective sectors. In Senegal, the 250 members of the literacy coalition known as *Coalition Nationale des Opérateurs en Alphabétisation* (CNOAS) worked on improved coordination of their internal structure and enhanced dialogue with the literacy branch of the Ministry of Education. The result has been a genuine collaboration between the Ministry and civil society towards the implementation of the national literacy strategy.
- More than 80 CSOs are actively involved in policy dialogue in their respective sectors. Thanks to the program, several organizations have been able to network and to take concerted action at the national, regional, and international levels, thus reinforcing their influence. In Nepal, the Feminist Dalit Organization, FEDO, plays a central role in an initiative to enact laws preventing discrimination on the grounds of gender and caste. With Uniterra's help, FEDO has formed ties with other women's organizations around the world, thus strengthening its influence within the national dialogue.
- More than 290,000 people, 60% of them women, have better access to services, means of production, or markets. For example, over 5,000 women from four West

African countries have acquired greater proficiency in the production and marketing of shea butter products. The quality of their products has improved, and they have boosted their market share and income. These women have created cooperative businesses as a way of organizing their production and marketing efforts and of acquiring the services they need. Over the last 15 years, dozens of volunteers have supported these women's groups.

- In Bolivia, hundreds of women have seen their risk of dying in childbirth drop substantially since they have gained access to a midwife who uses both traditional and modern techniques and works at the hospital. This service was developed as part of a partnership between the communities, the municipality, and health care providers, with support from program volunteers. This innovative model is now being replicated throughout the Andean Altiplano.

Description of good practice

Local ownership, alignment, and coordinated programming

As we have seen, Uniterra's activities are based on coordinated actions and locally-defined priorities, developed taking a relatively comprehensive sector perspective. While respecting the principle of local ownership, this approach ensures that interventions are mutually supportive and have more potential for impact at the sector level, compared to isolated volunteer-sending activities. It has also promoted improved collaboration and coordination with the government.

In Senegal's education sector the sectoral committee chose to focus on the strengthening of informal education, including literacy training. Several umbrella bodies sitting on the sectoral committee represent hundreds of Senegalese literacy organizations. These organizations previously had difficulty wielding any influence over Senegalese authorities. To help overcome this constraint, the literacy branch of the Ministry of Education was invited to become a Uniterra partner. This laid the groundwork for constructive dialogue between CSOs and the literacy branch of the government. Today, joint projects are being planned, and CSOs are engaged in constructive dialogue with the Ministry.

In Guatemala, Uniterra supports craft organizations to market their products. Uniterra also supports AGEXPORT, an association composed mainly of business people promoting exports, which has chosen to set up a unit for the promotion of fair trade products, thereby supporting small-scale artisans. Following a request by the artisans and with the support of AGEXPORT, the Guatemalan government has set up a Fair Trade Commission to develop policies and provide support for programs in this sector. The Commission is now a Uniterra partner and actors at all levels work together to provide the country with winning strategies for fair trade and give voice to the South in debates concerning fair trade.

Results and accountability

One of the major challenges confronted by international volunteer programmes is to demonstrate that they contribute to development results. Uniterra has addressed this challenge by setting up a performance measurement and reporting system based on quantitative and qualitative development indicators such as those seen above under Results. The adoption of a sector-focused approach facilitates the measurement of development results through the identification of higher level development goals.

Since the purpose of the program is to build capacity, indicators serve to determine which types of capacities are developed (management, governance, marketing, advocacy, mobilization, etc.) and how many organizations benefit. Uniterra also supports its local partners' implementation of systems to measure the results of their own activities for the populations they serve.

The implementation of performance measurement systems places demands on all the partners of a program but it is essential to evaluating the contribution of CSOs to development efforts. Moreover, such a system serves to demonstrate that the concerted action of Northern and Southern volunteers, in the context of a structured development program in line with the country's priorities, can make a significant contribution.

Donorship issues

One of the keys to the success of Uniterra is the quality of its relationship with CIDA. The contribution agreement between the two Canadian organizations and CIDA was drafted in the spirit of partnership in a common cause that recognizes the contributions of the parties (*inter alia*, the monetary value of Canadian volunteers' donations of work-time). The five-year term of the agreement is crucial to the success of such a program. The program was designed by two Canadian organizations in conjunction with their Southern partners and is in keeping with CIDA's priorities, yet allows for the flexibility necessary to create a value-added program run by and for civil society.

Uniterra's contribution to capacity building for the local organizations is, however, limited by the low levels of financial support granted to CSOs in the program countries. The local organizations are thus ill-equipped to adequately deliver services to the public or to advocate on its behalf. All the organizations complain of a lack of funding through national programs, thus putting the effectiveness of Uniterra's efforts in doubt. This suggests that capacity building programs such as Uniterra be implemented in environments where the enhancement of CSO capacities goes hand in hand with resource availability to support the work of CSOs more generally. Southern and Northern CSOs can mobilize resources to support their activities and programs through their own channels, but it is incumbent upon local governments and donors to ensure that adequate funding for civil society is available through program funds.

Partnerships

CECI and WUSC have considerably improved the quality of their relationships with the 120 partner organizations they now work with, who now play a pivotal role in program management decisions. In addition, Uniterra favours the establishment of relations of knowledge-sharing, and reciprocity between Southern and Canadian organizations as well as among Southern organizations. Thus, for example, a partnership was established between literacy stakeholders in Senegal and Niger and two Canadian actors, the *Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec* and the *Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français*. These organizations, which represent grassroots organizations offering literacy services, have exchanged techniques and training methods and shared strategies on how to induce their respective governments to step up their financial support. Examples such as this that demonstrate how volunteerism and international partnership help to build social capital are increasingly numerous.

Extracted from the case study "Uniterra Programme" submitted in 2008 to the AG-CS by Centre d'étude et de coopération internationale (CECI) and World University Service Canada (WUSC) through Sylvain Matte, Uniterra Programme Director. Contact Philippe Fragnier, Team Leader, Programming and Partnership Uniterra, philippef@ceci.ca

<http://web.acdi-cida.gc.ca/extranet/policy/ExtCivilSociety.nsf/69f5b93259b47cce8525673000575b65/add2fe8e2bac094b85257485006e394f?OpenDocument>