

The lesson lies in the importance of building democracy, respect for human rights and civil society. Primarily this is a role for local groups in their own national context, but aid investments can make a difference. It is a slow process, can take 25-30 years, and may be intangible at first. But results can already be seen in Thailand: a new constitution with broad public input, reduced role of military, higher hope and optimism and spirit; better quality of public debate, and greater capacity for analysis, proposal, and coalition building.

Aid really does aid

What can aid do? ODA is a modest though catalytic factor. It must work synergistically with other international policies on finance, foreign policies, reform of global institutions. Our main message was that aid and bailout are not enough to attack the depth of the crisis and the root causes of instability, but aid is important nonetheless.

Through basic human needs the roots of poverty can be attacked with education, but not just at the primary level, and especially for women.

Community development can be pressed forward.

Participation in civil society, can be strengthened by increasing local capacities for:

- analysis and making proposals;
- monitoring of corporations, policy, and decision making; and
- networking and coalition building (such as through the APEC popular summit)

But aid is at its lowest level in 30 years in Canada, reduced by almost 40% since 1991. Aid policy continues to be beset by confused objectives, from peace-building to police training to infrastructure to more traditional basic human needs, to development of export markets for Canadian goods and services. Despite strong policy frameworks, implementation is weak.

Indeed, notwithstanding the difficulty of measurement from CIDA's own statistics, our calculations are that only 19 percent of Canadian aid is spent on basic human needs, despite our own goal of 35 percent.

- Aid to sub-Saharan Africa declined at a greater rate than to the whole aid program.
- CIDA has experienced only minor cuts since 1992, yet almost half in countries of serious human rights violations.

Proposals for aid reform

The ODA Reform Agenda of CCIC and the NGO community would refocus aid on poverty eradication; building development strategies with the South that lead to sustained poverty reduction and respect for human rights.

1. Sixty percent of Canadian aid must be focused on sustainable human development, including civil society and human rights; benefitting directly people living in poverty.
2. Programs must be led by the developing countries themselves.
3. The commercial component should be reduced or eliminated.
4. A strategy for public engagement is needed to build Canadian awareness and sense of responsibility in global issues.