

## What does Civic Driven Change (CDC) imply for the policy and practice of international cooperation?

### ⊗ A stone in the pond of the development sector

Civic Driven Change (CDC) is about people achieving social change themselves. In relation to international cooperation it reaches beyond the classical poverty reduction agenda and beyond the scope of the development sector. In 2010, a consortium of Dutch and Belgian organisations (see Box) explored the concept of CDC with a particular focus on the implications for development cooperation practice and policy.

The Civic Driven Change (CDC) concept refers to a set of ideas about citizen-led change in society. It is not an established theory but rather an emerging approach. Moreover, it is not a brand new concept, as the main elements of CDC thinking come from existing debates and practices in different contexts. However, looking at social change through a CDC lens triggers our thinking about social change processes and leads to innovative ideas and new insights.

Civic action requires civic agency, which consists of the capacities, skills and imagination of people to change society. Social change happens everywhere, all the time, by people engaging in their own initiatives to change some-

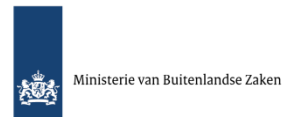


Source: [network.kwanda.org](http://network.kwanda.org)

### Process organisation

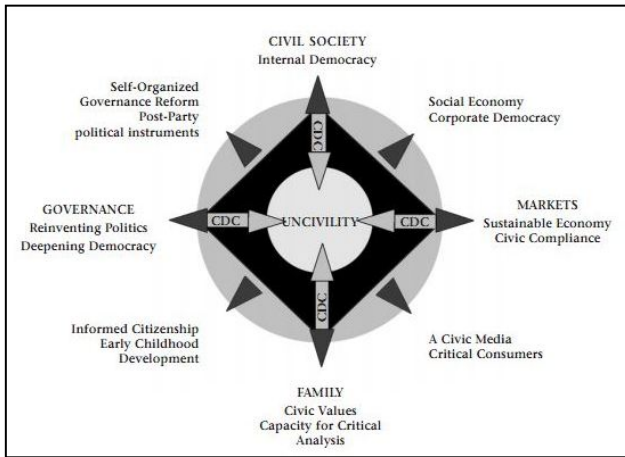
The 'Civic Driven Change: implications for policymakers and practitioners' process was carried out within the framework of the Development Policy Review Network (DPRN) by:

- Hivos
- Context, international cooperation
- Institute of Social Studies (ISS)
- Cordaid
- Broederlijk delen
- Social E-evaluator
- Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs



thing in their immediate surroundings. Such actions are the result of events, traditions, beliefs and mechanisms at local level, combined with influences and pressures from the greater context, upon which single or united people act. The Civic Driven Change (CDC) concept underlines a number of aspects of societal processes that may not always be adequately taken into account by actors who intend to support social change processes.

Recently, the debate has flared up again about the future of aid, the roles and tasks of the development sector and the position of the Dutch development NGOs and their Southern counter-



*CDC compass strategy (Fowler & Biekart, 2008).*

parts. Viewing development and development aid through a CDC lens offers great potential to contribute to this debate. The CDC concept is a stone in the pond of a traditionally inward looking development sector, as it questions some of the assumptions which are often hidden beneath development aid practices. One example is the notion that civic action is a cross-sector phenomenon that is not confined to civil society *as we know it*.

### 🌐 The complexities of social change

The CDC debate throws up a number of challenges and dilemmas. These are related to the complex nature of social change, the position of CDC regarding traditional sectors, the normative dimension of the concept and the scope for aid.

#### 1. The complex nature of social change

Societal change is a non-linear, fuzzy process, in which cause-effect relations are hard to identify. Choices made by civic actors are based on their understanding of mechanisms at local level ('the politics of small things') and contextual factors, in combination with their theories of change, values and convictions. Assuming that both the local and the wider contexts are extremely complex and unpredictable is directly opposed to policies and procedures in which development outcomes are predicted, strictly planned, quantified and assessed by outsiders. The current obsession for results (and evidence that applied interventions 'work') overlooks the role of personal relationships,

social networks, passion and power, family and community dynamics. It also reveals a western-centred discourse dominated by neoliberal assumptions, where the market is expected to turn 'underdeveloped' people into 'developed' citizens through 'interventions'.

#### 2. Changing the looking glass: from sectors to domains

When looking at social change processes, the division between state, market and civil society is often taken as the point of departure. This implies that NGOs and CBOs are inevitably seen as the actors of change, that represent and mobilise people to claim their rights from the government authorities and force businesses to become more accountable. The CDC concept, however, steps away from the traditional dichotomy between 'rights holders' and 'duty bearers' and emphasises that civic agency is not confined to one sector. Individuals, organised formally, informally, or not at all, have the agency to change their surroundings. This points to a need to strengthen civic agency all round and it underlines the idea that every daily activity is a choice that has an impact on society, both near and far. This refers to all domains.

#### The 'self' and the 'environment: enabling CDC

CDC is located everywhere, within any citizen, be it a parent, business person, student, volunteer, policymaker or entrepreneur. At a more fundamental level, CDC is associated with values like wellbeing of the whole and respecting variety. This connects with the current debate on a broader, less formalistic interpretation of rights holders and duty bearers, in the sense that citizens not only have rights but also responsibilities, and not just vis-à-vis the state, but also in all other spheres of their daily lives. CDC focuses on change and active citizenship. By taking a critical look not only at our own actions in our communities, but also in our professional activities and private relationships, this optimistic perspective implies that it is possible to reinforce an enabling environment for civic agency. CDC thinking pushes us to look at the role of development actors in a whole new way, as CDC processes are largely unplannable and unpredictable. Actors active in development cooperation might not be able to bring about CDC in developing countries, but they can attempt to contribute to the context in which CDC can flourish, e.g. through the promotion of 'civic-ness' in education in both North and South.

Domains are 'sites' of collective agency with purposeful combinations of processes, interests, collaborators, principles and values. Examples are: anti-corruption, social enterprise and feminism. There are people behind a domain who drive it with a certain interest. Domains pervade all sectors – enterprises, government and the private sphere – and occur at different levels, influencing and changing society.

### 3. Debating the 'civic-ness' of CDC

Actors in aid tend to assume automatically that civil society performs a positive role in development. This, however, is a problematic assumption because civil society can also have 'uncivic', exclusionary, undemocratic and violent features. The question is: who defines what is civic and what is uncivic action? The boundaries between benign and malevolent are culturally and morally confined. What can be perceived as civic by one person or group, can be perceived as uncivic by others, e.g. homosexuality in the Netherlands versus Uganda. Hence 'civic' is not presented as a given but rather raised as a normative standard and qualification. The 'civic' contained in the concept of CDC refers to change processes that embrace a 'concern for the whole' and that allow for diversity. This qualification of 'civic' helps to reveal tensions and dilemmas about cultural, ethnic or religious differences and serves as a starting point for exploring normative biases. This also brings us to the question: why do people want change? Whereas the CDC discourse easily speaks of processes displaying a 'concern for the whole', the discussions at the DPRN events showed from participants' experiences that change processes usually start with some degree of self-interest.

### 4. Aided versus non-aided change

Although the CDC concept does not take aided change as a starting point for analysing societal change, it does not imply that change processes cannot be aided. Rather, CDC nuances the scope for aid, in its traditional definition of a resource transfer between the North and the South. It highlights the complexity of change



processes and states that, within that complexity, aid at most plays a minor role. At the same time CDC also enlarges the scope for aid actors to make a positive contribution to change processes. CDC thinking releases aid agencies from the confines of traditional sector boundaries and stimulates them to explore new intervention opportunities, from the global to the local. In addition, it encourages aid agencies to think about competencies and constituencies, and to reflect on their own value base.

### 🌐 Implications for policymakers and practitioners

CDC was never meant to offer a toolbox for development intervention. Rather, it offers the possibility of a refreshing step back, the potential for questioning underlying assumptions, an opportunity for inspiration and a source of critical reflection. For policymakers this means that:

- CDC offers an alternative lens for looking at societal dynamics, and therefore potentially also new policy options. These could range from a new policy with regard to promoting civic agency through better education, to changing methods of civil society assessment.
- Policymakers would need to accept the uniqueness of each country context and to adopt more realistic expectations on the nature and rhythms of development processes.
- Specifically for the Dutch development sector, the CDC framework offers a source of inspiration for dialogue between the co-financing agencies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on future strategies for collaboration. Putting

## Process output

The 'Civic Driven Change' process included two meetings about bringing CDC into practice in local politics and development policies. A synthesising writeshop was organised to outline the strategies needed for the further promotion of the CDC concept.

This resulted in the following publications:

- Background paper: 'A short introduction to Civic Driven Change'.
- Discussion paper: 'Youth driven change in the Netherlands', by Chris Aalberts.
- Discussion paper: 'Civic Driven Change and local politics'.
- Seminar report: 'CDC and local politics'.
- Seminar report: 'CDC and policy'.
- Synthesis paper: 'Civic Driven Change: implications for policy and practice'.

All publications are available on the website: <http://cdc.global-connections.nl/>

the common ground of citizens and civic agency at the centre of such a discussion might steer the debate away from short term institutional interests.

- In addition, the application of a domain-lens offers a starting point to reflect on the position of the development sector, and in particular the role of non-state actors, in future foreign policy.

Some CDC-related impertinent questions that practitioners could use to scrutinise current practices are:

- Does our policy leave space for endogenous change initiatives, or are we imposing our priorities and approaches on our partners?
- Do we also allow our partners to be involved in defining our strategies and policies? How?
- Are we transparent and outspoken about our own values?
- Do we promote capacities such as imagination and civic agency within our programmes?
- Do we pay attention to power relations and interests by supporting people in mapping these?

- Do our procedures and systems (most notably for result assessment and learning) leave room for complexity and emergent outcomes, or are they based on linear models of change?
- Do we take our own role as civic actors in our own country and sector seriously, by promoting our values within our societies, by acting as a watchdog and advocating for policy space for the types of changes we aim to support?
- Do we support our own staff and networks to be conscious global citizens?
- Do we ourselves take risks, for example by reserving funds to support emerging CDC processes using a hands-off approach, without any strings attached?

## 🕒 Follow-up

Several agencies involved in this DPRN process have been actively attempting to apply CDC to their programming. The Institute of Social Studies (ISS) is planning follow-up research on CDC, with a view to:

- understanding better the societal patterns of change and domain dynamics by working more with complexity theory;
- understanding better the proper supporting roles for outsiders in change processes;
- further developing a normative framework of civic/uncivic norms, values and morals, including a discussion on drivers of (collective) citizen action;
- deepening the theme CDC and markets.

Development Policy  Review Network

This infosheet was made by DPRN. With a view to stimulating informed debate and discussion of issues related to the formulation and implementation of development policies, DPRN created opportunities to promote an open exchange and dialogue between scientists, policymakers, development practitioners and the business sector in the Netherlands and Flanders from 2003-2011.