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Next Generation of knowledge partnerships for global development. Introduction

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Next Generation of knowledge partnerships for global development. Introduction / Prochaine génération de partenariat de savoir pour le développement global. Introduction

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ABSTRACT

Despite the rich potential benefits to be had from collaborations amongst practitioners and academic communities in the Canadian global development field, there is a general sense that such exchanges happen much less frequently than they could. The Next Generation programme, which underpins this special issue, presented an opportunity to address knowledge gaps in the current ecosystem of academic-civil society organization (CSO) collaborations, producing new research presented in this issue. Between 2016 and 2019, the NextGen Program sought to test and foster different ways and models of facilitating cross-sectoral collaboration between academics and CSOs in Canada. This introduction takes a reflexive approach, including with respect to the Program's partnership between the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development (CASID) and Cooperation Canada (formerly known as the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC)), to present some key lessons and findings from cross-sectoral collaborations in the global development sector. The article then draws on the experiences of a wide range of collaborative models to draw some conclusions about how to nurture a conducive knowledge partnership ecosystem looking forward.

RÉSUMÉ

En dépit des grands avantages potentiels que peuvent générer les collaborations entre praticien-ne-s et universitaires dans le domaine du développement global au Canada, le sentiment général est que ces échanges se produisent beaucoup moins souvent qu'ils ne le pourraient. Le programme Prochaine génération, qui sous-tend ce numéro spécial, a été l'occasion de combler des lacunes en matière de connaissances dans l'écosystème actuel des collaborations entre universitaires et organisations de la société civile (OSC), produisant de nouvelles recherches présentées dans ce numéro. Entre 2016 et 2019, le

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programme Prochaine génération a cherché à mettre à l'essai et favoriser différentes façons et modèles pour faciliter la collaboration intersectorielle entre les universitaires et les OSC au Canada. Cette introduction prend une approche réflexive, y compris en ce qui a trait au partenariat entre l'Association canadienne d'études du développement international (ACEDI) et Coopération Canada (CC) (auparavant le Conseil canadien pour la coopération internationale (CCCI)) dans le cadre du programme, afin de présenter quelques-unes des principales leçons et conclusions tirées de ces collaborations intersectorielles dans le secteur du développement global. L'article s'inspire ensuite des expériences d'un large éventail de modèles de collaboration pour tirer des conclusions quant à la manière de soutenir un écosystème propice aux partenariats de savoir dans l'avenir.

Introduction

Missed opportunity: an underperforming Canadian development ecosystem

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and academic communities[1] have much to learn from one another and much to gain from collaborating. Indeed, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remind us that our collective international development and humanitarian assistance efforts increasingly rely on our capacity and ability to partner with various development actors more effectively, and to actively exchange knowledge and share expertise. Despite the rich potential benefits to be had from such cross-sectoral collaborations, starting with achieving better and more sustainable development, there is a general sense that such exchanges among practitioners and the academic community happen much less frequently than they could, and that in many cases one or both parties are left less than satisfied by the encounter.

Divergent priorities, approaches and organisational cultures can lead to misunderstandings on both sides and prevent long-term partnerships from emerging (Roper 2002; Cameron, Quadir, and Tiessen 2013; Martel and Kindornay 2020; Toukan 2020, this issue). Partially as a result of such divisions, Canadian development CSOs have historically seemed to rely much more on private consulting firms rather than Canada's academic communities to inform their research, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and policy advice (CCIC and CASID 2016). According to Cooperation Canada (CC) (formerly known as CCIC) and CASID, this tendency resulted in research by CSOs that was limited in scope and reach, while academic research has become increasingly focused on theory and concepts, divorced from policy and other practical applications.

Meanwhile, International Development Studies (IDS) programmes have grown significantly in Canada in the past decades. Responding to student demands, Canadian universities have created several curricula including more practical courses and collaborative programmes. Nonetheless, IDS programmes in Canada remain predominantly theoretical and critical of development as a sector. Very few programmes and research focus on applied learning and action-based research (Tiessen and Smillie 2017). Likewise, there are very few examples of secondment opportunities for tenured professors in non-academic institutions, such as in CSOs or in the government.[2] And few universities host practitioners in their departments. There are exceptions to this rule, albeit limited ones,

including an "Activist in residence" in the Law Department at Carleton, Professors of practice at the McGill Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID) or humanitarian simulations (SimEx) led by practitioners at Laval University and Humber College. And while there is a strong focus on community-based research (CBR) in Canada (including community-campus departments in several universities, including Université de Québec à Montréal (UQAM), University of Victoria and Simon Fraser University), their involvement in global development research and practice tends to be limited – even though CBR has played an important role in democratic knowledge partnerships (Lepore, Hall, and Tandon 2020, this issue). "Where community action is united with academic knowledge, [knowledge partnerships] have the potential for social transformation in ways that the narrow application of university scientific knowledge solutions cannot achieve" (Lepore, Hall, and Tandon 2020, 7). The SDG framework provides us with an opportunity to move outside of traditional theoretical development studies to think about development solutions across (and beyond) disciplines and conventional geographies. Consequently, the arrival of "hybrid" organisations such as the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)[3] Canada could help change the Canadian scene.

It is within this context that the Next Generation initiative emerged. It aimed to respond to some of the following questions: Why do Canadian CSOs not turn to academics to inform their policy and programmes? To what extent are Canadian academics – within the IDS field and beyond – leading research initiatives aimed at transforming development policy and practice? Are they bystanders of development work or do they collaborate with practitioners to improve the sector's impact on the ground? If so, what forms do these collaborations take? What are the limitations to and strategies for successful collaborations between these two communities?

Prior to launching the Next Generation initiative, few studies were available in Canada on academic/practitioner collaborations (McGiffin 2017). Studies and literature reviews commissioned by this initiative show a wide range of perspectives and a number of significant collaborations happening between Canadian academics and practitioners, but also some limitations. One of the initial observations was that cross-sectoral collaborations are in fact taking place, within and beyond the field of IDS, as demonstrated by Toukan's (2020) study. University departments in education, nutrition, health, environment and management are involved in research collaboration with Canadian CSOs.

Furthermore, the Canadian ecosystem is characterised by a think-tank gap which was exacerbated following the shutdown of The North–South Institute (NSI) in 2014. This led to the underperformance of the Canadian global development sector in terms of translating knowledge into policy uptake and use and providing independent analysis on policy and practice. For instance, the 2016 Global Go to Think Tank Index Report (Lepore, Hall, and Tandon 2020; McGann 2016) indicated that there were no Canadian institutions of this type inf its Top International Development Think Tanks list (in comparison, both the United Kingdom and Germany had three institutes in the top 25). As stated by Andrew Hurst (2020, this issue) in this special issue, better collaboration between academics/researchers and CSOs in Canada might require different organisational forms, such as think tanks to bridge the gap between these communities. The Canadian knowledge sharing ecosystem could benefit from new institutions which aim to improve development policy and practice.

In some countries, large CSOs bridge that gap by hosting research divisions (e.g. Oxfam UK, Save the Children UK, Action Aid UK/US, Christian Aid UK, etc.), hiring

what Chernikova (2017) called "bridging experts", and providing research and analysis, along with accompanying knowledge management. In Canada, very few organisations host research divisions. It is quite rare to see specific staff dedicated to research. Those involved in research in CSOs are hidden in policy departments or most often M&E positions. Beyond simply being a human resource or organisational structure limitation, it is perhaps emblematic of a knowledge ecosystem which considers academics as the main producers of knowledge. Since few non-academic organisations manage research funds (because of lack of access to, or eligibility for, resources, or because it is not deemed a priority) and since those that produce knowledge within CSOs are already somewhat invisible, engaging in long-term knowledge partnership with CSOs can be a challenge. Toukan's (2020) study also highlights some of the power dimensions related to knowledge production in Canada's research partnerships, which could also limit the scope and engagement of non-academic partners.

Part of the challenge for collaboration also lies in the funding landscape in Canada, despite some evolutions in recent years. While Canadian development researchers and practitioners have witnessed substantial cuts to Canadian official development assistance (ODA) in the past decade, and the end of important knowledge producing institutions on global development in Canada (McGiffin 2018; Martel and Kindornay 2020), at the same time, some additional funding windows have emerged to support collaborative and trans-disciplinary research, like the new SSHRC partnership engage grant. However, academic institutions are still largely the ones applying and managing these funding opportunities.[4] Moreover, non-mainstream and Indigenous research collaborations tend to get even less funding, despite some new opportunities that have arisen over the course of the NextGen initiative.[5] As noted in Toukan's study commissioned by the Next Generation programme and highlighted in this special issue, "research partnerships that receive funding from Canada's major channels, in one way or another, are seen to 'fit' with Canada's trade-centric agenda for foreign aid and development" (Toukan 2020, 15).

Compared with our peers, Canada stands out relative to Britain, the US and other G7 countries in terms of its gap between bridging research and practice (CCIC and CASID 2016) in the global development domain. But there is reason for hope. As funding to the international development and humanitarian sectors (and particularly to research-related projects) flatlines, this may nurture a growing incentive for academic scholars and development practitioners to collaborate to leverage their respective expertise in an effort to fill a growing gap (Martel and Kindornay 2020). On one side, universities are increasingly interested in integrated knowledge and learning approaches and, on the other side, CSOs are both being pressured to invest in research and innovation to remain leaders in their field (Mougeot 2017), as well as fulfilling a strong desire to use research to help them better understand their own performance and the context within which they are operating. Together, these trends created a climate in Canada that was conducive to taking decisive steps to finally addressing this long-standing lacuna.

The Next Generation programme and this special edition – a response to bridging the gap between research and practice

The *Next-Generation: Collaboration for development program* (henceforth NextGen) was launched in 2017 by Cooperation Canada, Canada's independent national voice for

international development., and CASID, an association of researchers, students, and academic institutions (colleges and universities). The intent of the initiative was to analyze the causes of the research-practitioner divide in Canada, and determine how to reduce the policy, practice and research gap in the Canadian global development sector. This three-year research initiative, funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), sought to accomplish its goal by testing different models of collaborations between the respective communities, creating cross-sectoral spaces for dialogue and collaboration on international development, assessing best practices amongst (and beyond) our respective members, and engaging the next generation of researchers and practitioners in concrete joint activities.

Specifically, this programme aimed to accomplish the following:

- **Ecosystem:** Strengthen the Canadian ecosystem across the range of its actors, including civil society organizations and academic communities, to enhance opportunities for collaboration on international development and humanitarian assistance.
- **Influence**: Improve research, knowledge-sharing and learning, evidence-based programmes and policy development to increase the potential for greater impact and influence.
- **Leadership:** Sustain collaboration amongst and between the next generation of Canadian international development and humanitarian practitioners, academics and students in policy, research programmes and practice focused on sustainable development.

This special issue, co-edited by Andréanne Martel, Fraser Reilly-King, and Bipasha Baruah, grew out of the NextGen initiative. It documents our findings and taps into different models and experiences of collaboration between practitioners and scholars in the global development sector in Canada and abroad. The same key themes that structured our learnings and were embedded in the programme design and implementation of this initiative (ecosystem, influence and leadership) structure the learnings in this article. We connect – where relevant – our findings with some of the broader literature on collaboration, including findings from some of the articles included in this publication.

This special issue specifically seeks to address the following four research questions:

1. What have been the experiences, outcomes, and lessons learned of past and present collaborations between civil society organizations and academics?
2. What are the specific problems and challenges in collaboration that need addressing through new and enhanced models of collaboration?
3. How do political and economic contexts and conditions affect fair, equitable, effective and impactful collaborations in Canadian research partnerships and beyond? How do power dynamics play into academic-CSO research partnerships in Canada?
4. As new and enhanced models of collaboration are tested and studied, what difference do these create for outcomes? What constraints and opportunities are identified to refine and upscale these pilots?

It draws on (1) papers commissioned by NextGen; (2) experiences from similar international studies (United Kingdom, multiple countries in the Global South, etc.); and (3) case studies of current research partnerships in Canada. Contributors are affiliated with

eight different universities across Canada (Québec, Ontario, British Columbia) and abroad (Open University UK, Durham University UK). Several contributions are co-submitted by academics and their CSO partners (engaging five CSOs). The latter is one of the most important contributions of this special issue, as we invited academic and non-academic partners to reflect on their experience working together. By doing so, we are contributing to the body of knowledge around cross-sectoral collaboration in Canada and abroad. In keeping with the spirit of the programme, we encouraged emerging scholars and practitioners to publish in this special issue (four emerging scholars and practitioners are listed as authors, including three as the main author).

To set the stage for this overview, we also share the learnings from our own collaboration – between CC and CASID, as two member-based organisations testing different ways to collaborate both between our organisations and our respective members.

We conclude this article by discussing some theoretical and practical contributions from the eleven articles which appear in this special issue. We intend for the special issue to be useful for teaching, improving cross-sectoral collaborations in the global development sector, and to help advance cutting-edge research on these issues. This special issue aims to reflect the diversity of contexts in Canada and abroad.

Canada's knowledge partnership landscape: what have we learned from NextGen?

Ecosystem: Testing Models of Collaboration to Strengthen the Canadian Ecosystem

Over a three-year timeframe, the NextGen programme had the broad goal of identifying and promoting new ways of working among practitioners, researchers, academics, students and policy developers in order to create conditions for enhanced and sustained collaboration between civil society organizations and academia working in global cooperation, including international development and humanitarian assistance. As part of this programme, we documented and shared best practices, experiences and learnings around cross-sectoral collaborations in Canada and abroad. One of the objectives of the programme was to **strengthen the ecosystem of research and knowledge-sharing** across the range of Canadian development actors, with particular emphasis on the civil society practitioner and academic communities. We sought to achieve this goal in three ways: (1) by mapping the Canadian ecosystem of knowledge sharing to identify barriers to collaboration; (2) by strengthening actual collaboration between our respective executives, including in terms of developing joint decision-making structures between our organisations, and by bringing a collaborative lens to all joint activities over the three year period; and finally, (3) by extending this collaborative lens to our respective memberships, identifying best practices in collaboration, showcasing what our respective members were doing together, and creating spaces for them to get to know one another.

Mapping the Canadian ecosystem: why it is not as easy as it seems

Through an initial baseline survey and a series of studies (McGiffin 2017; Toukan 2020; Martel and Kindornay 2020), we started to fill the knowledge gap around cross-sectoral collaborations happening in the Canadian global development sector.

With the baseline survey, we aimed to understand what types of collaborations were already happening in the sector, and what were the challenges and best practices our respective memberships (and beyond) had identified from past and current collaborations. This provided us with an overview of major Canadian CSO-academic forms of collaboration, some guidance for the design of the NextGen programme, as well as some initial policy and practice recommendations. What initially surprised us was the level of collaboration already happening in the sector. However, these collaborations were mostly ad-hoc and short-term (even if some referred to formal SSHRC funding agreements, for example). But these ad-hoc and mostly informal relationships were still considered as important as formal ones as a means of fostering and nurturing ongoing relationships. In fact, respondents recognised that relationships were the cornerstone of successful collaborations, and that even though CSOs often used consultants to conduct their research, when they engaged academics it brought an unexpected value-added (Martel and Kindornay 2020). As raised by Fransman et al. in this issue (2021, 8), partnership is seen as a "a set of relationships framed by particular contexts and in a continual process of 'becoming'". The focus groups we organised early on in the NextGen programme also surfaced examples of short-term collaborations leading to longer-term benefits and relationships (e.g. with academics sending relevant research to CSOs on an informal basis).

In multiple areas, the baseline survey findings were further corroborated by additional literature reviews. According to the same pan-Canadian survey mentioned above (Martel and Kindornay 2020), the most important forms of collaboration we identified were events, student secondments and placements; this is consistent with the findings in Chernikova's survey from 2011 (Chernikova 2017). Joint events seem to be a very important form of collaboration as confirmed by our survey responses. Strategies leading to successful collaborations include the co-production of research and knowledge, working with and through bridging experts, creating spaces for dialogue, learning, and sharing, and having entry points to connect with the other community (McGiffin 2017). Practitioners also identified skills training as a frequent model of collaboration, and academics identified research projects and teaching/student supervision as key ways they collaborate. Advocacy work and mobilisation/action are sometimes used by practitioners, but less by academics which is not surprising as action research and community-based research do not tend to be prioritised in Canadian international development studies (IDS) (Tiessen and Smilie 2017). In contrast, Hurst's (2020) article on think tanks in the Global South underscores how researchers and civil society actors, engaged in their national context, are well situated to navigate and negotiate opportunities for policy influence and positioning for policy influence, and how actively they engage in the research to action nexus. He suggests that this might be a model we emulate in the Canadian context.

The survey also revealed that barriers and disincentives to collaborating in the Canadian context include the lack of funding opportunities, and the fact that each actor works on different timeframes. McGiffin (2017) demonstrated in her literature review the main barriers to successful collaborations. They tend to be cultural and institutional, rather than logistical. Challenges to working together are largely linked to different organisational cultures and differing priorities. This leads to divergent research design and outputs. Producing timely and relevant outputs is an important concern for practitioners, while incentives to collaborating is the next most important challenge for academics.

Toukan (2020) documented in her study different dimensions around incentives and disincentives to collaborating, starting with incentive structures for promotion and tenure in academia, which does not encourage nor value practitioner involvement in research. Furthermore, the research partnerships in her study exemplified "how partners are often operating under the constraints and incentives of values, discourses, norms and rules that differ according to their sectors, disciplines or institutions" (Toukan 2020, 12).

According to an external evaluation of NextGen, the first goal of this initiative, which was designed to fill in the gaps related to the current ecosystem for academic-CSO collaborations, "has succeeded in deepening the knowledge of the Canadian ecosystem and the findings and key recommendations have been shared with their own members, as well as with funders and the relevant policy makers within the federal government" (Erbs and Associates 2019).

A reflexive approach to assess the Cooperation Canada and CASID partnership

One of NextGen's outcomes was dedicated to looking at CC and CASID's own partnership – as nexus organisations for the two communities being studied. We wanted to find out what made this partnership work, or did not, as much as the other collaborations we were trying to nurture over the course of the programme. Using a reflexive approach, we assessed our own partnership as part of the research programme, trying to document and measure the success of our collaboration along the way. Inspired by best practices related to partnership, at the start of the programme we adopted a partnership agreement which detailed our respective roles, along with a set of guiding principles that we hoped would inform our collaboration. These principles included participation, inclusion, equity, respect and trust, independent action and thought, collective decision-making, transparency of information, mutual learning and knowledge-sharing, and acknowledgement of our respective strengths and value-added. This partnership agreement was co-developed during an inaugural partnership session in which we mapped our partnership and shared our respective visions of the partnership. This included identifying potential measures of success in the partnership.

Concretely, we set up milestones and strategies to assess our partnership from the beginning: quick partnership check-ins at the beginning of each steering committee meeting to gauge how people were feeling about the partnership in general, and whether they had any immediate concerns; and a more formal partnership session[6] once a year. This session was preceded by a survey that was shared amongst partners to collectively and intentionally assess our key indicators of success in the CC-CASID collaboration, and to evaluate our progress towards meeting these over the three years. These sessions were a key opportunity to reflect on the partnership, adapt and realign. For example, the partnership survey helped the management team identify what we were doing well in terms of our partnership (staff coordination, managing the logistics around the partnership, information dissemination, etc.), and where improvements were required (decision-making process on operational activities, addressing imbalances of power (perceived and actual) between partners, co-branding, etc.). Near the end of the partnership, we organised conversations to discuss plans for future collaborations and the legacy of the programme – including intellectual property over the data we had collected, and tools we had collectively created, such as the Nextgen database[7] of Canadian

researchers. A Memorandum of Understanding was co-developed to comprehensively plan an exit strategy.

Building foundations for the programme and more importantly building trust to be able to undertake our activities together took more time than anticipated, even though we had collaborated on events and activities together in the past. Not surprisingly, complex partnerships – which aim to transform the way each organisation works and how they engage their respective memberships in the partnership – require a high level of commitment. Going beyond institutional constraints and ways of working demand time and trust. These same observations are shared by the many partners involved in the multiple case study led by Toukan (2020) as part of the programme. Trust is a well-documented requirement for effective research collaborations (Zingerli 2010; Lepore, Hall, and Tandon 2020), as partners usually identify networking as one of the primary motivators to engage in collaboration. These issues were also echoed in the baseline survey in which respondents recognised that relationships are the foundation of successful collaborations; it is both the main driver and the main success factor (Martel and Kindornay 2020). And the collaboration between CC and CASID was no exception.

Models of collaboration being tested and scaled

Previous studies have shown the importance of creating shared spaces between academics and practitioners to foster collaboration (Chernikova 2011), rather than forcing partners to work together. This was also raised as part of the eight principles for fair and equitable research partnerships established by the Rethinking research collaborative: "create spaces and commit funded time to establish, nurture and sustain relationships at the individual and institutional level" (Fransman et al. 2021). Consequently, as part of the NextGen programme, we embedded a collaborative lens in our programming to test different models of collaboration among our membership and to create spaces for them to connect.

During the Next Generation programme, we tested six different models of collaboration: (1) joint annual conferences; (2) working through coalitions and regional working groups (see below) to enhance evidence-based advocacy; (3) teaching and learning events between the next generation of scholars and practitioners through both a doctoral school and joint activities with a network of emerging CSO leaders; (4) student-led regional events co-organised with provincial/regional councils or CSOs; (5) secondments and internships within CCIC; and a (6) guest lecture series with speakers coming from the Global South. Each of these models purposely embedded a cross-sectoral lens. Learnings from these different models are described in the following sections.

As a starting point, and with the goal of strengthening collaborations among our members, CCIC and CASID co-organised our respective annual conferences during the first year and then co-organised a joint annual conference the two subsequent years. Each event shared the same goal of trying to increase cross-sectoral collaboration and dialogue between academics and practitioners. Different strategies were identified to achieve this goal: engaging both CC and CASID representatives in the steering committee to organise joint annual conferences; creating learning spaces in these events to discuss best practices and challenges related to cross-sectoral collaboration; inviting

speakers from the Global South who could speak to issues related to collaboration; reducing registration costs for our members and giving subsidies to emerging leaders; and designing calls for panels which required our respective memberships to include practitioner and academic speakers on each panel.

From these experiences, we learned the importance of understanding one another's incentive structures and the respective drivers for collaboration for both executives and members. For instance, although some academics may have access to multiple sources of funding that enable them to attend several conferences annually, many academics, especially early in their careers, are able to apply for conference funding from their home institutions only once or twice a year. They must also present papers or serve as panel discussants or chairs of sessions in order to access conference funding from academic institutions. CSO practitioners do not typically have to present papers or play other key roles in conferences in order to attend. This very simple difference required us to develop strategies to increase the number of academics serving as presenters or discussants. We also shifted the timing of our annual conference to one that better suited our academic partners. We also needed to better understand our members' motivations for participating in these collaborative activities and events. As our baseline survey showed, shared interest is the main factor that triggers academic-CSO collaborations (Martel and Kindornay 2020). Consequently, bringing them together at the conference to co-organise workshops around themes of shared interest and priorities proved to be the most successful way to get them engaged.

Influence: Influencing policies via evidence-based advocacy work

Better translating findings for the end-user – the policy community

By increasing support to institutionalised cross-sectoral collaborations between CSOs, academia and policy-makers in Canada, NextGen sought to use research to better inform policy and practice. To do so, it purposefully engaged with government representatives in different programmes at IDRC, with the SSHRC partnership division, and with Global Affairs Canada's research division at each stage of our programme. For instance, we addressed recommendations to donors in each of the studies we commissioned (McGiffin 2017; McGiffin 2018). Each of the studies were followed by knowledge mobilisation activities to share learnings and recommendations with key stakeholders. Producing concise, action-oriented reports in a timely manner over the course of the programme also proved to be a successful strategy for engaging policy makers. This constant dialogue created opportunities to influence, ask questions, and sometimes include policy makers' concerns and suggestions in our programme and research, which would not have been possible if we had waited until the end of the programme to publish our results in a peer-reviewed journal. This process was both challenging and successful, as it required us to publish the results of new studies with different content and in totally different formats (to be useful to a policy audience) from the articles going to peer-reviewed journals in order to avoid self-plagiarism.[8] However, it also allowed us to increase our influence and adapt our programme and research based on recommendations and feedback from the literature. It was also highly participatory, since different stakeholders were involved in providing insights at different stages of these

studies. And it took a degree of courage and humility for our researchers to share their preliminary work.

Evidence-informed advocacy (vs. advocacy informed evidence)

Pressing activist concerns were also raised in our baseline survey as an incentive to collaborate with the academic sector (Martel and Kindornay 2020). Accordingly, another way we sought to increase policy influence via NextGen was by increasing evidence-based advocacy within CC's regional working groups (RWGs). One of CC's core mandates involves government relations and policy influence. CC's regional working groups – the Africa–Canada Forum, Asia-Pacific Working Group, and Americas Policy Group[9] – have a long history of policy engagement and advocacy. Their core mandate was to develop collaborative strategies for policy development, dialogue, and advocacy within the Canadian government and multilateral institutions. The three working groups engaged in NextGen in order to test how they could increase their collaboration with academics to produce timely, evidence-based advocacy. The working groups benefited from these collaborations through the preparation of briefing notes, research and analysis on key issues, and their understanding of regional issues – all with a view to strengthening their advocacy work.

While some of the working group members were already working on an ad hoc basis with research institutions, or individual researchers, most members still needed convincing about the value of the collaboration. How would this collaboration work, and what would it bring to the group? And while many members liked the idea of working with independent researchers to inform their advocacy work, they did not necessarily appreciate that this means respecting the researchers' independent and intellectual freedom. Academic findings may not reveal what advocacy groups were hoping or expecting. At the same time, advocacy groups also began to appreciate the value of using research to discover the "truth" – whether it could help their case or not.[10] Based on these initial reflections, working group members began to realise the importance of collaborating with academic allies, and began to identify ways that they could work with them without compromising their academic independence. More specifically, the groups learned that by working closely together using participatory methodologies, the academics and working groups could co-design research questions and protocols that were useful and did not compromise academic integrity and independence.

Getting comfortable working together – an iterative approach

After getting more comfortable with the idea of collaborating with academics each group integrated this "collaborative" angle into their strategic planning and programming, engaging in many of the following approaches: (1) inviting one or more researchers to give a presentation at an annual meeting or public conference; (2) organising a joint event with a research group/institute (in the context of an annual meeting or as part of its programming); (3) having representatives participate in discussions and exploratory meetings with potential partners; (4) collaborating with one or more research institutes to develop activities or advocacy documents; (5) sharing information and data with researchers or research institutes (and vice versa) on a regular basis; (6) inviting

researchers or research institutes to participate in consultations or discussions with government representatives or parliamentarians; (7) inviting research institutes or university department to become members of a working group; and (8) conducting a joint study with researchers or a research institute.

Each group would test different strategies based on their needs and objectives, with a view to slowly increasing the frequency and significance of collaborations and activities between members of regional groups and the academic community. A series of introductory meetings between group members and research centres led to a range of different initiatives from joint public events, to academic participation in consultations with the government, to studies on issues of common interest. A series of "lunch and learns" organised jointly by the NextGen team and the RWGs also provided an opportunity to deepen knowledge on a variety of topics – from youth movements fighting inequalities, to reconstruction progress following typhoon Haiyan, or human rights implementation by regional and international legal bodies, and Asia-Pacific treaties.

Adding a few academic institutions as members within the RWGs helped maintain a continuous relationship with academia, and provided access to, and an understanding of, academic work. This knowledge exchange served both sides: academics benefitted from access to a large number of organisations deeply involved in and knowledgeable about different regions, with a host of local partners; and CSOs got to digest current academic findings and research in areas of shared expertise, which they might not have otherwise had the time and resources to access.

As mentioned by Erbs and Associates (2019, 8),

> the RWGs changed their practice as a result of their participation in the Next Generation program. All the RWGs had worked with academics on an ad hoc basis, the Next Generation program created the impetus for the groups to extend more formal invitations and to offer full member status to academics engaged in work relevant to their areas of focus. The academic members brought a greater rigour to the RWG work, improving the evidence collection and evaluation done by the RWGs and used to inform their policy development, advocacy calls and public engagement activities.

It will be interesting to see whether these collaborations continue in the context of the reformatting of the RWGs, including APG, operating independently.

Leadership: Investing in the Next Generation of leaders to foster a cultural shift

The next generation of leaders still needs to find the right spaces to collaborate

A critical dimension of NextGen was the focus on instilling among emerging leaders – both researchers and practitioners – the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration to achieve sustainable development. Supporting sustained collaboration amongst the sector's next generation of leaders was part of the theory of change for this initiative and we aimed to achieve it in three ways. Firstly, through concrete joint activities to encourage emerging leaders (from CC's Emerging Leaders Network (ELN[11]) and participants to the PhD school[12]) to get to know one another's work and identify potential crosswalks. This strategy was not as effective as we hoped in the first year. The barriers to collaboration in the global development sector in Canada proved to be the same even when trying to encourage collaboration among a new generation of leaders. If young

academics were not interested in applied research or pursuing a non-academic career path, it was not clear to practitioners how more and better cross-sectoral collaboration could be mutually beneficial or bring any value added. Based on the outcomes of this initial exchange, we took a different tact in subsequent years. For instance, we organised a joint training on a topic of mutual interest: knowledge translation. Rather than trying to "force" them to get to know one other and see the value of their respective fields of work, we created shared spaces and opportunities for them to interact, such as breakfast meetings with high level speakers, and CEO-Youth networking activities to help advance their career aspirations. We also sought to highlight their work and expertise via poster sessions at the joint annual conferences and through writing competitions.

We learned that PhD students and emerging leaders within CSOs have different professional needs and interests, and we should not expect collaborations to emerge by simply bringing them together in a room. PhD students want capacity-building opportunities that provide tailored support for their research, writing, and publication skills. They also want to know about non-academic career opportunities in their areas of interest and profile. Including these themes (e.g. identifying opportunities for non-academic career paths, etc.) as part of the PhD School was a way to invite them to think about these issues without forcing them to interact with ELN. Conversely, emerging leaders are involved in a variety of domains and positions such as human resources, programme management, communications, accounting, policy, etc. For some, collaboration with researchers and academics makes more sense than for others. Overall, they do not always see the value added of these joint opportunities, even though they could clearly benefit from one another in terms of better understanding how to translate and use knowledge and communicate complex issues to diverse audiences. Building on their own expertise and connecting with leaders involved in the same field of interest (e.g. agriculture, water management, women's rights, etc.) would probably lead to better results.

Secondly, encouraging youth to lead collaborative initiatives was another proven method to engage young leaders in meaningful cross-sectoral collaborations. Through student-led events, youth across the country were invited to submit ideas, the best of which were funded, and to then lead these activities on campuses or at their partner organisations. The purpose of this initiative was to provide opportunities for learning and professional development that bring students, scholars and practitioners together around current issues and themes in international development. To achieve this, we invited students to collaborate with regional and provincial councils for international cooperation or a civil society organization while planning these events. Consequently, these events would simultaneously offer a significant collaborative experience with a non-academic stakeholder to the students involved.

A third strategy we tried to instil the importance of the next generation of leaders in cross-sectoral collaboration was by engaging young researchers in every dimension of this initiative. By supporting graduate students (both Master's and PhD) and postdoctoral candidates to lead or co-lead literature reviews and studies on the Canadian knowledge partnership ecosystem, to engage in capstone initiatives, to develop the monitoring framework, to build the database of Canadian academics, young researchers helped realise the objectives of the initiative. Often under the supervision of academics, they worked in collaboration with CC staff and a steering committee representing academics and practitioners. They also quickly adapted their work to serve the needs of different

publishing environments – working with practitioners to develop policy briefs, short reports and blogs that articulated policy, practice and programming recommendations, or alternatively with professors before publishing peer reviewed articles in journals – and different audiences – engaging in lunch-and-learns and brown-bag lunches, CSO events and academic conferences, and roundtable policy discussions.

These experiments between CASID and CC's executives and memberships will hopefully inspire further collaboration which will keep the "NextGen spirit" alive long after the end of the programme in 2020. By instilling a collaborative state of mind, advocating for the mutual benefit of cross-sectoral work, and creating shared space rather than forcing an alliance between the two organisations, hopefully we've planted a seed for the future.

Nextgen: how is Canada doing in terms of research collaboration?

Beyond the NextGen's own experience, in this special issue, we aim to better understand the Canadian ecosystem of knowledge partnerships by exploring various factors which could foster, but also challenge, collaborations.

The first set of articles in this issue present the current state of the literature and practice in Canada in terms of academic-practitioner collaboration, including the political economy of research partnerships between these two communities (Toukan 2020) and some international context setting (Hurst 2020).

Toukan provides an overview of the knowledge partnership landscape in Canada. Through a multiple-site case study looking at seven research partnerships between Canadian CSOs and universities, Toukan addresses research partnerships through a political economy lens that considers power differentials among partners. Cases were selected across a large range of international development themes, funders and methodologies, providing an interesting sample of how partnerships in Canada operate and the institutional structures they have. Her study examines how knowledge is created and shared (Toukan 2020). Beyond power, this article situates these collaborative efforts within the larger context that may influence their success or failure. By analysing the systemic, institutional and individual perspectives of research partnerships, Toukan tackles challenging questions regarding knowledge production and evidence-based programming in international development. She demonstrates how research partnerships could potentially challenge sectoral and disciplinary lines and re-defines what it means to be an "engaged academic" or what it means for an organisation to be seen as a "thought-leader".

Thanks to the learnings of a ten-year initiative that sought to strengthen researchers and research institutions in the Global South, Hurst (2020) draws from the international context to inform Canada's ecosystem of knowledge development, translation and influence. Based on a decade of working with think tanks across the world, Hurst suggests that the re-emergence of think tanks in Canada, which bridge the research to action nexus, could do a lot to enhance Canada's academic practitioner-community.

> Better collaboration between academics/researchers and CSOs in Canada requires an organizational form whose purpose is to bridge the gap that tends to exist between these two types of actors, and that think tanks, which come in a variety of shapes and sizes, are one form that

works. With the demise of The North–South Institute, this gap emerged in stark relief. (Hurst 2020)

Whether or not the "Canadian international development community is big enough to warrant and sustain a dedicated organisation focused on informing and influencing the policy and practice of Canadian international development actors" is one question (Hurst 2020). But regardless, he asserts that this new organisation's mandate should connect with existing networks of researchers and think tanks in the Global South.

New issues to consider in international partnership experiences: the critical notion of power in partnership

The second set of articles showcases examples of research initiatives that shed light on new dimensions and issues that influence how we foster partnerships and collaboration between these two communities.

McGiffin (2020, this issue) uses a systematic lens to look at factors which trigger collaboration rather than focusing on organisational level. She explores the downside to the impetus for greater cross-sectoral collaboration: emotional wellbeing. "Work to develop strong and successful collaborations must therefore also consider how the emotional labour of academic workers is increasingly exploited by the academy even as workplace trends have been shown to drastically reduce academic workers' emotional wellbeing" (McGiffin 2020). Calls for greater collaboration come with pressing demands to do more with fewer resources. McGiffin demonstrates in her paper how academia has created conditions of increased precarity – with low pay, rampant stress, and lack of job security, all of which results in a very challenging work environment for emerging researchers, and which in turn has significant impact on the frequency and success of such collaborations.

Besides Toukan, who addresses power as part of her study and the notion of fair and equitable partnerships, many contributors raise issues of power in their papers. Fransman et al. (2021) for instance, engage with the notion of power through the lens of complexity theory. They define relationships as being embedded in complex structures, including structures of power. As in participatory approaches, complexity theory demands recognition of and engagement with power. "Given that equality is an ideal rather than a realisable aspiration, any commitment to equitable working necessitates an on-going critical engagement with power as well as responsiveness to the changing contexts that shape power and order knowledge" (Fransman et al. 2021). Lepore, Hall, and Tandon (2020) analyze how power could be bestowed or co-created through empowerment processes. In the context of knowledge production, community-based research partnerships are an instrumental way to decolonise knowledge. Lepore et al. conclude that involving students, Indigenous communities, traditional knowledge keepers, community and academic leaders in action-oriented research projects is the best approach to shifting power imbalance and addressing local needs.

Furthermore, almost in direct contrast to Toukan's (2020) article, Fransman et al. (2021) offer a total rethink of how to enhance partnerships between these two communities. They argue that partnerships need to move beyond a focus on technical fixes to a reliance on partners themselves for improving collaborative practices. They propose a renewed approach to collaboration based on *effective*, *efficient* and *equitable* practice

(drawing on a set of eight principles), that is firmly grounded in complexity theory. These articles, which gather international and Canadian experience and knowledge, provide the theoretical backdrop to a series of case studies that follow in the third section.

Case studies: Canadian research partnerships between universities and CSOs

The third section of the special issue features case studies involving Canadian partners, and in many cases southern partners, from across different sectors and disciplines, from agricultural innovations (Bocoum et al. 2021, this issue) to volunteer for development programming (Tiessen et al. 2020, this issue) and inclusive development (Francis, Henriksson, and Alonso 2020, this issue). This series of case studies uses a critical interrogation of collaborative Canadian initiatives to identify key challenges and success stories around fair and equitable research partnerships being done in the Canadian global development sector. Mostly co-written by academic and practitioner partners, these articles offer a critical interrogation of existing collaborative initiatives between Canadian universities and CSOs and draw out a number of lessons from their respective collaborations. One of the main contributions of these case studies to this special issue is to give a multidimensional perspective from all the stakeholders involved – beyond academics and CSOs – and their relationships with each other, including donors, private sector institutions, and local partners.

Bocoum et al. (2021) introduce the notion of organisational and institutional influence in their analysis of an existing partnership being implemented in West Africa. In their paper, they analyze the influence of each partner upon the other, including their donor IDRC. Their perspective highlights power dynamics between research partners and their donor, but also brings a southern dimension to the centre of the analysis. One of the main challenges in this partnership is the collective understanding of the researchers' methodological approach by all partners. Their experience emphasises the instrumental role of researchers in translating their research protocols to other stakeholders involved. Not having buy-in from all partners could compromise the research process and the validity of data collected.

Tiessen et al. (2020) draw on data collected from 40 scholars and practitioners engaged in collaborative research on international volunteering for development (V4D). They present a comprehensive case study, which identifies the benefits and challenges of practitioner-collaboration, identifies the ways in which V4D initiatives have navigated these, and the lessons that can be drawn from such programmes. They use their experience to begin to draw a distinction between the terms *collaboration* and *partnership*, which they argue are often conflated, but which carry very different assumptions and foundations. As a result, "specific distinctions between models of partnership and collaboration [are needed] in order to parse out attendant implications underlying these differences" (Tiessen et al. 2020). It affirms the need to move towards a relationship grounded in the "equality of partnership, geographically-specific perspectives, individual growth opportunities, and negotiating scholar/practitioner hybridity" – adding some important additional dimensions and nuances to the notion of partnership in the V4D context (Tiessen et al. 2020).

Beyond just civil society practitioner and academic collaboration, Francis, Henriksson, and Alonso (2020) investigate private sector involvement in such partnerships,

along with academic driven partnerships. The partnership that this paper showcases is quite different as it is a consortium of universities working together. This unique case provides a number of important lessons and a template that demonstrates how universities can play an active role in "co-creation for sustainability". To achieve this new mission, universities will need to set up appropriate policies, governing structures, and more flexible academic career options that incentivize collaborations.

Conclusion

Over the lifespan of this three-year initiative, we have seen a number of important changes to the Canadian academic-civil society ecosystem, which are signalling growing attempts by a range of diverse actors to engage in meaningful, long term relationships and partnerships for knowledge co-creation and production. At the beginning of this initiative what was needed was a better understanding of the Canadian international development ecosystem's current state and how academics and CSO practitioners might work together. The programme has succeeded in deepening that knowledge and created the environment and support to foster collaboration especially among the next generation of leaders. However, external observers noted how challenging these sorts of time-bound partnerships can be if resources (e.g. human resources, funding, etc.) and power aren't shared equitably among partners (Erbs and Associates 2019). Erbs and Associates who conducted an external evaluation of the NextGen programme, also pointed out the necessity "to move from a transactional relationship to a co-creative partnership focused on the co-production of knowledge". Paying too much attention to the technical process and outcomes of cross-sectoral collaboration may result in a loss of focus on the overarching goals of advancing sustainable development and challenging social inequality.

In the last decade, several cross-sectoral partnerships were "economically encouraged" by donors, including IDRC and Global Affairs Canada. Building structures and governance for these time-bound partnerships are very time consuming and costly. Should more effort within partnerships be expended on documenting and understanding the state of collaborative works, best practices and behaviours instead of on building new institutional structures? On the other hand, these temporary governance structures and partnership tools (MOU, guiding principles, etc.) developed to support decision-making and co-creation often enable collective and equitable share of resources and power (Toukan 2020). Moreover, working effectively in collaboration requires trust between partners which isn't a given. Building trust requires time and space and appropriate partnership structures can help the process.

Similarly, an important lesson from the partnership between CC and CASID is how focusing on adapting and increasing collaborations on existing activities can be as or more sustainable than creating new or innovative activities (Erbs and Associates 2019). With time-bound collaboration, continuity, sustainability and ownership of new activities or tools are easily compromised when project funding ends. At the end, what will remain from these collaborations in the long run are often the "collaboration spirit itself" (including collaborative practices and ways of working) and a stronger network to amplify each other's work. CC and CASID's activities pre-existing the partnership will continue as before but hopefully with an increased willingness to adapt to a multiplicity of approaches to partnership.

The articles in this special issue provide valuable answers to some of the difficult questions that emerged from the NextGen collaboration and programme over the past three years, and that made a modest contribution to the research gap it sought to fill with respect to our initial research questions around cross-sectoral partnerships in Canada and beyond. They speak to a broad set of experiences, outcomes and lessons learned specific to the Canadian context and beyond, which those interested in bridging the research to action nexus would do well to consider as they set out to foster collaborations between academia and practitioners.

Notes

1. The authors recognise that there are a very broad range of both civil society and academic communities, in terms of size, experience, values, location in Canada, geographical focus and area of focus. This paper can obviously not do this diversity justice. Due to CC's membership profile, this initiative reflects the realities of more large organisations than small and medium organisations (SMOs).
2. In 2019, the International Assistance Research and Knowledge division within Global Affairs Canada (GAC) piloted a Visiting Scholar initiative aimed at enabling mid-career academic researchers on sabbatical from their university appointments to work with GAC to develop evidence-based international development policy and programming in their specific areas of expertise.
3. SDSN Canada, launched in May 2018, is hosted at the University of Waterloo. SDSN Canada aims to mobilise Canadian scientific and technological expertise for accelerating problem-solving for the SDGs.
4. In the SSHRC partnership grants suite, partnership and partnership development grants could be administered by not for profit organisations including CSOs.
5. In 2017, the Canada Research Coordinating Committee (CRCC) was created to improve the coordination efforts of Canada's granting agencies—SSHRC, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)—as well as the Canada Foundation for Innovation. The following years, new funding windows were created to support research being done with and by Indigenous communities.
6. Partners held an inaugural partnership session on February 10th 2017, a second one on January 31st 2018 and a last one on January 23rd 2019. Each session was facilitated by Shelagh Savage, a member of the steering committee and Coady Institute's former Associate Director, Partnerships & Organizational Learning.
7. The NextGen database – part of the Next Generation-Collaboration for Development programme – is an online, searchable database to help identify potential new collaborators. It includes Canadian researchers from universities, colleges, institutes, think-tanks and civil society organizations working on global sustainable development issues including international development and humanitarian assistance, and on domestic issues related to the SDGs. It is co-owned by its two main partners, CC and CASID. See https://nextgendatabase.ca/en/home
8. Self-plagiarism involves submitting the same article or very similar manuscripts to different publications.
9. In 2019, Cooperation Canada (CC) announced their intent to reformat its Regional Working Groups (RWG). Following a consultation process, a new format for the RWGs was announced in September 2020. This led to the departure of one of the three regional working groups from CC, the Americas Policy Group (APG), which now operates independently of CC.
10. The Food Security Policy Group (FSPG) brought an interesting example to the annual conference in 2017 of conflicting interests between findings coming from a study they commissioned and their advocacy work.

11. The Emerging Leaders Network (ELN) exists as a space where emerging leader voices, opinions and analyses can be shared, developed and heard – among one another and across the sector as a whole. See this website for more details: https://cooperation.ca/our-members/emerging-leaders-network/

12. Over the three years of the programme, we hosted an annual PhD school alongside the joint annual conference. The aim of the school was to provide doctoral students with the opportunity to receive extensive intellectual and methodological advice on their doctoral research as well as other aspects of professional development such as publishing their research in peer-reviewed, policy and popular media venues; identifying future professional opportunities; and planning for careers within and outside academe.

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