Building a Learning Network on Governance: The Experience of the Governance Cooperative

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Executive Summary

The Institute On Governance (IOG) convened the “Governance Cooperative” in 1996, with support from Canadian Partnership Branch at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The purpose of the Coop was threefold: to gather information on the experiences of the members and approaches that have successfully yielded change in governance, to reflect on that experience and on capacity gaps, and to disseminate the learning in a way that would improve the quality of governance interventions and encourage Canadian and overseas partners to situate their diverse activities in a broader governance framework. This report summarizes the lessons learned from this ‘learning network’.

The various activities and discussions among Coop participants revealed a lack of congruence among Canadian organizations engaged in governance interventions internationally. The Coop allowed a number of such actors to share experiences and lessons learned, as well as to identify areas of mutual interest and possible collaboration. An action research activity and documentation of three case studies pointed to the need for greater rigor in assessing and documenting impact and lessons learned. The cases demonstrated how even a small research component contributes an analytical perspective to a project, thus providing an opportunity to capture and share lessons learned within the life of a project.

Drawing on the results of the Governance Cooperative activities, the paper points to the value of establishing a forum to share experiences and lessons learned, and demonstrates some of the tensions between conceptual and operational issues in governance programming. A special emphasis is placed on the challenges associated with assessing the impact of interventions seeking to improve governance, illustrated through the summaries of three case studies.

The critical lessons learned from this process are that improving governance is a long-term endeavour, and that results and impact are difficult to monitor in this field. As such, a rigorous and systematic process of analysis needs to be built into an intervention in order to truly capture and learn from the experience, so as to improve interventions. A ‘learning network’, such as the Governance Cooperative, is one approach that can be used to address the analytical gap between collecting anecdotes and truly capturing lessons which can be applied in future interventions.
Acknowledgements

The Governance Cooperative Program was made possible by the generous contribution of the Canadian International Development Agency, through its Canadian Partnership Branch. The willingness of the CPB to take a risk on an iterative program such as the Governance Cooperative played a great role in the success of the program. Special thanks are due Mr. Gilles Bernier, Senior Program Officer responsible for the Governance Cooperative program, who graciously provided guidance to the program and participated actively in Coop activities.

The Governance Cooperative Program evolved from the consistent and active participation of the Coop participants themselves, who contributed their time, shared their experiences openly and were eager to learn from other participants. Special appreciation is extended to the Canadian and overseas partners involved in the action-research activity, and especially to the overseas participants for their efforts in documenting and presenting their experience. The action-research projects were carried out over the course of one year by: the Canadian Urban Institute: Jurate Raugaliene (Lithuania), Dalia Bardauskiene (Lithuania), Chris Currie (Toronto), Greg Kasting (Toronto); the Centre canadien d’études et coopération internationale (CECI): Lucrecia María Ariiola de Paniagua (Guatemala), María Eugenia Mijangos Martínez (Guatemala), Hélène Lagacé (Montreal); and the Parliamentary Centre: Elena Molotchkova (Russia), Richard Colvin (Russia), Peter Dobell (Ottawa).

Many Coop participants took part in an assessment of the program, and their input is reflected in this report. In addition to these contributions, the paper benefited from the comments and feedback of several reviewers both inside and outside of the Institute On Governance. While this feedback has proven invaluable and has strengthened the paper, responsibility for errors and omissions remains that of the author.
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1.0 Introduction

Given the emphasis placed on governance, how can Canadian interventions to promote effective governance best be supported and strengthened? How can partners document results and identify impact? What lessons from interventions can be usefully shared with a wider audience?

In an effort to address questions such as these, the Institute On Governance (IOG) convened the “Governance Cooperative” in 1996, with support from Canadian Partnership Branch at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). This report summarizes the lessons learned from this ‘learning network’. Drawing on the results of the Governance Cooperative activities, the paper points to the value of establishing a forum to share experiences and lessons learned, and demonstrates some of the tensions between conceptual and operational issues in governance programming. A special emphasis is placed on the challenges associated with assessing the impact of interventions seeking to improve governance, illustrated through the summaries of three case studies.

1.1 Defining the terrain – what is governance?

When the Institute On Governance was founded in 1990, governance was a rarely used term in the field of international development. Since then, there has been an increasing realization that the quality of a country’s governance is a key determinant of its ability to pursue sustainable economic and social development. “Governance” has emerged in the 1990s as a foundation for sustainable development, and developing capacity for effective governance is now a priority theme of many international development institutions. Governance relates to a complex system of institutions, actors, traditions and systems involving the state, civil society and the private sector – and not simply government – on matters of public concern (see Box 1 below).

Box 1: “Governance”

 Governence has to do with the institutions, processes and traditions for dealing with issues of public interest. It is concerned with how decisions are taken and with how citizens (or stakeholders) are accorded voice in this process. The need for the concept of governance derives from the fact that today, government is widely perceived as an organization. In its early form government was seen as a process whereby citizens came together to deal with public business...Today, government is viewed as one of several institutional players, like business or labour, with its own interests. ...The emergence of government as a freestanding organization in society with its own agendas and interests has created the need for a word to describe a process distinct from government itself.¹

For many bilateral and multilateral international development organizations, governance is a programming theme or priority, and is seen as the basis for sustainable economic, political, and social development. One of CIDA’s programming priorities is “to support democracy, governance, respect for human rights including children’s rights, and the building up of civil society”.  

1.2 Building a ‘learning network’ on governance: The governance cooperative program

Frequently, government representatives and institutions visit Canadian organizations with recognized expertise in one or several aspects of governance. Canada is well positioned to provide advice and support to other countries in many areas related to governance, having a tradition of democracy, an experienced public service, a vibrant civil society, and an international reputation for a commitment to peace. Several Canadian organizations actively engaged in governance-related projects around the world expressed an interest in convening a proactive network to bring together interested organizations with complementary expertise in several areas of governance. In 1996, the Institute On Governance, with support from Canadian Partnership Branch at CIDA, convened a group of organizations to participate in a learning network referred to informally as the “Governance Cooperative”.

The Governance Cooperative brought together a diverse group of public purpose organizations in an informal network – including government departments, para-statal institutions, and non-governmental organizations – seeking clarity on governance at the conceptual and operational levels. The organizations represented the diverse themes in governance, such as human rights and democratic development, justice and law, elections, parliamentary reform, accountability, and public administration.

The purpose of the Coop was threefold: to gather information on the experiences of the members and approaches that have successfully yielded change in governance, to reflect on that experience and on capacity gaps, and to disseminate the learning in a way that would improve the quality of governance interventions and encourage Canadian and overseas partners to situate their diverse activities in a broader governance framework.

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2 During 1995-96, CIDA spent $172 million (10.5 percent of its program resources) on initiatives to promote Human Rights, Democracy, Good Governance, one of CIDA’s 6 program priorities. Under this program priority, the Agency's focus is on increasing respect for human rights, including children's rights; promoting democracy and better governance; and strengthening both civil society and security of the individual. For two geographic programs (Africa and Middle East Branch, and Central and Eastern Europe Branch) some 20% of active projects are in support of governance, human rights, and democratic development. Source: 1997-98 Estimates - Part III - Expenditure Plan for CIDA
In the beginning, I didn’t know what to expect from participating in the Governance Cooperative. The concept was intriguing and the program reviewed the types of activities in which we were involved nationally and internationally. We benefited from participating, and deepened our understanding of governance. In this context, I can say that our expectations were met, given where we were starting out. Things have changed since that first meeting, and we are making great strides in this area. (A participant in the Governance Cooperative).

Over a period of two years, the program has consisted of workshops and seminars, research activities, and documentation of organizational capacity in governance. A number of activities remain, including the identification of, and linkage with, institutional partners in an overseas country similarly engaged in governance interventions. A summary of activities is found in Box 2, below.

Box 2: The Governance Cooperative Program

What is the Governance Cooperative? 23 Canadian public purpose organizations convened in an informal network – including government departments, para-statal institutions, and non-governmental organizations (a list of participating organizations is found in Annex II)

Purpose of the Program
• to gather information on experiences and lessons learned in governance interventions
• to reflect on that experience and on thematic and operational capacity gaps
• to disseminate the learning among Canadian and overseas partners

Governance Cooperative Activities
1. Governance Cooperative Capacity Map: a review of Coop members’ expertise related to governance, comprising examples of projects and organizational profiles, and including a conceptual framework for understanding governance
2. Workshops and seminars: a series of workshops and seminars for Coop members relating to thematic and operational questions on governance
3. Action Research: three research activities funded through the program, and carried out by three Coop participants together with their overseas partners; lessons documented in case studies and presented at a two-day seminar

Results Achieved
• Identified examples of Canadian capacity in governance
• Established a forum for dialogue, information exchange and sharing of lessons
• Improved technical skills of Canadian partners, such as application of participatory approaches and RBM, in a governance context
• Improved capacity of Canadian and overseas partners to assess impact, document results and share lessons from governance interventions
• Altered programming approaches and priorities
1.3 Results Achieved through the Governance Cooperative Program

“There is so little clarity on what governance is, and so many new actors are becoming involved in the field; we need a place where we can look at the concept and examine the different angles” (A Governance Cooperative participant)

Identification of Canadian capacity

The Governance Cooperative program contributed to raising Canada’s aid profile in the field of governance, and disseminated examples of Canadian capacity to support governance interventions internationally, through the development and international dissemination of the Governance Cooperative Capacity Map in both print and electronic form. The Capacity Map documents the thematic and geographic areas of expertise of Governance Cooperative participants, as well as examples of projects, demonstrating the breadth of Canadian capacity in supporting governance. The map clusters thematic areas under five headings: public sector management and accountability, legal reform, human rights, democratic development, and economic management and development. The map also directs users to the participating organizations themselves through a directory of organizational profiles and by electronic linkages to their websites.

Through this exercise, many participants came to realize that there is a wider range of Canadian capacity and areas of intervention than they had expected. However, one participant reflected, “I was struck by how disparate, discrete and disconnected they were, and how ungrounded individual projects were from a broader understanding of the complexity of governance programming”. Often, while individual activities may make sense at project level, there is insufficient linkage between the objectives and activities of a project and an understanding of how it will contribute to improving governance. One goal of the program was to encourage participants to begin to connect their activities within a broader governance framework, and to foster collaboration among Canadian partners, with a view to enhancing interventions and cooperation with overseas partners.

A forum for dialogue

Many of the organizations that participated in the Coop had previously not engaged in dialogue, and some participants found that they were working in the same countries, yet were unaware of each other’s programs. In the words of one participant, “I became more aware of activities in governance, and who the actors are [in Canada]”, while another participant similarly commented, “I was reminded of how complex and multi-faceted governance is.” There is a tremendous opportunity for Canada to make a contribution in various aspects of governance, as demonstrated by the breadth of experience among Coop participants. There is also a danger of fragmented and piecemeal interventions, which may not optimize their impact, and which may alienate overseas partners.

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3 Available in print form from the Institute, and electronically on the Institute’s website at www.igvn.ca.
A conceptual framework and paper entitled “The Ecology of Governance,” developed by the Parliamentary Centre and the Institute On Governance, initiated a discussion on the various actors and sectors involved in governance, and on the elements of sound governance which depend on a balance and interaction between them. The framework (see Box 3, below) and paper emphasized the importance of going beyond examining governance from the perspective of state sector institutions. Donors and practitioners were encouraged to address the broader environment in which governance is situated, taking into account the range of actors within the spheres of state, civil society and the marketplace or private sector, as well as those at the interface between spheres. The paper placed attention on the connections between social, political and economic issues and institutions, and urged collaboration and dialogue in an effort to address the policy issues and capacity gaps at the heart of governance.

These ideas and reflections were elaborated upon during a series of seminars and workshops for participants, on emerging governance themes and challenges in development cooperation programming in governance. Some thematic areas of discussion included municipal governance, governance in an indigenous context, and the links between peacebuilding and governance. On this latter topic, the Coop engaged in a discussion on the government’s Peacebuilding Initiative with Minister Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs. As an added benefit, the seminars provided a unique opportunity for implementing agencies to meet informally with one of their donors (CIDA), allowing for a candid exchange on challenges in governance programming, such as raising NGO’s concerns about applying results-based management to governance programming.

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**Exposure to operational techniques and approaches**

Through the seminars and workshops held as part of the Coop program, participants learned about and shared operational methodologies, and improved their technical skills in such areas as conducting capacity assessments, evaluating, monitoring and reporting on results, and employing participatory approaches. Approaches for implementation and evaluation of governance interventions remain relatively unexplored and undocumented, as a result participants were especially eager to learn how other organizations monitor results and maintain accountability in projects. In addition, participants sought to understand the implications of these approaches, with regard to donor policies and programming.

Given the context of CIDA’s results-based management (RBM) framework, it has been seen as important by some to delineate between ‘results’, ‘outcomes’ and ‘impact’. As governance projects are often dealing with intangible results, ascertaining standards of performance or appropriate indicators, especially by distinguishing between those categories, is a particular challenge. The sessions on evaluation and participatory research demonstrated that it is useful and vital to allow for flexibility in project design, to promote an iterative implementation and learning process, and to share information on lessons learned so as to feed into future phases or activities.

Ultimately, however, Canadian and overseas partners still have to respond to basic questions, especially on issues of financial accountability. Results-based management is one attempt to provide answers to how and where resources are allocated and used; but in the final analysis, RBM mostly addresses issues of accountability. Broader, more analytical questions and research processes are required to address the more profound questions of “Are we making a difference? How and where?”

**Improved capacity to document results, assess impact and share lessons**

The Governance Cooperative program placed a premium on learning activities, promoting the development of partnerships for learning between donors, CEAs and their overseas partners. In addition to the *Capacity Map* and seminars, three Coop participants carried out research projects together with their overseas partners. The projects consisted of a self-assessment of one of their programs, documenting the governance challenges addressed and results achieved through the interventions.

The three research groups presented their cases at a two-day seminar held in Hull, February 12 - 13, 1998, entitled “Partners in Governance: Lessons from a Collaborative Research Process”. Participants at the seminar included some 60 representatives from CIDA, DFAIT, other Canadian government departments, foreign embassies, NGOs, a former MP, and academics and students of development. This seminar provided a unique opportunity for other practitioners to hear about examples of where Canadian support is making a difference, and for the overseas partners to share the results of their work with a Canadian audience.
“As an NGO we spend so much time doing things and not reflecting. It was extremely helpful to prepare the case study and seminar presentation, to capture not just what we’re doing, but how and why.” (A Governance Cooperative participant)

The action-research process enhanced the capacity of the three organizations and their partners to analyze and assess the impact of their particular interventions. The activity provided the partners with an opportunity to analyze their work together, and to share their experience by documenting their findings in case studies and presenting them in an international setting. The cases themselves provided a basis for discussing approaches to enhance governance, while the seminar offered an opportunity for participants to explore the nature of results and partnership in governance interventions. By documenting the action-research activities, and disseminating the results at the seminar, the lessons could be shared more broadly, so that other organizations might in turn improve their own capacity to assess the impact of their work collaboratively with their partners.

Altered programming approaches and priorities

| We have applied what we learned through the Cooperative in some of our projects: altering vocabulary, adjusting our public administration programs … |
| Our organization has altered course given the new relations between public administration, political organizations, the private sector, civil society and the international context. (A participant in the Governance Cooperative). |

The impact of the activities undertaken by the Coop can be noticed in a number of programming areas. A representative of CIDA’s Policy Branch, for example, has indicated that the Branch has placed greater focus and attention on governance questions, partly as a result of having participated in the program and having been made aware of the scope of Canadian involvement in governance.

Other non-governmental participants have made an effort to position their organization’s activities within a broader governance framework, initiating new activities such as a conference in India on governance and accountability (held in New Delhi, May 1998), and an annual seminar on challenges of good governance relevant to parliaments. The decision of one organization to revise the project design of two existing projects was a direct result of having participated in the research seminar. The process of capturing lessons and preparing a case study provided one organization with the impetus to apply some of the lessons learned to other projects in the same region.

Perhaps the greatest impact has been the realization among many participants that, while value cannot always be quantified, it is possible and appropriate to measure the effort and process undertaken – in addition to qualitative and quantitative results achieved – when monitoring and reporting on the impact of an intervention. As one participant noted, “governance interventions are like the sowing of seeds – they are not quite about growing trees.” Thus, there is a need to engage in interventions that maximize the potential for successful results and broader impact, such as building relationships that provide a foundation for future cooperation.
1.4 Learning through our interventions: an experiment in action-research

One of the main objectives of the Governance Cooperative program was to foster a process whereby a group of Coop participants and their overseas partners would reflect on and disseminate lessons from their experience in supporting a change process in governance. Canadian executing agencies and developing country partners who have struggled with governance issues and challenges have learned critical lessons about the complexity of effecting change in this area. This experience is valuable, since it relates to such issues as design and implementation of programs, trade-offs and tensions inherent in making choices, and ways of dealing with unanticipated events.

Valuable as they are, these lessons are rarely captured, and even less frequently analyzed or disseminated so that others may learn from the experience. Part of the difficulty in doing so is that the task of documenting lessons requires time and resources that are not always available within a project budget. In addition, some practitioners simply do not have experience in research, and leave it to an end-of-project evaluation to document the results of a project.

A large body of literature, developed over decades of work in the field of international development, highlights approaches to engaging participants and stakeholders in design, implementation and evaluation of interventions. Put simply, participatory or action research and evaluation is a process of self-assessment, and collaborative problem-solving that leads to corrective action. The key stakeholders and actors in an initiative participate substantively in the identification of the research issues, the design of the study, the collection and analysis of the data, and the action taken as a result of the findings. By participating in this process, actors not only ascertain results and impact of the activity, but they also build their own capacity and skills to undertake research, to evaluate progress, and to develop strategies for change. Ultimately, the process is as important as the product.

The three case studies, chosen from among the participants in the Coop through a competitive process, illustrate examples of governance challenges and types of interventions used to address them, and focus on the following themes: strengthening the capacity of regional legislatures (Russia), citizen participation in municipal planning (Lithuania) and promoting women’s legal rights (Guatemala). The research groups explored very different governance challenges in diverse countries. No effort has been made to engage in a comparative analysis; rather, the objective of this experiment in ‘action-research’ was to draw lessons about identifying meaningful results in governance interventions, and to share the lessons with other practitioners. Their findings are summarized below.

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6 To assist the groups in the research process, the Institute developed a set of guidelines for case study preparation, found in Annex I. The full texts of the case studies are available from the Institute, as well as on the IOG website www.igvn.ca.
Case Study 1: *Strengthening capacity of legislatures in Russia, by the Parliamentary Centre*

The Parliamentary Centre’s case study examined the Canada-Russia Parliamentary Program (CRPP), a project funded by CIDA that initially was designed to enhance the capacity of the federal legislature in Russia and one in which a second phase later involved a number of the 89 regional legislatures in Russia. The research focused largely on the second phase of the program.

The substantive governance challenges that the CRPP sought to address were:

- enhancing the administrative and policy capacity of regional legislatures to carry-out their functions in a newly democratized country; and,
- establishing a functioning federal state by strengthening the authority and autonomy of regional legislatures and working with both political and bureaucratic officials.

The approach adopted by the CRPP was to facilitate the implementation of a series of seminars and study visits. Although the first phase of the CRPP succeeded in holding a series of seminars focused on staff training, regional legislatures ‘consistently manifested a strong interest in holding seminars on policy issues’, notes the Parliamentary Centre. The Centre’s experience with the first round of policy seminars at the regional level revealed a number of problems that ‘limited the educational potential of the seminars’.

This program raised questions about how legislatures in a newly democratized country can effectively enhance their policy and administrative capacities, and how Canadian involvement can best support this type of process. Some of the key difficulties included:

- lack of experience in engaging in candid debate and dialogue to work through policy issues, as seminars during the Soviet period were used to convey messages rather than to explore options
- continued hierarchical structures and attitudes prevailed, and while having a number of chairpersons participate in the seminars raised the profile of the events, it also caused protocol difficulties leading to constrained dialogue
- role of Canadian experts was not as beneficial as one might assume, as presenters were inadequately prepared to relate their particular areas of expertise specifically to the Russian context.

Because the Parliamentary Centre worked with multiple partners to implement the CRPP, it was not feasible to carry out a truly participatory research process. By relying, however, on the input of the staff and partners at the Centre’s project office in Russia, the study was able to consider the perspectives of the Russian counterparts. Although the case study outlined the challenges mentioned above, the Centre reflected more specifically on the nature of impact in this type of program, and the difficulties of reporting on results to the donor. The case study raised issues for debate between the donor and CEAs such as the Parliamentary Centre, challenging all partners to be realistic in their expectations of what can be achieved in a context such as the CRPP, and in identifying areas for meaningful cooperation.
The Centre stressed that working with numerous regional legislatures meant being involved in a continuous process of response and adjustment, and recognizing that every relationship is collaborative. The Centre noted: “we must constantly be aware that our partner is the host, a situation that places a limit on our capacity to press our views on organizational arrangements. Our most important asset is that we continue to be regarded as a true collaborator.” The process of reaching agreement with partners on activities and approaches can also be time-consuming.

The case study illustrated the difficulty of identifying precise objectives in the field of governance, a key element of a ‘project approach’, and demonstrates that achieving outcomes takes time. “In modern democracies, where many actors are engaged, it is virtually impossible to identify single causes of political outcomes,” claims the Centre. Individual activities can open routes for proceeding toward broader goals. Reporting on results in programs like the CRPP, which are often iterative, also requires an examination of unanticipated opportunities and outcomes. Given these constraints, qualitative indicators should form a large part of the assessment of a governance intervention like the CRPP.

**Case Study 2: Stakeholder Involvement in Municipal Planning by the Canadian Urban Institute**

The Canadian Urban Institute, together with their partners at the City of Vilnius, Lithuania, carried out a research activity within the framework of the Canada-Baltic Municipal Cooperation Program on Strategic Urban Management, funded by CIDA. The impetus for this project was the implementation of the Vilnius City Official Plan, which sought explicitly to involve citizens in the territorial planning process in the City of Vilnius.

The substantive governance challenge the program addressed was how to enhance the capacity of government officials, urban planners and citizens to participate constructively in municipal planning in the context of the country’s transition to democracy. The program attempted to address technical considerations, attitudes toward, and procedures for participation. The approach adopted by the partners included workshops on conceptual and process issues related to stakeholder involvement in municipal planning, comparative analysis with Canadian practice, as well as the development of research material and guides for implementation.

The research conducted to examine the impact of this program raised questions relating to how public and open territorial planning can both strengthen democracy and encourage economic prosperity, and confronted a number of substantive and process challenges including:

♦ balancing private and public interests  
♦ developing and implementing effective procedures and mechanisms for constructive public participation  
♦ establishing mechanisms to address conflicts and disputes  
♦ challenging previously-held attitudes towards government, political illiteracy and weak ‘citizenship capacity’
integrating new concepts and vocabulary into practice (such as ‘stakeholders’, ‘citizen engagement’, ‘participatory planning’, etc.)

The case study focused particular challenges associated with reconciling established procedures for involving citizens in municipal planning and attitudes regarding citizen engagement and democracy. The case study also explored the difficulty of transplanting ‘Western’ concepts and terminology, such as “stakeholder involvement”, in a newly democratizing country – a country still struggling to define what ‘democracy’ means in the Lithuanian context, as well as what balance to achieve between public and private interests, and how.

By providing a comprehensive review of the legislative framework in Lithuania, and contrasting the legal framework with the social and political context, the case study illustrated the barriers to entrenching meaningful participation. The researchers cited the passive (though strengthening) NGO sector, the role of political forces, political illiteracy and the lack of a sense of citizenship among citizens, the tendency to rely on ‘experts’, and the lack of finances available for territorial planning, as factors that constrained the value of citizen participation. The researchers also provided an analysis of the opportunities and threats associated with stakeholder involvement in municipal planning, and a comparison with Canadian practice.

Throughout the research activity, the overseas partners were fully engaged in developing the research agenda and documenting their findings. Their conclusions emphasized the advantages of public participation in Lithuanian municipal planning as an example of implementing democracy and local self-government. The researchers found that there is additional work required to improve the legal framework, and to improve actual practice. By collecting and documenting successful cases, educating citizens, planners and politicians on concepts and approaches to citizen engagement, and by involving public organizations as representatives of the public interest, the opportunity for meaningful participation in the planning process can be further enriched.

Case Study 3: Promoting Legal Rights for Women in Guatemala, by CECI

With support from the Democratic Development Fund (DDF) managed by the Centre canadien d’études et coopération internationale (CECI), the Centro para la Accion Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH) succeeded in bringing about a change in the Penal Code of Guatemala. The law, which related to crimes of adultery and keeping concubines, penalized women over men and resulted in women receiving more and harsher penalties for crimes which men also committed.

The strategy used to reverse this discriminatory law involved engaging in judicial action, implementing mechanisms for social pressure, and enlisting the support of the media. This intervention resulted in strengthening the women’s movement and other organizations of civil society, and ultimately in reinforcing the democratic exercise of power in Guatemala. The substantive governance challenges addressed by the program related to ensuring the equality of men and women before the law, as well as enhancing the capacity of civil society to challenge political and legal inequalities in a democratic, peaceful way.
The program raised questions about effective ways to engage citizens with regard to legal and human rights concerns, and, more broadly, to create a ‘culture of rights’ in a newly democratizing country. The program also demonstrated that improving governance might affect people at a deeply personal and individual level. The process was confronted with a number of challenges such as:

♦ ensuring consistency between the Constitution (which guarantees equality between men and women) and the Law (which penalized women more harshly than men in the area of adultery)
♦ balancing between domestic and international law
♦ mediating between citizens and government,
♦ the application of feminism, in the context of patriarchal attitudes and governing structures
♦ increasing political and legal awareness of citizens, through public education and the media, among a population which is largely illiterate
♦ promoting debate and dialogue on citizens’ rights, and encouraging safe public ‘space’ for criticism and interpretation of the law

The research and case study documented the process undertaken to mobilize the women’s groups, gain political support of key actors, and engage the media in a public education campaign about human rights, in an effort to change the discriminatory law. The case study provided a systematic analysis of the factors which contributed to the success of the intervention, such as the strength of the women’s movement, the legislative process which allowed for public hearings, the financial support provided through the DDF, and the participation of the media, for example.

The researchers noted that the intervention would have considerable implications for Guatemalan society. The success of the intervention strengthened the women’s movement, and set an important precedent for future action on other discriminatory laws and practices. The process also demonstrated the capacity of the women’s groups to organize themselves for collective action, in spite of political, social and economic differences between them, and encouraged them to undertake future action in other areas of abuse and human rights.

The intervention also resulted in peaceful, open debate, proving that democracy in Guatemala is possible. The administration of justice was improved, as the institutions and actors were forced to examine the contradictions in Guatemalan law, and to provide a legal foundation for the just resolution of other cases. The intervention, and the process of documenting the outcomes, ultimately contributed to the creation of a ‘culture of rights’ in Guatemala.

The research was carried out and documented collaboratively between CECI and their partners in Guatemala. Focus groups were held with representatives of the women’s groups, the media, and various lawyers involved in the intervention. An important output of the research was an accompanying document – a “Methodology for participatory development and implementation of development projects”. This document was produced in Spanish for dissemination and use in local NGOs.
1.5 What are we learning from lessons learned?

Drawing from all the activities of the Coop program, and from the collective experience of the participants, a number of lessons can be drawn about the various challenges related to developing, implementing and learning from governance interventions.

The nature of governance interventions

Unlike other more traditional fields of international development intervention, such as infrastructure development, humanitarian assistance, and basic human needs, ‘governance’ interventions are seen to be inherently political and normative. As a result, they are also high-risk.

There are many points of intervention, given that there are multiple actors and stakeholders to consider, within the state, private sector and among institutions of civil society. Governance includes not only many actors, but also various fields of study, traditions, and systems, and as such doesn’t lend itself to the project approach. There are no blue prints, and effective interventions rely on strong contextual analysis at the front-end and an iterative approach to the design and implementation. Such approaches require additional time, as well as financial and human resources, or re-allocation of existing resources.

Improving governance is a long-term endeavour, while the development project cycle tends to be of a shorter time frame. Even five years is a short time period when attempting to motivate systemic change among governing bodies, citizens, and the private sector towards improving governance. Because of the long-term nature, causality is difficult to determine, results are difficult to monitor, and unanticipated outcomes may prove more relevant and meaningful than planned outcomes.

Assessing, Documenting and Learning from Results

Factors such as risk and the need for longer time frames pose challenges to implementing agencies when reporting to donors, given that most donors are currently locked into RBM frameworks for their operations. In fact, many Coop participants voiced concerns echoed throughout the Canadian NGO community, that RBM applied too rigidly is not an appropriate framework to adequately assess impact in a field like governance.

As demonstrated throughout the Coop program and by the case studies in particular, managing for results in a program area like governance can be done in a less rigid fashion. Recent audits of CIDA conducted by the Office of the Auditor General used a mix of qualitative and quantitative criteria, criteria which could be usefully adapted to projects. Box 4, below, demonstrates these types of criteria which, when mixed and applied appropriately, can give a more holistic picture of results achieved.
Box 4: Balancing Qualitative and Quantitative Criteria

At the country program level:

- Actively pursuing well-defined policy and specific strategic objectives
- Assessing and managing the risks associated with the programs and activities undertaken
- Obtaining and using relevant information on performance
- Continually learning from experience and redirecting resources more productively among programs and projects
- Reporting on costs and accomplishments in terms of results
- Creating an action-oriented organizational environment that promotes learning by doing, an innovative style of management and an openness to differing viewpoints

Box 4 (con’d)

At the project level:

- Clarity of purpose and consensus among stakeholders
- Commitment of partners that have a long term interest in the purpose of the project
- Proactive involvement of beneficiaries throughout the project
- Willingness to adapt to changing circumstances
- Availability of sustaining resources
- Capacity to take risks and demanding tasks

As a result of previous so-called ‘development failures’, many donors and implementing agencies alike are attempting to document ‘best practices’ and lessons learned, in an effort to avoid past mistakes and build on strengths and successes. The Governance Cooperative action-research activity attempted to demonstrate how a research component can provide an analytical perspective in a project, allowing the experience to be captured by the project participants so that results and impact may be more easily identified and lessons fed into future project iterations. It was evident from the different approaches used and results attained by the research projects that to be truly rigorous, and to have maximal benefit, research capacity needs to be developed among Canadian and overseas partners alike, and such analysis needs to be built into the project from the start.

Roles for external partners

When attempting to effect change in governance, the scope for external technical assistance may be limited, and the role for outsiders is not always evident. Developing capacity for effective governance does not simply require the attainment of new skills to be imparted by an outside

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‘expert’. What may be required instead (or as well), are new partnerships, increased capacity for free debate and open dialogue, an environment open to change, respect for and legitimacy of governing institutions – all of which must be locally developed and nurtured over time.

The role of the donor and ‘implementing agency’ may more usefully be to provide financial and substantive resources, to act as a ‘window on the world’ easing access to intellectual resources from other jurisdictions, to accompany a change process by lending moral support and international pressure, or to act as a ‘neutral convenor’ between parties. Furthermore, there can be great value added in having the donor and implementing agency participate in impact assessment and analysis of lessons learned, by providing resources and strengthening research capacity, by providing a comparative perspective with other similar initiatives, or by sharing the lessons with a wider audience internationally.

1.6 Conclusions

In an attempt to document the lessons learned from the Governance Cooperative program it has been found that it is very likely that the greatest value has been in actually participating in the program throughout its duration. Participants, organizers and supporters of the Coop agree that the program has succeeded in meeting its overall objectives. The Program has provided a venue for exchange, identified examples of Canadian capacity in various aspects of governance, and facilitated a process of collaborative assessment of three projects.

The various activities and discussions among Coop participants revealed a lack of congruence among Canadian organizations engaged in governance interventions internationally. Many participants have, however, been stimulated to see their work in a broader context, and even to take on new activities or to carry out their current activities with greater regard for links to other aspects of governance.

In addition to illustrating some of the complexities in governance programming, the action research activity and documentation of the case studies pointed to the need for greater rigor in assessing and documenting impact and lessons learned. The cases demonstrated how even a small research component contributes an analytical perspective to a project, thus providing an opportunity to capture and share lessons learned within the life of a project. The critical lessons learned from this process, are that such analysis does not, and will not, happen on its own, and that for the analysis to be useful, it needs to be rigorous and systematic.

These lessons challenge donors, Canadian organizations, and overseas partners alike, to develop strategies to build analysis into their activities and programs. Without clear questions, meaningful indicators, and a collaborative review of steps taken, approaches used, and lessons learned, we are left with a lot of stories and anecdotal experiences, but no cumulative analysis, and thus no true learning. A ‘learning network’, such as the Governance Cooperative, is one approach that can be used to address the analytical gap between collecting anecdotes and truly capturing lessons which can be applied in future interventions.
The Institute On Governance initiated the Governance Cooperative program in the spirit of building more effective partnerships in Canada, and of learning from our collective experience so that both Canadian and overseas partners may contribute to promoting effective governance world wide. By placing more emphasis on learning, and on developing effective partnerships among actors in Canada, Canadian organizations will be in a stronger position to enhance partnerships and carry out interventions with institutions overseas.

Strong partners can effect great change, as was demonstrated in the cases from Russia, Lithuania and Guatemala, and is illustrated in the variety of Canadian interventions in governance. It is hoped that the documentation of their experience, and that of the Governance Cooperative program in general, may prompt other organizations to pursue the development of other ‘learning networks’, even in other countries or fields, with a view to stimulating partnerships in support of improved governance.
Annex I

Guidelines for Case Study Preparation
Governance Cooperative Action-Research Projects

This set of guidelines suggests an outline for the preparation and documentation of the case studies developed as part of the action-research activity of the Governance Cooperative program.

1.0 Objectives of the action-research projects

An underlying assumption guiding this process is that, since impact in the area of governance is difficult to identify, and since progress is often slow, it is important to understand the parameters within which it is possible to study interventions in this field. The goal is to encourage a process of reflection and analysis which is integrated into the actual design and implementation of particular interventions, and not only at their culmination in an end-of-project evaluation.

2.0 Purpose of the case studies

The action-research projects will be documented by the research partners as case studies. The case studies will address the challenges of studying governance projects, and will offer some examples of how impact in this area might be assessed, and how the lessons learned can be continually fed-back into the project and future interventions. To maximize the usefulness of the case studies, and to present them in a way that will facilitate comparisons and offer a basis for comprehensive analysis, it would be beneficial that the cases address common themes and concerns.

This guide has been prepared to provide an outline for the case studies that will establish some common ground for comparisons; however, it is not meant to stifle each case's unique characteristics. On the contrary, researchers are encouraged to emphasize the issues that make this case unique, including contextual factors (cultural, social, economic, and political) that may be particularly relevant and distinctive. Particular attention should be given to the "lessons learned" and to the possibilities or limitations of the applicability of the case study experiences to other contexts.

3.0 Suggested Outline for the Case Studies

This guide suggests that the case studies include (but not necessarily be limited to) sections on the following:

- a description of the issue at stake for the institution or group in question

some questions to consider...
- describe the issue
- how long had this challenge been apparent? to whom?
- who might have been affected if the problem went unaddressed?
- how did the issue emerge onto the public agenda?
- what public policies or practices were in question, if any?
- was there an event or personality which triggered action to address the issue?

• identification of relevant contextual factors, actors and their interests in addressing this challenge

some questions to consider...

- describe the political, social, economic, cultural situation
- which organizations, political parties, citizens' groups, individuals, etc. were involved in or implicated by the particular issue? who occupied leadership positions?
- who among the actors had a stake in the issue, or would likely be affected by the resolution of the problem; how would they be affected?
- what was the nature of their interests in addressing the issue?
- were their any dominant cultural, social, political, economic or other factors contributing to pressure either to address or ignore the issue?

• a description of the approaches adopted to deal with the issue at hand

some questions to consider...

- what approach was adopted to address the development challenge?
- how was it implemented?
- what were some of the difficulties in implementing the approach?

• an analysis of the process of developing and using a participatory action-research process

some questions to consider...

- what research methodology was used or developed to study this intervention?
- who was involved in developing the methodology and conducting the research; in what capacity?
- what questions did the action-research seek to address?
- what were some of the difficulties in developing and using a participatory action-research methodology?
- how useable is the methodology in other contexts?

• an analysis of the results of the research project, and of the outcomes of the action-research process
some questions to consider...

-did the research address the research questions? were the questions answered? did other questions arise as a result of the research process?
-what changes have occurred as a result of the intervention; what evidence is there to support these conclusions? what issues remain unresolved?
-what factors contributed to the outcomes of the research process (leadership, community participation, financial support, political pressure, etc.)?

-what, if any, were some of the unanticipated outcomes (both positive and challenging) of the research process?
-are some of the parties unsatisfied with the process and/or results of the intervention and/or the research?
-what are the prospects for integrating participatory action-research into future governance interventions?

• lessons learned

some questions to consider...

-identify and discuss the most important lessons learned from this case, both in terms of the research process and the results of the research
-what are the possibilities and limitations of applying this type of research in other interventions?
-what preconditions made the research process possible, and what conditions led to successful outcomes?
-what possibilities exist for a lasting impact of the intervention, and/or of the action-research activity, on governance policy and practice in the country/region/locale in question?
Annex II  Participants in the Governance Cooperative

Canadian Bar Association
Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI)
Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL)
Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre
Canadian Urban Institute (CUI)
Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC)
Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto (CUCS)
Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM)
Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT)[AGP division]
Ecole Nationale d'administration publique (ENAP)
Elections Canada
Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)
Human Rights Internet (HRI)
Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa (HRREC)
Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC)
Institute On Governance (IOG)
International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD)
International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
International Foundation for Electoral Systems
North-South Institute (NSI)
Office of the Auditor-General
Parliamentary Centre
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
University of Saskatchewan International