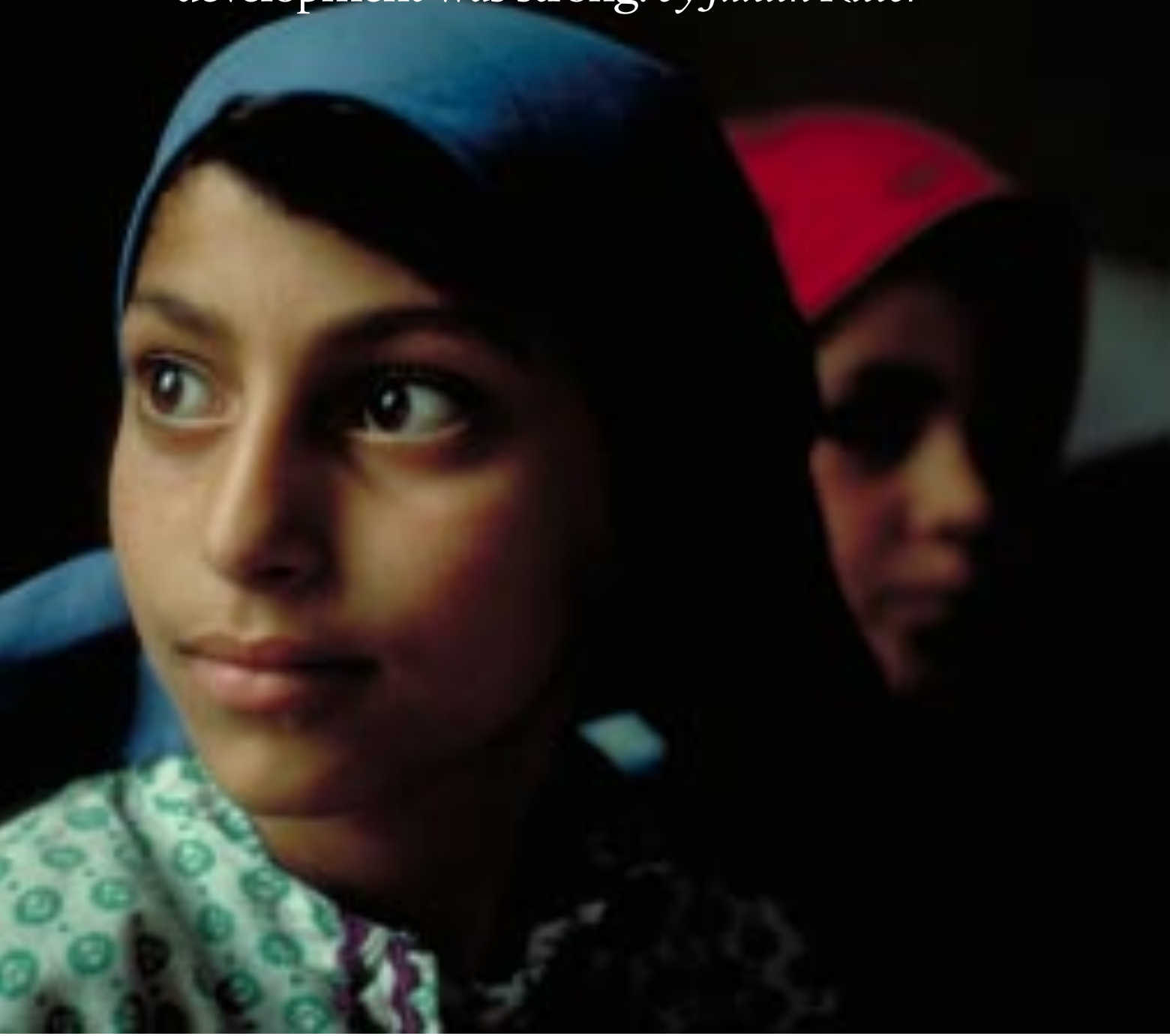


Canada's Friendly Face

The spirit of CIDA was forged in the heady days of the 1960s, when public support for international development was strong. *by Judith Ritter*



The year 1968 altered Canada's political and social landscape forever. Pierre Elliott Trudeau became prime minister and, under his leadership, Parliament permitted no-fault divorce, began creating a national system of medicare, and launched the Canadian International Development Agency — CIDA.

From its gestation as the External Aid Office in 1960 under the Diefenbaker government to its birth as a full-fledged development agency in 1968, CIDA was the face of Canadian development. This new incarnation of Canada's commitment to the world's poorest was a response to changes on the world stage — the people at the bottom were finding their voice.

The change can be tracked back to 1955, when the first major conference of African and Asian states was held in Bandung, Indonesia. Of the twenty-nine countries that participated, some were struggling for liberation from colonialism; others had recently become independent and were desperately poor. Altogether, they represented 1.5 billion people — more than half the world's population at the time. The less privileged half of the planet was speaking up. Canada — itself building an identity outside the Commonwealth — was listening.

The idea of wealthy nations helping poor nations was hardly new. Earlier efforts, however, had had a distinctly colonial feel. In a demonstration of noblesse oblige, wealthy countries extended a helping hand to the so-called “backward” nations.

CIDA would do something entirely different.

Canada had no history as a colonizer. In fact, it had a reputation as an honest broker, which was illustrated by eventual Prime Minister Lester Pearson winning the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize for defusing the Suez Crisis and “saving the world,” as the Nobel selection committee put it.

The spirit of CIDA was the spirit of Canada at its centennial, a country with a collaborative style, with Aboriginal peoples, and with immigrants from all parts of the globe. CIDA was driven by a very real desire for cross-cultural understanding.

One might say CIDA was a child of the sixties, but, in the simplest terms, it was a national expression of neighbourliness, something Canadians have always been good at. Public support for CIDA was strong. Not only were Canadians proud of their government's efforts to help poverty-stricken people across the globe, but individuals and small organizations wanted to help, too. As one official put it, “There was, at the time, a certain headiness in being Canadian.”

From its earliest days, CIDA worked with volunteer agencies such as Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO) and

Canada World Youth (CWY). Volunteer agencies — along with a host of non-profit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) — have since worked in powerful collaborations with CIDA to make sure Canadians can donate not only money, but also their time and expertise.

East Africa had long been the Commonwealth's traditional area of assistance. But in creating CIDA, Canada asserted its own bilingual, bicultural identity by reaching out to assist the francophone countries of West Africa and then North Africa. Under the leadership of founding director Maurice Strong — a businessman who started in the Alberta oil patch and went on to become CEO of Petro-Canada — CIDA-funded businesses carried out large technical-assistance projects requiring major construction. These included dams, power stations, roads, railroads, and airports — infrastructure projects that were to pave the way for economic growth.

While this burst of ambitious project-building produced laudable results, there were also some notable failures. It

soon became clear that applying Western models of progress didn't always work. For instance, in the mid-1970s, Canada built a huge, automated bakery in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, and then set up large-scale wheat farms to supply it. There were many problems associated with doing this in a sorghum-based food culture with a long dry season not well suited to wheat. The project has since been cited as example of inappropriate aid.

CIDA was quick to learn that the one-size-fits-all approach to development clearly needed rethinking. Under its forward-looking president, Paul Gérin-Lajoie, there was a willingness to take a new look at the way aid was handled.

Before Gérin-Lajoie emerged on the national scene to serve as the head of CIDA from 1970 to 1977, he had been Quebec's minister of education. He successfully modernized that province's archaic school system and proved to be one of Canada's most innovative educators. Gérin-Lajoie was passionate about education for the poor, and CIDA's projects soon reflected this. Throughout the 1970s, countless African children benefited from CIDA-sponsored programs that built schools and trained teachers, especially at the primary level.

Of course, the agency in the 1970s was about more than education. It was about increasing food supplies, protecting clean water, supporting women, and relieving debt. In 1974, the agency responded to its first African drought with short-term emergency aid as well as a long-term food security program in Sahel countries. In 1976, becoming more aware of the central role women play in lifting their families out



Opposite page: Egyptian girls attend school in 1985. This image, which won a World Press Photo Award, was shot by David Barbour while on assignment for CIDA.

Inset: CUSO volunteers beam with enthusiasm prior to departing for the Caribbean in 1961. CIDA has a long history of working with NGOs, including CUSO.



ACDI-CIDA/DLIP MEHTA

Above: of poverty, CIDA lent its support to the United Nations Decade for Women and provided the funds with which Lucia receive Norma Walmsley and Suzanne Johnson-Harvor created MATCH International, the world's first non-governmental development organization run by and for women. It was the beginning of a three-decade partnership that aimed to increase women's inclusion and to achieve full participation in their societies.

Below: Debt relief proved challenging. In 1977, the Canadian government stepped in to help twelve developing countries suffering from crushing international debt in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis. Outstanding loans were converted to grants, and, while the measure was welcome, it wasn't quite enough. The idealism of the 1960s and early 1970s was challenged by hard realities. CIDA continued to innovate and evolve — with Margaret Catley-Carlson now leading the way.

Catley-Carlson joined CIDA as a vice-president in 1978 and served as its president from 1983 to 1989. She called it her "favourite job, bar none!" Her greatest passion was access to clean water, but she also launched programs to address the problems of denuded landscapes, global health, overpopulation, and "underused human capital" (i.e., women).

In 1984, CIDA published its Women in Development policy. The agency in fact pioneered the promotion of gender equality worldwide. Other countries came to look at CIDA as a model, even sending representatives for training, as did New Zealand and South Korea only recently.

As CIDA built a sound foundation for addressing women's issues, other challenges emerged. In 1984, during the height of the Ethiopian drought, stark images of dying children flashed across television screens, spurring huge numbers of Canadians to give generously. According to David R. Morrison of the North-South Institute, Canada and its NGOs provided food aid in amounts greater than any other Western donor. The spirit of that 1984 CIDA-NGO collaboration still exists today in Partnership Africa Canada, an NGO that has supported hundreds of projects in sub-

Saharan Africa.

In the early 1990s, the Canadian government's program to reduce its national deficit resulted in cuts to the international development budget. That prompted a simplification of procedures and a drive to improve results, even as new issues were drawing CIDA's attention.

In Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a new mandate for CIDA — promoting democratization and economic growth in former Soviet Bloc countries. Then, with dozens of wars breaking out within and between nations in the wake of the instability that followed the ending of the Cold War, CIDA also created programs to build peace, promote human rights, and reconstruct destroyed communities.

But rebuilding communities couldn't happen until former battlefields were cleared of land mines. Anti-personnel mines became a huge issue in the 1990s, with millions of people being killed or maimed every year as they worked their fields or walked near their homes. Through the Canadian Landmine Fund, set up in 1997, CIDA and its partner organizations supported projects to do the dangerous work of removing



ACDI-CIDA/DAVID BARBOUR

land mines.

Land-mine clearing is a huge undertaking that continues today. In one country alone — Cambodia — CIDA recently committed \$10 million over five years (2011–2016) to the UN Development Program to support mine-clearing activities.

Meanwhile, there were growing concerns about the state of the world's environment. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development — known as the Earth Summit — convened in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Chairing the conference was former CIDA director Maurice Strong. It was a transformative event for the more than one hundred heads of state who attended and for the millions of people around the world who heard the summit's message: Only united and swift action on the part of all countries would solve our environmental problems. Issues that needed urgent attention included population growth, water scarcity, deforestation, climate change, energy needs, and species destruction.

CIDA responded by adopting its Policy for Environmental Sustainability. The policy promises that environmental considerations will cut across all of the agency's decision-making and all of its policy, program, and project activities.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, profoundly affected Canada's foreign aid policies. It's now understood that threats to the world's stability could come from the same fragile states that need the most assistance. This new awareness led to what is called Canada's 3-D approach, a trifecta of defence, diplomacy, and development. Along with that came a new mandate for CIDA: to collaborate closely with other government departments to achieve Canada's humanitarian objectives and create stability.

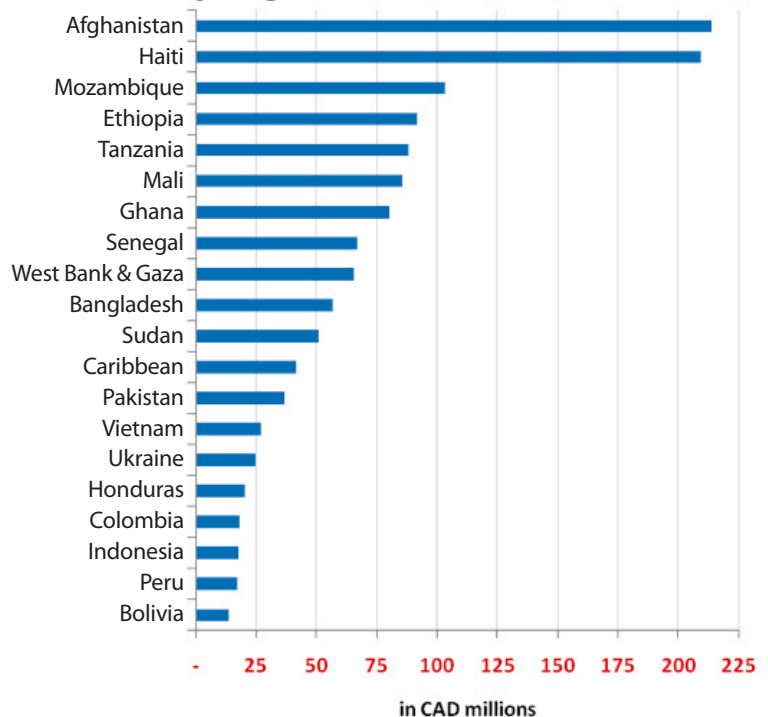
CIDA's new role can be seen in Afghanistan. Working as part of a UN-led multinational effort, CIDA disbursed over \$1.7 billion in Canadian aid over ten years. The money went into a wide range of projects, from supporting polio eradication and improving access to education for girls to fostering democracy.

One signature project was the rehabilitation of Afghanistan's second-largest dam. Clogged with silt and crumbling from neglect, the Dahla Dam became a major restoration project. Now, after four years of work with Canadian Forces assistance and \$50 million from CIDA, Kandaharis who live along the Arghandab irrigation system have access to a secure water supply.

A big part of getting aid right is getting the recipients involved in decision-making. The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness addressed this issue, committing donor countries and development organizations to the principle that aid recipients should determine their own needs. CIDA had a powerful role in developing the declaration and successfully put it into practice in Afghanistan through the National Solidarity Program. That program gave villages the power to decide for themselves what kinds of projects CIDA would fund.

There is always pressure on aid organizations to show quick, even dramatic results. The challenge is to take the long view. Over the past two decades, more work has gone into identifying, tracking, and measuring results. Even modest projects can have enormous implications. For instance, a

CIDA Country Program Aid in the 20 Countries of Focus



small university research project CIDA once supported in Vietnam that studied the effects of Agent Orange became the basis for future legal cases, as well as a large-scale campaign — led by CBS News *60 Minutes* — against using Agent Orange ever again.

With more than four decades behind it, CIDA has gained a wealth of knowledge and experience. It's no longer the young, idealistic maverick it was in the 1960s. It's a seasoned aid-provider whose mantra is efficiency, focus, and accountability.

The breadth and depth of its programs are profound. While working with many partners around the world on aid issues, the agency continues to be a uniquely Canadian voice at international conferences. And it is respected globally for its ability to offer neutral advice.

CIDA is not without its critics. Recent tight budgets, a reorganization of priorities, and a new and more intensive system of funding have left some NGOs and non-profits confused and others critical. Others chalk up the problems to "growing pains." For its part, the agency hopes the new process will bring about "transparency, timeliness, and predictability." In short, it should help taxpayers get more bang for their buck.

From its long experience, CIDA knows development is a package deal. The goal for any of the countries it assists is sustainable economic growth in a democracy that protects human rights, promotes gender equality, and protects the environment. Ultimately, that helps create a secure, equitable, and healthier world for everyone. 🇨🇦

This 2011 graph illustrates the dollar value of programming aid currently being delivered to CIDA's twenty "countries of focus."

Judith Ritter is a freelance writer. This article was written with the assistance of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).