

Daring to take risk and fail

Building an innovation agenda
in Canada's global development
and humanitarian community

A discussion paper prepared for the
Canadian Council for International Co-operation

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Executive Summary

Innovation has become a significant topic of discussion within the Canadian global development and humanitarian sector. It is a central theme for the current government, including Global Affairs Canada (GAC). For its part, the development and humanitarian community has engaged in a mixed fashion – with some embracing and acting on this new focus, others saying that they are already demonstrating innovation in their work, and still others challenging the status of innovation as the buzzword *du jour*. The topic is top of mind for the sector. Yet there is little if any common understanding of what innovation is or entails.

To help assess and engage with this growing innovation agenda, this paper seeks to provide some clarity to the discussions, and some parameters for how organizations might think about innovation in the context of global development and humanitarian assistance. To realize this objective, the paper maps out current thinking on innovation among five national platforms of non-governmental organizations working in the global cooperation sector – sister organizations to the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) – as well as the Cambridge Humanitarian Centre.

The intent of the paper is to help give shape to how CCIC might learn from the experience of these platforms as it shapes its own innovation agenda and works to implement one of three core CCIC strategic directions for 2018-23: *Inspire and support the growth of a more relevant, responsive and effective global development and humanitarian assistance sector that, through a broad range of innovations, can create sustainable impact and change in collaboration with our partners.*

The paper is divided into seven parts. After a brief introduction (1), the paper looks at how the five platforms are defining innovation and social innovation, in terms of newness, value-added, effectiveness, and impact (2). Some of the elements raised include organizational openness to new or external ideas, and cross-disciplinary collaboration; only one platform explicitly defines innovation relative to its mission of building a more inclusive and sustainable world.

The paper then addresses why platforms chose the innovation route they took, exploring six specific stated rationales (3). While not all the platforms examined explicitly articulated their reasons for engaging with the innovation agenda, the range of rationales included the following: adaptation to a changing world; positioning vis-a-vis donors; responding to members' interest; remaining relevant and valued in an evolving development landscape; making work on innovation more intentional; and improving existing capacities, using innovation as one tool among many.

Next, the paper identifies key elements of the innovation agenda common to the work of different national platforms, and specifically relevant to the global development and humanitarian context – recurring factors that add clarity to a complex concept (4). Core pieces that helped further consolidate national platforms' thinking about innovation include the degree of newness and scale of impact of an innovation; considering varied entry points to innovation in terms of process, outputs and outcomes; the degree of their intentionality in trying to be innovative; organizational and environmental factors that hinder or promote innovation; the extent to which they fostered collaboration, knowledge-sharing and learning; and how they adapted to change and managed risk.

The paper then assesses the approaches taken by various platforms to foster innovation among

their respective members, identifying and analyzing a variety of six types of approaches (5), including the following: collaborative learning and knowledge sharing (e.g. conferences, workshops, and thought experiments); capacity assessments (e.g. member surveys); applied research and practical guidance (e.g. systematically framing innovation for members); innovative/innovation partnerships (e.g. creative North-South collaborations); promoting innovation (e.g. stimulating member competition and celebrating innovative failures); and intra-organizational leadership (creating dedicated staff positions to lead internal work on innovation).

To provide a backdrop for the Canadian context, the penultimate section of the paper specifically examines approaches to innovation at GAC (6). Not unlike the national platforms profiled in this paper, GAC's thinking about innovation is broad. It focuses on the newness, effectiveness and impact of innovation, where and how it can occur, on what scale, and to what end. To these, it adds a focus on inclusion, localization, evidence and data, learning, collaboration and partnership. That said, to be successful, GAC still has some key challenges that it will need to address.

The paper then concludes with some final consideration (7). As a discussion paper, it reaches no clear conclusions for the Council, but provides guidance for CCIC and its members as they shape an innovation agenda for the Canadian global development and humanitarian sector. While it signals the directions that the Council could take, some key questions remain. Readers are encouraged to reflect on these questions as they read this paper and share their reflections with the Council.

1. **Situating innovation:** Beyond the concepts outlined here, where and how do we integrate the Istanbul Principles and build on the Council's historical focus on development effectiveness?
2. **Building and prioritizing innovation:** what are some smaller acts which CCIC could start to foster innovation a) within the Council b) among its members? How might these differ between those who are more engaged, and those who are less engaged, but interested?
3. **Supporting innovation, collaboration, knowledge-sharing and learning:** What types of spaces and opportunities need to be created for innovation, collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and learning? What role is there for CCIC, GAC and members in this?
4. **Ensuring responsible innovation and risk-taking:** How can we better think about and work with risk – in a context where failure can have unacceptable outcomes on people's lives, and organizations and funders have low risk tolerance? How can CCIC help manage this?

As a final thought, the paper suggests that national platforms such as CCIC should recognize innovation as risky by definition, and therefore exercise caution before jumping on the innovation bandwagon. Carefully-worded definitions and intentionally developed plans formulated by CSOs offer no assurance that impactful and sustainable innovation will occur, especially if the rationale for doing so is purely exogenous. Furthermore, so as not to not lose its focus, the Council should consider how to situate innovation within its longer-standing historical focus on enhancing civil society development effectiveness, practice and accountability as defined in the Istanbul Principles. Yet by making a very intentional decision as an organization and national coalition to build on existing approaches and solutions, explore new options where appropriate, and support the creation of an enabling environment for innovation, national platforms can help their members and the wider sector improve their development effectiveness, better address the needs of affected communities and potentially have greater impact.

1) Introduction and overview

Although a focus on innovation preceded the arrival of the current federal government in 2015, it has since then become a central tenet of this government's agenda. In November 2015, the government established a Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, with a mandate to develop an innovation agenda for Canadian business and work with a host of different Ministries to drive innovation in their portfolios. The Minister of Families, Children and Social Development was tasked to work with the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour to develop a Social Innovation and Social Finance strategy. Innovation or working with the Minister of Innovation features in 20 of 34 Ministerial mandate letters. Within the Privy Council Office, the Government has set up an Impact and Innovation Unit to help lead its innovation work, in particular policy innovation. The Unit is focused on trying to reduce the barriers to innovation within government departments, engaging civil servants in discussions around innovation, and supporting them to apply innovative approaches to policy development and implementation. It also plays a challenge function, encouraging departments to experiment and test new approaches in how they work, and measure the outcomes of these efforts.¹ In this vein, Treasury Board has updated generic terms and conditions for grants and contributions to allow "for the use of prizes and challenges, incentive-based financing and micro-funding."² Finally, in November 2018, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI) released *The Innovation System of the Public Service of Canada*, the first of the OECD's reviews of a national public sector innovation system developed in partnership with the Unit.³ The Report provides a new framework to help Canada think about the purpose, nature and effectiveness of their own innovation systems in the public sector – something the government can draw on looking forward.

More specific to Global Affairs Canada (GAC), in 2014, Partnership with Canadians Branch was renamed Partnerships for Development Innovation Branch. In 2015, GAC established a departmental Champion for Innovation and set up a Development Innovation Unit to help drive the innovation agenda within the department and build staff capacity. The Unit has since established a Multi-Stakeholder Development Innovation Community of Practice which meets several times a year with members from the development community. In 2016, during the International Assistance Review, innovation was one of the central tenets of renewing Canada's international assistance, coupled with improving effectiveness, transparency and partnerships – ending up in the final Feminist International Assistance Policy in the context of "innovation, research and results". Budget 2018 announced the establishment of an International Assistance Innovation Program (\$873.4 million over five years) that will give "Government greater flexibility for financing arrangements and partnerships and ensure Canada remains at the leading edge of development financing."⁴ Building on an existing focus on innovation within the International Development Research Centre and Grand Challenges Canada, Global Affairs has also joined 11 other donors in the International

¹ Government of Canada (2016, December). *Experimentation direction for Deputy Heads - December 2016*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-hub/services/reports-resources/experimentation-direction-deputy-heads.html>

² Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2018, September 14). *OECD Development Cooperation Peer Reviews Canada 2018*, p. 73. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/canada/oecd-development-co-operation-peer-reviews-canada-2018-9789264303560-en.htm>

³ OECD (2018, November 20). *The Innovation System of the Public Service of Canada*. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/gov/the-innovation-system-of-the-public-service-of-canada-9789264307735-en.htm>

⁴ Government of Canada (2018, February 27). *Budget 2018 – Equality + Growth – A strong middle class*, P. 159. Retrieved from: <https://www.budget.gc.ca/2018/docs/plan/budget-2018-en.pdf>

Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA), an opportunity to learn from and share with other donors around its innovation agenda. According to a recent OECD report, with all of this, GAC wants to become a leader in development innovation.⁵

In this context, innovation is understood “to include new business models, policy practices, technologies, behavioural insights, or ways of delivering products and services that benefit and empower the poor in developing countries; that is any solution with the potential to address an important development problem substantially more effectively than existing approaches.”⁶

Against this backdrop, the development and humanitarian community has responded in a mixed fashion. Many organizations argue that they are already actively engaged in the innovation space or have been quick to embrace this new focus. Some already have impact hubs, are testing and trying new technologies, or are holding innovation days and workshops; others are testing new approaches to delivering and measuring impact or are scaling up initiatives; still others are monitoring and evaluating their work in different ways. Yet others would question what is meant by innovation, in particular the focus on scientific and technological quick fixes, and are writing it off as simply the latest development buzz word. The latter organizations argue that the contexts in which they work require them to be constantly evolving and innovating in response to changing circumstances and needs. Alternatively, in life-threatening situations where failure is not an option, they argue they can’t afford to be innovating and testing new approaches. Regardless, the topic is top of mind for the sector. The term *innovation* featured highly in the majority of submissions organizations made as part of the International Assistance Review (IAR), albeit likely in response to the strong emphasis Global Affairs gave the term in their discussion paper for the Review.⁷ But while groups referenced innovation a lot, the references generally lacked any common understanding of what innovation is or entails.

To help assess and engage with this growing innovation agenda, this discussion paper seeks to provide some clarity to the discussions, and some parameters for how organizations might think about innovation in the context of global development and humanitarian assistance. To realize this objective, the paper maps out current thinking⁸ among a sample of five national platforms of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the global cooperation sector – sister organizations to the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC). While these national platforms typically represent both global development and humanitarian organizations, to ensure there was at least some explicit attention given to innovation in the humanitarian domain, the paper also included work by the Cambridge Humanitarian Centre on innovation. While the authors recognize that there are probably many more national platforms active on the innovation agenda, these five were selected as the national platforms addressing innovation in the most public-facing way.

The intent of the paper is to help give shape to how CCIC might learn from the experience of these platforms as it shapes its own innovation agenda and works to “Inspire and support the growth of a

⁵ OECD (2018, September 14), p. 73

⁶ Global Affairs Canada (GAC) (2017a). *Canada’s Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance – A Feminist Approach*, Footnote 7. Retrieved from: http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/civil_policy-politique_civile.aspx?lang=eng

⁷ See Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) (2016). *In our words: A discourse analysis of submissions to the International Assistance Review*. Retrieved from: http://archive.ccic.ca/files/en/what_we_do/2016_12_05_IAR_In_Our_Words.pdf

⁸ More specifically, the paper draws on materials available on the web and on direct correspondence with the innovation leads and heads of agency at the respective platforms.

more relevant, responsive and effective global development and humanitarian assistance sector that, through a broad range of innovations, can create sustainable impact and change in collaboration with our partners” – one of three strategic directions for the Council in 2018-23.⁹ Accordingly, the paper first looks at how these different platforms are defining innovation. It then addresses why platforms chose the innovation route they took, exploring their stated rationales. Thirdly, the paper identifies key elements of the innovation agenda common to the work of different national platforms, and relevant to the global development and humanitarian context. Fourthly, it assesses the different approaches taken by various platforms to foster innovation, either within the platform itself or among their respective members. Finally, it assesses where Global Affairs Canada is going on innovation, to provide a backdrop against which to help further contextualize CCIC’s approach (not yet developed; available in the final). The paper concludes with some final considerations for CCIC as it develops its innovation agenda. As a discussion paper, it reaches no clear conclusions for the Council, but rather provides guidance for CCIC and its members as they shape an innovation agenda for the Canadian global development and humanitarian sector.

That said, while it signals the directions that the Council could take, some key questions remain. Readers are encouraged to reflect on these questions as they read this paper and share their reflections with the Council.

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⁹ CCIC (2018). *2018-2023 Strategy*. Retrieved from: <https://ccic.ca/about-us/#strategic>

National Platforms reviewed






 <p>AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT</p>	<p>The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) is the peak body for Australian non-government organizations (ANGOs) involved in international development and humanitarian action https://acfid.asn.au/</p>
	<p>Bond is the UK network for organizations working in international development and humanitarian assistance. https://www.bond.org.uk/</p>
	<p>Civil Society in Development (CISU) is an independent association of small and medium-sized Danish Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). http://www.cisu.dk/home</p>
	<p>InterAction is an American alliance organization of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in international development and humanitarian assistance. https://www.interaction.org/</p>
	<p>Partos is the Dutch membership body for organizations working in international development. Partos' The Spindle connects innovators among Dutch and global actors in an online and offline movement for inclusive, sustainable development. https://www.partos.nl/en/ http://thespindle.org/</p>

Table 1: Description of national platforms examined

2) Defining innovation

This section identifies the different ways that national platforms are thinking about both innovation – typically something that is new or improved, adds value to the individual or the organization, and is more effective than what was previously tried – and social innovation – a very broad range of potential solutions that address people’s unmet needs or have a positive social impact. Some organizations go further by talking about the preconditions for achieving this – among other things, an organizational openness to new or external ideas and cross-disciplinary collaboration. While enhanced effectiveness and impact is a central premise of the recourse to innovation, only Partos links this further to its mission of building a more inclusive and sustainable world.

ACFID

ACFID acknowledges the ambiguity of innovation as a concept: “it is difficult to pin down exactly what warrants being called ‘innovation.’ Innovation is subjective...where ‘one person’s innovative is another person’s ordinary’”.¹⁰ Nevertheless, its general understanding of innovation embeds two central elements: the creation of “something that is new or different,” and of “something that adds value.”¹¹

ACFID explicitly frames innovation in the development and humanitarian space as social innovation, where “the value of innovation is gauged by its contribution to achieving social outcomes,”¹² based on Phills, Deiglmeier & Miller’s definition.¹³ In this view, social innovation is conceived, in brief, as “new solutions that meet unmet needs and improve people’s lives,” that can encompass “a product, production, process, or technology ... a principle, an idea, a piece of legislation, a social movement, an intervention, or some combination of them.”¹⁴

The reason for limiting the scope of innovation strictly to activities that contribute to social ends and add value is presumably based on the need to assuage Australian NGOs’ (ANGOs) concerns about the implications of “innovation” for their sector – something identified by ACFID in its *Innovation for Impact* report. One such critical view identified innovation as a “trojan horse,” i.e. “an ideological preference for seeking solutions from business as opposed to not-for-profits.”¹⁵ Other related concerns expressed by some ANGOs were “that good practice and wisdom from the past [would] be under-valued, and that innovation is faddish and could be hailed as a silver bullet that fails to address the deep-rooted complex causes of poverty.”¹⁶ It reminds us that the purpose of the collective work that we do, whether through an innovation lens or not, should always be to better address the needs of affected communities.

Bond

Bond UK, which has devoted significant energy to providing its sector information about innovation, defines the term as requiring “collaboration and a commitment to *doing things*

¹⁰ James Whitehead et al. (2016). *Innovation for Impact How Australian NGOs Nurture and Scale up New Ideas*. Retrieved from: <https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/ACFID%20Innovation%20for%20Impact%20-%20Web%20Ready.pdf>

¹¹ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 10.

¹² James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 5.

¹³ James A. Phills Jr., Kriss Deiglmeier, & Dale T. Miller (2008) *Rediscovering Social Innovation* in Stanford Social Innovation Review, Fall 2008, pp. 33–43. Retrieved from: <http://csi.gsb.stanford.edu/rediscovering-social-innovation>.

¹⁴ James A. Phills Jr., Kriss Deiglmeier, & Dale T. Miller (2008).

¹⁵ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 5.

¹⁶ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 13.

differently” or “new ways of working together that transcend traditional boundaries to deliver greater impact, more quickly attained.”¹⁷ Bond’s definition of social innovation is “any solution that has the potential to address an important development problem more effectively than existing approaches.”¹⁸ Although Bond’s research shows how differently people within the sector understand social innovation, it mentions two recurring elements that have “consistently emerged from [their] conversations with NGOs about their understanding of social innovation”¹⁹: novelty and effectiveness.

CISU

According to its mission statement, CISU “builds capacity, promotes mutual learning and innovative thinking, and strengthens popular participation in development cooperation.”²⁰ CISU, however, only seems to reference innovation or ‘innovative thinking’ without providing an explicit definition. However, this paper assumes that the organization implicitly understands innovation as a new solution or invention.

InterAction

InterAction does not explicitly define innovation on their website, despite it seeming to be one of their central areas of focus in recent years. However, through personal correspondence, innovation was described as: “a new solution to a problem—which could be a borrowed or improved solution—and often, the means to impact at scale.” InterAction also mentions that innovation involves “a systems analysis for transferring how power operates.”²¹

Partos

Partos, echoing an emphasis by other national platforms on realizing social outcomes and impact, understands innovation as “social innovation,” whose end is “meaningful action for a more *inclusive* and *sustainable* world.”²² Partos views the aim of its innovation platform, The Spindle, as connecting innovators with each other, based on two innovation theories: Mulgan’s “connected difference” theory of innovation, which views social innovation as requiring cross-disciplinary collaboration between organizations, and Chesbrough’s “open innovation paradigm,” which stresses the importance of organizational openness to outside ideas and innovation based on co-creation.²³ The Spindle embeds “North-South learning” and a gender analysis approach to its work in accordance with its mission statement of fostering *inclusive* sustainable development.²⁴

¹⁷ Bond (2016a). *Funding Innovation in International Development*, p. 2. Retrieved from:

https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/funding_innovation_in_international_development.pdf

¹⁸ Bond (2016b). *An introduction to social innovation for NGOs*, p. 3. Retrieved from:

<https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/introduction-to-social-innovation-0416.pdf>

¹⁹ Bond (2016b), p. 3.

²⁰ CISU (No date). *CISU: Vision, Mission and Values*. Retrieved from:

[http://www.cisu.dk/Files//Filer/CISU/Forening/Vedtaegter %20strategier%20mv/CISU%20mission%20vision%20ENG.pdf](http://www.cisu.dk/Files//Filer/CISU/Forening/Vedtaegter%20strategier%20mv/CISU%20mission%20vision%20ENG.pdf)

²¹ Personal correspondence from Deborah Willig, Director at InterAction

²² The Spindle (2016, June 30). *Inception Report*, p. 3.

²³ The Spindle (2016), p. 6.

²⁴ The Spindle (2016), p. 12.

Organization	Definition
ACFID	Social innovation creates “new solutions that meet unmet needs and improve people’s lives,’ that can encompass ‘a product, production, process, or technology ... a principle, an idea, a piece of legislation, a social movement, an intervention, or some combination of them’” ²⁵
Bond	Broadly defined as any solution that improves effectiveness over existing approaches, innovation is a concept that is inherently collaborative and must transcend traditional boundaries to achieve the greatest impact.
CISU	A new or improved solution or invention.
InterAction	Innovation is a new, improved, or borrowed solution to a problem often involving scaling up solutions.
Partos	Collaborative action for a more inclusive and sustainable world that supports the development of new ideas, and proposes new strategies and solutions through the identification of emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities. ²⁶

Table 2: Comparative table of working definitions of innovation between national platforms.

3) Rationales for focusing on innovation

While not all the platforms examined explicitly articulated their reasons for engaging with the innovation agenda, others provided a range of rationales including the following: to help them better adapt to an ever-changing world – be it to find new solutions that can bring more far-reaching and sustainable change in the world, or to scale solutions that can respond to the magnitude of current and emerging global challenges; to position themselves with respect to donors’ interest in innovation; to respond to members’ interest in the innovation agenda; to remain relevant and valued in a growing landscape of development actors; to make the focus on innovation more intentional, and less accidental; and to improve existing capacities, using innovation as one tool among many.

Understanding these rationales is more than an academic exercise, since the rationale will likely drive the approach. For example, if the rationale for innovating is purely in response to a donor-driven agenda, vs. to remain relevant or have greater impact, the approach is not likely to be sustainable in the long term. The following sections provides an overview of some of the thinking behind these different rationales.

²⁵ From James A. Phillis Jr., Kriss Deiglmeier, & Dale T. Miller (2008), as cited in James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 12.

²⁶ The Spindle (2016), p. 3.

a) Doing things differently in a rapidly changing world.

The most common reason cited is the necessity of adapting to change. For instance, ACFID argues that, given the rapid rate of change, NGOs have a moral necessity to become “disruptors” to better address the needs of beneficiaries. “If there are better ways, then there is a moral imperative to seek them out.”²⁷ Similarly, Bond posits the need for UK-based NGOs to reject “business as usual” approaches, which it characterizes as unsustainable, and to adopt innovative approaches to adapt to far-reaching change.²⁸ Partos also cites a number of “drastic” changes requiring innovative solutions, including the rise of income inequality, global warming, the shrinking space of civil society, and shifts in development financing due to the entrance of “powerful new players.”²⁹ Bond³⁰ and ACFID³¹ also mention these changes as motivating factors for innovation.

b) Organizational positioning on an emerging donor agenda

Organizations are also engaging in the innovation agenda to gain competitive advantage over other competitors in the field – in the context of donors using innovation as a way to drive greater impact and results amidst limited (and often declining) donor resources. For example, ACFID mentions how organizations are positioning themselves as innovators as a means of attracting additional donors/funding.³² In recent years, the Australian government has set up “innovation” initiatives, *e.g.* funding of InnovationXChange, the Pacific Humanitarian Innovation Challenge, and the Global Innovation Fund.³³ Bond also cites organizational positioning as one of four “major motivating factors” for innovation. “If you want to get new resources you also need new offerings which requires innovation. How do you attract a new customer or donor? With something different—humans want variety and diversity.”³⁴

While this may lead to organizations to genuinely develop an innovation agenda within their organizations, it may also simply be a tactic to be seen to be playing the game. Critical research cautions of the social innovation movement’s “reluctan[ce] to discuss, or even acknowledge, a possible dark side” to innovation.³⁵ Particularly relevant to the issue of organizational positioning, some research argues that non-profit organizations are “pressure[d] to adopt the language and practices associated with social enterprise. Non-profits may therefore engage in ‘tactical mimicry,’ *i.e.* ‘publicly identifying with the discourse of social enterprise in order to acquire resources, while at the same time privately expressing disdain for it and characterizing its core ideas as neoliberal ‘bullshit.’”³⁶

c) Member interest to innovate in order to remain relevant

Membership interest seems to be another reason motivating some national platforms to work on the innovation agenda. In the case of Bond, it noted in 2018 that “Innovation and adapting to stay

²⁷ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 16.

²⁸ Bond (2016b), p. 3; Bond (2015, October). *Bond Strategy 2016-2021 – Building a network fit for the future*. Retrieved from https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/bond_strategy_2016-21_v2.pdf

²⁹ The Spindle (2016), p. 3

³⁰ Superflux (2018), *International Development Futures: Nimble, Parasitic and Tentacular*. Retrieved from: <http://superflux.in/index.php/work/mantissystems/#>; Bond (2016b), p. 3.

³¹ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 5.

³² James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 13.

³³ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 16.

³⁴ Bond (2016b), p. 4.

³⁵ Paul Tracey & Neil Stott (2016). “Social Innovation: A Window on Alternative Ways of Organizing and Innovating,” *Innovation: Organization & Management* 19, no. 1. Retrieved from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14479338.2016.1268924>

³⁶ Paul Tracey & Neil Stott (2016), p. 56.

relevant in a changing context” was the second highest long-term priority of its member organizations.³⁷ While InterAction does not explicitly signal its rationale for exploring innovation, survey results³⁸ and personal correspondence suggest that it is motivated by the growing interest of its members, especially vis-à-vis innovative financing. Likewise, ACFID talks about the need to ‘*innovate or die*’ as a common refrain from its 2015 workshop, in light of significant reductions in funding to ANGOS and a shift to the private sector as “a key partner” of the Australian Government in its efforts to “promote prosperity [and] reduce poverty.”³⁹

d) To innovate with intent

The existing approaches to innovation among Partos’ membership are generally understood as lacking strategic intent; their innovation successes have been characterized as largely accidental and focused only on organizational innovation. Accordingly, Partos has developed interest in dedicating more resources to innovation, to boost the opportunity of its members to tap into existing innovative ideas and to bring isolated innovators together; The Spindle plays a key connective role in this regard.⁴⁰ But there is an inherent challenge embedded in this rationale. Whereas in other contexts organizations are innovating in an effort to get an advantage over their competitors, in an environment where everyone is trying to innovate, Partos has identified intra-sectoral competition as a risk to innovation, and a potential impediment to The Spindle’s “open innovation” mission of fostering collaboration between organizations.⁴¹ Partos recommends strategies to overcome these obstacles by, for example, “anticipating potential sensitivities when choosing the format for facilitating exchanges between organizations.”⁴²

e) Innovation as one tool among many

While this section has explored some of the rationales why different platforms are pursuing the innovation agenda, and such articulation clearly helps provide some focus for how to approach this agenda, it is also important to put this in context. Both Bond’s *Introduction to Social Innovation* and ACFID’s *Innovation for Impact* note that social innovation ought to be understood by practitioners as one tool among many for combatting poverty. It is not a silver bullet. In this sense, innovation is the means (or the tool) to achieve an end, not the end itself.

Furthermore, it is not clear what challenges “innovation” (both as tool and as process/ methodology) is best suited to address. While some groups cite addressing big global challenges and far-reaching structural problems, such as climate change and income inequality, as the rationale for adopting innovative approaches, it is not clear how well innovation can address such problems. Will innovation make the solutions and outcomes more impactful, or will it just make the organization more effective at achieving the same results?

In fact, none of the organizations featured in this study articulated *why* innovation is more useful than other processes to addressing the oft-cited changes of “megatrends and disrupt[i]ons,” “the

³⁷ Bond, Superflux, UNDP, Nesta (2018, March 23). *Building the Development Organization of the Future*, Retrieved from:

<https://www.bond.org.uk/resources/building-the-development-organisation-of-the-future>

³⁸ InterAction (2017). *Innovative Finance For Development (IF4D): A Snapshot Of InterAction Members’ IF4D Activities*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.interaction.org/node/6869>

³⁹ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 16.

⁴⁰ The Spindle (2016), p. 5-6.

⁴¹ The Spindle (2016), p. 8.

⁴² The Spindle (2016), p. 8.

arrival of disruptors,” and a domestic policy environment characterized by reduced ODA funding and the primacy of private sector investment. Rather, it is seen as a given: “innovate or die.”⁴³ This fundamental lack of formal or logical justification can perhaps be understood as arising from the tautological circularity of social innovation discourse, which “posits that: (1) there are problems in society that need new solutions; (2) social innovation is defined as successful (or more successful than alternative new solutions to problems); (3) thus, we need social innovation (more than alternatives).”⁴⁴ Just as the donor obsession with the private sector before it, there is no clear evidence that “innovative solutions” are on a consistent basis any more effective or impactful than (tried and true) alternatives being used to address the needs of affected communities.

4) Key elements to thinking about innovation, and to being innovative

At first glance, given a multiplicity of definitions and interrelated means and ends, innovation as a concept feels very fluid, ambiguous, and only so useful. To give further shape to our understanding of innovation, beyond definitions and rationale, this section tries to identify additional core elements across the work of the different platforms. These recurring factors may add clarity to this variegated concept: newness and degree of impact; different entry points for innovating in terms of process, outputs and outcomes; intentionality; organizational and environmental factors that can hinder or promote innovation; fostering collaboration, knowledge-sharing and learning; and adaptability to change and managing risk.

a) Expanding the concept of “Newness”

Despite unanimous agreement that “newness” is at the core of innovation, many NGOs lack a clear, or any, definition of what they mean by the “newness” of an innovation. Bond notes that NGOs ought to define for whom an idea is new, for example, the organization, the particular context, or the sector as a whole.⁴⁵ To help evaluate the “newness” of an initiative, Bond cites a matrix used by Christian Aid (Figure 1), which evaluates newness according to two axes, “newness to the organization” and “newness to the sector” – both important categories in terms of thinking about newness, and also expanding the scope for potential innovations. The axes also allows groups to gauge the relative degree of “newness” (incremental, substantial or radical), making the concept more or less expansive.

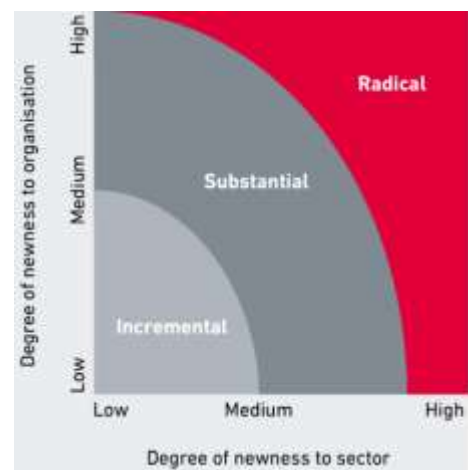


Figure 1: Degree of Innovation; Bond (2016).
An introduction to Social Innovation, p. 10.

How we think about the type and degree of newness has implications for how we think about innovation. For instance, GAC states that the first question it asks when assessing an initiative is: *is*

⁴³ See James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), pp. 15-16.

⁴⁴ Martin Fougère, et al. (2017) “A Critical Reading of the European Union’s Social Innovation Policy Discourse: (Re)legitimizing Neoliberalism,” *Organization* 24, no. 6 (2017), pp. 826, 827. Retrieved from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1350508416685171>

⁴⁵ Bond (2016b), p. 10.

it new? Including this criterion for assessing initiatives may imply excluding older or existing solutions. In contrast, Bond's definition of social innovation widens its scope to include *any* more effective solution to a development problem – even an old solution that could still be “scaled-up” and/or applied effectively in new or different contexts.⁴⁶ Scaling an existing development solution is innovative under the Bond definition – but since the solution itself is not new, it may not be considered innovative (or supportable) by GAC. Where divergent definitions influence funding decisions, this may impact on the extent to which civil society organizations are confident that the ‘innovation agenda’ reflects their interests and abilities.

b) Thinking about process, output and outcome innovations

We have already noted that many groups in their definitions have signaled that “innovation” is a means to the end of implementing better solutions to social problems—not an end in itself. This explains the widespread emphasis many groups place on “social innovation”. In other words, the process of innovation is intended to generate new products, services or outputs which aim to achieve more significant and positive social outcomes and impact.

That said, some organizations also think about innovation in terms of changes to organizational processes and practices themselves, as well as to services or products delivered, and to actual outcomes, along a similar spectrum of change as Bond identified (see figure 1 above). ACFID, for example, thinks about the degree of impact of social innovation, as process, output and outcome, along a spectrum of change (Figure 2 below). (See also Section 5 for more discussion of this.)

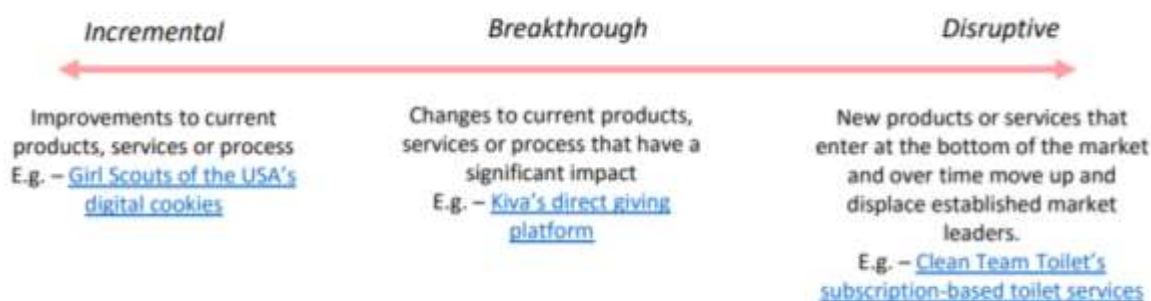


Figure 2: ACFID's continuum of social innovation impact⁴⁷

c) From thinking to planning to be innovative

We have already noted, in terms of the different rationales for innovating, the desire is to move from accidental to intentional innovation. It is obvious, but this means going beyond thinking about innovation to planning for it. Bond, which identifies the need for definitional clarity, recommends that organizational leaders “openly champion innovation [and] articulate its value.”⁴⁸ Strategic intent is stressed by all national platforms committed to innovation,^{49 50} namely the need to “establish

⁴⁶ Bond (2016b), p. 3.

⁴⁷ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), Australian Council for International Co-operation - Innovation Guide, pp. 8. Retrieved from: <https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/ACFID%20Innovation%20Guide%20-%201st%20Iteration%20-%20Complete.pdf>

⁴⁸ Bond (2016b), p. 1.

⁴⁹ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), pp. 21, 23, 27.

⁵⁰ Bond (2016b), pp. 17, 23.

supporting structures and leadership mechanisms, as well as build on already identified enablers.”⁵¹ As ACFID’s *Innovation for Impact* notes: “specific gearing of innovations in organizations will result in more effective outcomes. Without a set structure of how to facilitate innovation, and insufficient long-term planning and strategy, an organization’s ability to innovate can be limited”⁵²; ACFID’s detailed innovation guide for the ANGO community represents one effort to build innovative knowledge and capacity within civil society. Partos also places a strong emphasis on strategic intent for innovation, as evidenced by The Spindle’s outline of specific outputs, desired outcomes, and a detailed four-year plan to achieve specific goals associated with each “result area.”⁵³

d) Fostering an enabling environment for innovation

Bond⁵⁴ and ACFID⁵⁵ both follow Inventium’s framework of innovation best practices, which consist of nine enabling factors for innovation. While ACFID’s *Innovation Guide* provides detailed recommendations relating to these factors—including internal and external enablers—Bond uses case study examples to illustrate how these factors are implemented by its members. These nine factors represent distinct areas in which a national platform, like CCIC, can support and enhance innovative capacity among its members and the wider sector, as well as within the Council itself.

Culture (employee perceptions of the organization)

An effective climate for innovation is one that “involves individuals feeling an optimal degree of challenge and autonomy, support for new ideas and innovative behaviour, leaders taking risks to implement progressive ideas, and cross-departmental collaboration.”⁵⁶ Organizations need to build and support an innovative organizational culture.

Strategy (aligning innovation with organizational strategy)

“Connecting innovation to corporate strategy delivery” is viewed as bringing “clarity of purpose,” although “aligning innovation too tightly to immediate corporate priorities can lead to a restriction on more radical innovation that might not fit with narrow agendas or short time frames.”⁵⁷ Innovation should help drive organizational goals but should not necessarily be driven by those goals.

Communication (turning innovation into a habit and keeping it top of mind)

To avoid innovation being seen as a buzz word, innovation should be seen as “integral to long-term growth.” This requires supportive leadership which sends “clear, constant and consistent” messages about what “innovation means to the organization, why it’s important, and how everyone can contribute.”⁵⁸

Resources (allocation of time and money to drive innovation)

Social innovation—to be successful—must be properly resourced. Several strategies are proposed: “It may be having an organization-wide innovation budget, or smaller innovation budgets per team. It

⁵¹ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), p. 9.

⁵² James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 27.

⁵³ The Spindle (2016), pp. 15 - 45

⁵⁴ Bond (2016c). *Innovation Audit Report*, p. 3, Retrieved from:
https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/sample_innovation_audit_report.pdf

⁵⁵ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), pp. 9-13.

⁵⁶ Bond (2016b), p. 14.

⁵⁷ Bond (2016b), p. 15.

⁵⁸ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), p. 12.

may be having a few trained full-time innovation champions, or carving out 20% time of 10 employees' roles ... even innovation secondments,"⁵⁹ or the implementation of innovation R&D labs.⁶⁰

Capability (skill-building for innovating)

Innovation is seen as a "discipline and a set of competencies that should be recognized and actively developed."⁶¹ A "key catalyst," therefore, is "having employees skilled in innovation methodologies" such that they can "run social innovation projects through each stage of the innovation process."⁶²

Roles (driving motivation through job definition)

This enabler sets out the need to integrating innovation into employees' roles to "ensure that it is successfully driving both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation at an individual level."⁶³ For example, "to extrinsically motivate employees, leaders should incorporate social innovation into staff's job descriptions and [Key Performance Indicators], and create reward and recognition programs to thank the best participants. To intrinsically motivate employees, leaders should ensure that staff feel a sense of progress, challenge and purpose in their work, as well as give them opportunities to become a master of what they do."⁶⁴

Process (the pathway from mission to market)

There is a process to facilitating innovation, so organizations must build this into their practice and programming. Five stages of social innovation, explained more fully in ACFID's *Innovation Process Methodology*, are 1) opportunity identification; 2) exploratory stakeholder research; 3) idea generation; 4) idea testing and iterating; and 5) implementation/ scaling up. The innovation process ought to put people at its centre, to encourage continual learning/adaptation. Two internal enablers include "ensuring you are designing scalable ideas from the get-go for every social innovation project" and fully understanding the local context and all relevant stakeholders.⁶⁵ (See also Methodology for innovating below.) (Note the debate, identified by Bond,⁶⁶ surrounding the value (or not) of scale as a success factor for innovation. This is an issue worth examining further, as it is embedded in virtually all innovation process methodologies.)

Measurement (quantifying your innovation efforts)

The framework encourages organizations to measure their innovation efforts with a view to measuring their impact. This allows organizations to quantify the effectiveness of their efforts and to note where improvement or scaling-up is needed. NGOs "not only need to measure the outputs or impact of innovation activity, but also the inputs (e.g. Full Time Employment and funding), the effectiveness of the process itself (e.g. project speed) and any influencing environmental factors (e.g. cultural elements such as staff participation)."⁶⁷

Positioning (being seen as thought leader on innovation)

Being seen as innovative has "income benefits" and "increases employee pride and attracts talent to

⁵⁹ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), p. 11.

⁶⁰ Bond (2016b), p. 18.

⁶¹ Bond (2016b), p. 20.

⁶² Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), p. 10.

⁶³ Bond (2016b), p. 21.

⁶⁴ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), p. 12.

⁶⁵ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), p. 10.

⁶⁶ Bond (2016b), p. 17.

⁶⁷ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), p. 12.

the organization”; an external enabler to positioning is boosting “donor risk appetite.”⁶⁸

e) Creating opportunities for collaboration, knowledge-sharing and learning

While not exclusive to innovation in the development and humanitarian sphere, the Cambridge Humanitarian Centre notes that innovation, like development, is “people-centred and relies on participation and learning to be effective.”⁶⁹ Accordingly, funding partnerships and collaborative knowledge-sharing and learning are key strategies that organizations employ to innovate.

Collaboration through knowledge-sharing partnerships is understood as an important means to foster creative thinking to generate new ideas. Both Bond⁷⁰ and ACFID⁷¹ clearly articulate the necessity of collaborating with others to generate new ideas. Partos perhaps goes one step further, emphasizing the necessity of open collaboration and co-creation for innovation. Concretely, this approach entails group-based capacity-building activities, such as forums, workshops, online classes and applied research. Most of the organizations use at least one of these methods within their innovation strategy (this is explored further below).

Tracey & Stott’s *social extrapreneurship*, defined as “inter-organizational action that facilitates alternative combinations of ideas, people, places and resources to address social challenges,”⁷² is a type of innovation which corresponds to financial and knowledge-based collaboration approaches, both of which are viewed by platforms as essential practices of innovation. It should be noted that some critical research surrounding social extrapreneurship argues that NGOs may violate their responsibility to remain accountable to affected communities by, in effect, subordinating the needs and desires of affected communities to the agendas of other organizations, including funders, who may have “a particular set of assumptions about social change.”⁷³

f) Adapting to changes, working with risk and scaling

Adaptability is unanimously acknowledged as a crucial component of the innovation process. Indeed, the Cambridge Humanitarian Centre notes that “adaptation and learning (including learning from failure) are key parts” of the dynamic and unpredictable innovative process required for innovations to meet people’s needs.⁷⁴

Accepting and adapting to the risk inherent in innovation is identified as necessary to the process of innovation. Innovation requires the investment of considerable resources which often do not generate short-term benefits.⁷⁵ As Partos notes: “innovation processes...cannot be captured in detailed plans from inception to end with a 100% guaranteed success rate.”⁷⁶ Adapting to this through risk-mitigation is also identified as necessary to maximizing results.⁷⁷

⁶⁸ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), p. 13.

⁶⁹ Ian Steed (2010). *Cambridge and International Development: the Ideas, the People, the Impact*, The Humanitarian Centre, p. 8. Retrieved from: <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/30196703/cambridge-and-international-development-the-humanitarian-centre>

⁷⁰ Bond (2016a), p. 2.

⁷¹ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 21.

⁷² Paul Tracey & Neil Stott (2016), p. 55.

⁷³ Paul Tracey & Neil Stott (2016), pp. 56-57.

⁷⁴ Ian Steed (2010), p. 6.

⁷⁵ The Spindle (2016), p. 13.

⁷⁶ The Spindle (2016), p. 21.

⁷⁷ The Spindle (2016), pp. 13, 21.

Several risk-mitigation strategies are identified by a number of organizations, namely GAC, International Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA), the Cambridge Humanitarian Centre, and Partos, the latter of which refers to “portfolio management.”⁷⁸ There are generally two elements to risk management: 1) the ethical considerations of limiting possible risks of “failed innovation” to “vulnerable people and communities;”⁷⁹ and 2) managing the expectations (and risk tolerance) of organizations engaging in the innovations.⁸⁰ Both pose obvious challenges. On the latter point, IDIA, an influential innovation think-tank, notes that, “(a)lthough taking risks is an essential part of innovation and scaling, a highly risk-averse culture such as that often found within government bureaucracies can often work to hinder or even prevent successful scaling processes in different ways.”⁸¹

Another important dimension to adaptability is the process of “scaling up,” which the majority of organizations included in this study identified as a central element of the “process of innovation.” For some organizations, the activity which precedes “scaling up” is the risk-mitigation strategy of identifying “scalable solutions” (*i.e.* solutions that demonstrate high potential to achieve disproportionate impact and to change systems impeding progress), and weeding-out those which are not.⁸² However, it is worth noting that there is a debate about the potential importance of scale as a success criterion for innovation.⁸³

g) Following a clear methodology for innovating

Most organizations reviewed describe a “process of innovation.” This entails a methodology for guiding the way ideas are developed and implemented, with discrete, but overlapping steps. Most methodologies for innovating follow a logical sequencing of activities, from ideation, to piloting (small-scale implementation) and, if the pilot is judged successful, “scaling-up.” As well, most national platforms describe the innovation process as *active* (*i.e.* responsive and adaptable) as innovations tend to be developed in an unpredictable, non-linear fashion, with “testing, learning and adapting”⁸⁴ running throughout the process.^{85 86 87}

Bond’s *Introduction to social innovation for NGOs* cites a “social innovation spiral” created by Nesta and the Young Foundation (shown opposite in Figure 3), which identifies seven stages of the innovation process.



Figure 3: The Social Innovation Spiral; Bond (2016).
An introduction to Social Innovation, p. 11.

⁷⁸ The Spindle (2016), p. 21.

⁷⁹ Ian Steed (2010), p. 14.

⁸⁰ Bond (2016b), p. 18.

⁸¹ International Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA) (2017, June). *Insights on Scaling Innovation*, p 13. Retrieved from: <https://static.globalinnovationexchange.org/s3fs-public/asset/document/Scaling%20Innovation%20DIGITAL%20COPY.pdf?C719IAFtMThwNbUpdcs4TeYl5vYa2u9p>

⁸² IDIA (2015), *A Call for Innovation in International Development*, Retrieved from:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b156e3bf2e6b10bb0788609/t/5b1718b603ce649e65fff143/1528240311484/Call+for+Innovation+%28English%29.pdf>

⁸³ Bond (2016b), p. 17.

⁸⁴ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 10.

⁸⁵ The Spindle (2016), p. 17.

⁸⁶ Ian Steed (2010), p. 18.

⁸⁷ Bond (2016b), p. 14.

The Humanitarian Centre also establishes four “broad stages” associated with the innovation process:

1. Inventing: the idea stage
2. Piloting: carrying out initial testing of the idea as a prototype
3. Disseminating: spreading the piloted idea, whether deliberately or spontaneously
4. Adopting: getting the idea widely accepted

Partos implicitly conceives the process of innovation it undertakes as consisting of a number of stages: ideation (monitoring and generating ideas pertaining to inclusive and sustainable development), facilitation (connecting innovators throughout the process of prototyping and scaling), and showcasing work.⁸⁸

ACFID’s detailed *Innovation Guide* outlines five stages of the innovation process⁸⁹:

1. Identifying broad opportunities for innovation.
2. Discovering, through exploratory research with donors, partners, and beneficiaries, “the biggest problem area, within the boundaries of the opportunity, to innovate around.”
3. Ideation, *i.e.* generating ideas with stakeholders to address the problem identified, “using tools that push people’s creative boundaries.”
4. Experimentation with donors, partners, and beneficiaries to analyze the “chosen idea’s underlying assumptions using lean scientifically rigorous tests.”
5. Implementation by “scaling your social innovation.”

InterAction mentions the use of specific innovation methodologies implemented through workshops. These methodologies, derived from business-oriented approaches and adapted for the social sector, include Human Centered Design, Lean Startup, Lean Data, and Mission Model Canvas.

Each of these methodological models represents a framework under which a national platform can work with its members and their country context and seek to address the gaps or challenges they are trying to address through targeted capacity-building and information-sharing efforts.

h) Beyond definitions and key factors, to types of innovation

Bond, in partnership with Oxfam and the Social Innovation Exchange, created a document which outlines how it understands social innovation, and establishes a rigorous framework for what this might look like in the global development and humanitarian sector. It also established its own typology of social innovation, based on a framework adapted from a workshop with 16 NGOs. The nine distinct “types” of social innovation it identified are as follows:⁹⁰

- Funding Model (how you finance your work);
- Collaboration (how you work with new or unusual partners to achieve more impact);
- Organizational structure (how you organize your internal talents and resources to deliver impact);

⁸⁸ The Spindle (2016), p. 7.

⁸⁹ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), pp. 30-64.

⁹⁰ Bond (2016b), pp. 5-9.

- Process (how you deliver your work more effectively);
- Service/product (how you develop programmes and initiatives that achieve more impact);
- Service/product coordination (how you create complementary products and services that work together to deliver better outcomes);
- Communication channel (how you deliver your services/products to supporters and beneficiaries);
- Brand (how you represent your organization and its products/services);
- Engagement (how you foster meaningful interactions with beneficiaries or supporters).

ACFID similarly describes process, product, and position (the latter referring to “brand”) types of innovation. For ACFID, social innovation is first categorized into **innovation as process**, conceived as moving through discrete stages,⁹¹ which are described in detail in their “Innovation Process Methodology” guidelines.⁹²

The second approach is **output innovation**, which consists of the implementation of a solution to a social problem. Frances and Bessant’s (2005) ‘Four Ps’ are cited as useful conceptualizations of different types of innovation outputs:

Product innovation: introduction or improvement of a product or service;

Process innovation: modifications of the ways in which products are created or delivered;

Position innovation: changes to the context in which the product is framed;

Paradigm innovation: redefinition of the dominant models, theories and methods adhered to by an organization.⁹³

Ramalingam, Scriven & Foley’s (2009) typology, describing levels of change of innovation outputs, is also highlighted:

Transactional innovations: driven by necessity and designed for a particular context and purpose; as such, there may not be scope for the wider dissemination of these innovations;

Incremental innovations: scalable modifications applied to existing processes in order to enhance their efficiency or effectiveness;

Transformational innovations: long-term strategic developments that are designed to radically alter organizational processes and facilitate new operational methods.⁹⁴

To these types of approaches to thinking about where and how organizations can be innovative, Partos has identified a specific target for the innovative approaches of its members, focused more on an end goal: 1) inclusion of the extreme poor; 2) civic power; 3) innovative ways of cooperating between organizations; 4) innovative use of monitoring and evaluation.⁹⁵

As noted earlier, this expands our understanding of how to think about innovation, in terms of

⁹¹ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 10.

⁹² Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), pp. 30-64.

⁹³ D. Frances & F. Bessant, F (2005). “Targeting innovation and implications for capability development,” *Technovation*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 171–183 cited in James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 11.

⁹⁴ B. Ramalingam, K. Scriven & C. Foley (2009). *Innovations in international humanitarian action: ALNAP’s 8th Review of Humanitarian Action*. Retrieved from <http://www.alnap.org/resource/5664>, cited in James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 11.

⁹⁵ The Spindle (2016), p. 16.

the *location* of the innovation (new to the organization, to the sector, to the position/specific country context or project context), the varying *degrees* of innovation (incremental, substantial and radical), the *vehicle* for the innovation (new process, product or service, partner, paradigm), and the *challenge* the innovation is trying to address (inclusion, civic power, etc.). Like Bond, ACFID notes that innovations can overlap and therefore be “innovative at more than one level.”⁹⁶

As with the various innovation methodologies presented above, these diverse typologies of innovation represent models from which national platforms like CCIC and their members (or other prospective support structures or hubs for innovation within the development and humanitarian sector) can draw to identify specific areas of focus for their innovations.

5) National platform approaches to fostering members’ innovation

Beyond the questions posed throughout this discussion paper, all of which have implications for how CCIC may think about and work on innovation, this section details the actual approaches taken by national platforms to improve their own and their members’ capacity to innovate, either within their organization or within the sector. Many, if not all of the national platforms, take a range of different approaches, including collaborative learning and knowledge sharing, capacity assessments, applied research and practical guidance, innovative/innovation partnerships, promoting innovation, and intra-organizational leadership.

Approach	Description
Collaborative learning and knowledge-sharing	Organizing and convening traditional workshops, forums, deep learning events and communities of practice to actively raise awareness, knowledge and practice on innovation, as well as less traditional learning and ideation opportunities.
Capacity assessments	Conducting surveys and audits, often through external consultants, to assess the innovation capacity of members in the global development and humanitarian sector.
Applied research and practical guidance	Generating research about and guidance on innovation for its members.
Innovative/innovation partnerships	Working with partners to fund innovations, co-create innovative solutions, foster innovation, or generate partnerships with innovators
Promoting innovation	Helping to promote the innovative capacities of organizations — often as a means of cultivating reputations as innovators to attract donors — by showcasing innovations on their websites. Some platforms created incentives for innovating through competitions, awards and integrating innovation as a criterion

⁹⁶ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 11.

	for platform funding.
Intra-organizational leadership	Establishing leadership positions focused on implementing innovation agendas within organizations.

Table 3: Summary and description of approaches to innovation taken by national platforms

a) Collaborative learning and knowledge-sharing

All national platforms studied here – ACFID, Bond, Partos, InterAction, and CISU – have engaged their members in what InterAction calls “broad-based education” through more traditional learning approaches, like forums, conferences, workshops, communities of practice and classes.

InterAction’s 2018 annual forum focused on “Innovation, Impact, and Inquiry” and featured panels and expert presentations on topics such as “collaborative competition,” “how to foster innovation,” and a reflection on its Children’s Innovation Program.⁹⁷

Bond has hosted workshops, offered online classes and provided expert information on innovation. For example, Bond’s *Enabling Innovation* workshop aimed to give NGO leaders and senior staff practical advice about how to lead an organization by embracing new approaches, ideas and methods.⁹⁸

Similar to Bond’s 2017 annual conference,⁹⁹ ACFID’s 2015 national conference discussed the role of innovation in the global development and humanitarian sector.¹⁰⁰ More specifically, it “looked at how other sectors innovate and what can be learnt from them, what innovation currently looks like in the Australian development sector and internationally, and how innovation can be tailored, focused and enhanced.”¹⁰¹ Workshops at the conference also asked participants to put forward proposals on how to fast-track innovation and impact. The proposals that were put forward were used by ACFID through its Development Practice Committee to shape policy and work on innovation.¹⁰² ACFID has also established an innovation “Community of Practice” (COP), described as a “forum for ANGO staff to share, discuss and reflect on how to foster innovation within their work, their organizations and the sector more broadly” through collaborative partnerships. The COP aims to work “closely with ACFID and engage with [the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade], and the [government’s] InnovationXChange as appropriate.”¹⁰³

With respect to Partos, The Spindle, as part of its focus on “civic power and inclusion,” also engages government in its learning process, holding quarterly meetings with the Division of Civil Society Organizations’ staff “to facilitate cooperation, joint learning and innovation... [through] the Ministry’s Dialogue and Dissent program.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ InterAction (2018). *Interaction Forum 2018 Agenda*. Retrieved from: <https://www.interaction.org/forum-2018/agenda>

⁹⁸ Will Sanderson (2017, July 7). *Change your ways of working to encourage real innovation – Bond*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2017/07/change-your-ways-of-working-to-encourage-real-innovation>

⁹⁹ Bond (2017). *Highlights from the Bond Conference*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bond.org.uk/conference-2017>

¹⁰⁰ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 3.

¹⁰¹ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 3.

¹⁰² ACFID (2015). *Propositions for Innovation and Impact*. Retrieved from: <https://acfid.asn.au/content/propositions-innovation-and-impact>

¹⁰³ ACFID (2018). Terms of Reference: Innovation CoP on Collaborate. Received through personal correspondence with Jess Smith, ACFID.

¹⁰⁴ The Spindle (2016), p 15.

Many of these same organizations have also taken less traditional approaches to learning, knowledge sharing and ideation. In March 2018 Bond ran a partnership between global innovation ‘thought leaders’ Bond, Superflux, Nesta and UNDP; the project that resulted aimed to design a development organization of the future. It did so by developing Mantis Systems, a fictitious high-tech artificial-intelligence project that aimed to “imagine alternative ways of thinking about, and doing, development;” it identified the necessary traits of a future development organization as being “proactive, tentacular, autonomous, transparent, virtual, deregulated, nimble, parasitic, amorphous and unconventional”—rather than being “large, slow, and bureaucratic.”¹⁰⁵ In addition, to help “facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing,” The Spindle’s online platform serves to showcase “successes and brilliant failures.”¹⁰⁶

b) Capacity assessments

Bond and ACFID have commissioned innovation assessments of its members through Inventium. ACFID’s *ANGO Innovation Healthcheck* drew from two surveys. The first was a quantitative survey circulated among ANGO staff, which sought their views on their respective organization’s activities based on a 1–5 rating scale in response to a series of questions; this data helped map where the sector “stood in comparison to a best practice innovation framework.”¹⁰⁷ The second was a qualitative survey that “targeted key individuals within organizations who responded to ACFID’s call for case studies (10 received in total), and sought more in-depth text-based responses to questions that explored how innovation is managed within their organizations.”¹⁰⁸ Bond’s 2016 ‘Innovation Audit’ situated how well innovation was embedded and supported against ‘nine key drivers of innovation,’ based on findings from 62 member organizations (see pp. 12-14 above).

As part of its Innovative Financing¹⁰⁹ for Development (IF4D) Initiative, InterAction surveyed its members to evaluate their understanding around and practical applications of innovative financing for development. The survey identified the roles its members are occupying in innovative financing, the main barriers to entry, required resources and assets, sectors commonly being funded by IF4D activities, and the type of financial instruments being used. Its survey is cited as “the first major component of a larger project [...] with the objective to strengthen the ability of INGOs to engage more deeply in IF4D programming, and to implement improved approaches for measurement and evaluation of their programs.”¹¹⁰

Partos conducted a survey in 2016 to identify needs and assess existing innovation capacities of its members.¹¹¹ The survey informed the formulation of The Spindle’s four thematic areas of focus. Notably, the survey’s results concerning innovation capacities, despite its non-representative sample, appear to be more favourable than ACFID’s assessment, with more than half of Partos

¹⁰⁵ Superflux (2018).

¹⁰⁶ The Spindle (2016), p. 61.

¹⁰⁷ Inventium (2015a). *ANGO Innovation Healthcheck Report*, Inventium, cited in James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ Inventium (2015a). *ANGO Innovation Healthcheck Report*, Inventium, cited in James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 9.

¹⁰⁹ “There is no internationally agreed definition of ‘innovative financing for development’. In reality, the term encompasses a heterogeneous mix of innovations in fundraising and innovations in spending, i.e. innovative financing for development comprises both innovations in the way funds are raised as well as innovations in the ways funds are spent on international development.” UNDP (2012). *Discussion Paper. Innovative Financing for Development: A New Model for Development Finance?* Retrieved from: http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Development%20Cooperation%20and%20Finance/InnovativeFinancing_Web%20ver.pdf

¹¹⁰ InterAction (2017), p. 2.

¹¹¹ The Spindle (2016), p. 19.

members already having a strategy, dedicated leadership positions, specific funding towards innovation, and funding arrangements with donors that “have provisions for innovation.”¹¹² In addition, The Spindle sets out to conduct surveys every two years to assess its role in fostering innovative solutions.¹¹³

Partos stands out with regard to its collaboration-centered approach to innovation – combining ongoing capacity assessments with learning, knowledge sharing, and capacity-building. The main mission of its dedicated innovation platform, The Spindle, is “connecting stakeholders and engaging them in innovation initiatives.”¹¹⁴ Their broad engagement strategy with “primary stakeholders” (i.e. “member organizations, other development NGOs, Southern partner organizations, existing innovation labs and platforms”) is geared towards informing them about trends and opportunities; consulting with them to identify innovation needs and opportunities; bringing innovators together through “innovation labs” and organizing meetings; and advising on innovation strategies, including approaches to adopting and scaling innovations.¹¹⁵

c) Applied research and practical guidance

Bond has conducted significant research on innovation, through which it established a rigorous framework for understanding social innovation and its own typology of social innovation, which comprehensively describes the process of innovation and its enabling factors.

Building on conversations at its national conference, ACFID commissioned and produced a report in May 2016 to “develop a common understanding of the role of innovation” and ways to nurture it within the ANGO sector.¹¹⁶ The report was spearheaded by James Whitehead, Oxfam Great Britain’s Global Innovation Adviser, working in partnership with Inventium. The *Innovation for Impact* report issued recommendations to “ANGOs, ACFID, the Australian Government and other development actors” on how to foster innovation, mainly informed by Inventium’s innovation assessment, and a workshop with ACFID members including those sitting on its Development Practice Committee. Notably, the report issued recommendations surrounding the need to clearly define “innovation” in the sector as social innovation, which encompasses many sub-categories and overlapping activities, as well as to ensure that social innovation is not seen as a “silver bullet” to deep-rooted problems.¹¹⁷

ACFID’s *Innovation Guide* (October 2017), which aims to foster a common understanding and approach by its members, was created in response to the research and recommendations in *Innovation for Impact*. The *Guide*—also created with Inventium’s involvement— focuses on building the innovation capacity of its members. It does this by providing a *Pulse Check*, “a diagnostic [tool] to help tailor ... innovation strategies,”¹¹⁸ as well as outlining an “Innovation Process Methodology”: a five-step guide that combines several innovation methodologies (e.g. Lean, used by InterAction).¹¹⁹ In addition, the *Guide* details organizational dimensions of innovation, including

¹¹² The Spindle (2016), p. 19.

¹¹³ The Spindle (2016), p. 23.

¹¹⁴ The Spindle (2016), p. 13.

¹¹⁵ The Spindle (2016), p. 14.

¹¹⁶ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 3.

¹¹⁷ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁸ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), p. 3.

¹¹⁹ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), pp. 30-64.

how to enable nine organizational drivers of innovation (*i.e.* process, climate, capability, resources, strategy, roles, measurement, communication, positioning).¹²⁰

d) Innovative/Innovation partnerships

One of Bond's key programs, "Future of Funding," aims to pair funding for innovation of international development and a faster transition of power and money to the global South.

Also of note is The Spindle's aim of fostering North-South collaboration. To that end, it partners with Southern organizations to co-create solutions in "platforms, labs, and meetings," such as through CIVICUS and affiliated groups, like the Affinity Group of National Associations, the Civil Society Innovation Initiative, and the DataShift Global Knowledge Hub.¹²¹ For example, The Spindle's gender-balanced Inspiration Council, which includes Southern representatives, comprises expert "innovators" able to tap into their connections to innovation networks and provide advice to members.¹²² The council also aims to "advise about gender sensitivity and equality in the formulation of ideas, in conducting pilots and in showcasing innovations;" this is in line with The Spindle's embedded focus on gender, which mandates that all activities be subject to gender analysis, including monitoring and evaluation procedures.¹²³ Parenthetically, Partos was the only national platform to specifically set a goal of developing "innovative" monitoring and evaluation methods that help *improve* implementation strategies as one of its four key "result areas."¹²⁴

Similarly, CISU's 2014-2017 strategy committed to entering into "innovative partnerships with organizations in poor countries, focusing on mutual contributions and gains."¹²⁵

Finally, both Bond and ACFID have partnered with an Australian innovation training and consultancy firm, Inventium, for research, surveys and capacity assessments. Indeed, both organizations use, in their respective reports, Inventium's conceptualization of innovation enablers. Partos' The Spindle also makes use of external consultants (*e.g.* STBY, AndThePeople).¹²⁶

e) Promoting Innovation

One of the main ways CISU encourages flexible, relevant and innovative partnerships with diverse organizations is by including innovation in its approval criteria for grant applications to its members. While CISU's application guide does not explicitly mention innovation or innovative partnerships, its co-director, Jeef Bech, notes that it includes innovation as a criterion "by introducing the concept of catalytic effects [...] emphasizing that applicants are to demonstrate innovative synergies."¹²⁷ It also makes reference to considerations that fit into the concept generally. For example, the guide asks members to describe how their project or initiative would have *lasting* improvements for poor, marginalized and vulnerable target groups; sustainable impact tends to be a shared conception of innovation in the sector.

¹²⁰ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), pp. 8-13.

¹²¹ The Spindle (2016), p. 16.

¹²² The Spindle (2016), p. 61-63.

¹²³ The Spindle (2016), p. 18.

¹²⁴ The Spindle (2016), pp. 39-40

¹²⁵ CISU (2014). *CISU's Strategy 2014-2017: Common to global justice*, p. 3. No longer available on-line.

¹²⁶ The Spindle (2018). *The Spindle Summer Labs 2018*. Retrieved from: <http://thespindle.org/summerlabs/>

¹²⁷ Personal correspondence from Jeef Bech, co-director of CISU.

Other organizations promote innovation through various means. The Spindle facilitates a collaborative innovation challenge known as “Summer Labs,” where ten teams are given access to coaching, its network of NGO expertise, and the possibility of attracting donors and winning seed money at its annual festival.¹²⁸

Bond also uses promotional efforts designed to draw attention to innovative member organizations. For example, it has showcased case studies of successful innovative approaches, innovative programs and organizations on its website, as well as giving out Innovation awards. Both celebrating innovative failure on the one hand, and encouraging innovative competition on the other, represent important ways national platforms can facilitate a cultural shift towards a more innovation-tolerant sector.

f) Intra-Organizational Leadership

Most of the organizations examined recommended or created dedicated leadership positions for innovation, or in the case of Partos, created a dedicated innovation platform with an advisory board, *i.e.* the Innovation Council.

In order to promote innovation within its organization, InterAction has regular “convenings” with its Chief Innovation Officers to focus on devising strategies to create a workplace culture of innovation.

ACFID also maintains a Learning and Innovation Lead and Advisor; and recommends in its *Guide* to properly resource innovation by either “having an organization-wide innovation budget, or smaller innovation budgets per team. It may be having a few trained full-time innovation champions, or carving out 20% time of 10 employees’ roles, or even innovation secondments.”¹²⁹

Bond, despite recently scaling back its work on innovation, lists “provid[ing] leadership for innovation” as their third of five objectives for their 2016-2021 strategic plan.¹³⁰ Bond also describes resourcing innovation efforts as “vital to the success of an innovation programme,” and outlines several resourcing strategies.¹³¹

Likewise, CISU’s 2014-17 strategy committed to offer and develop “knowledge of trends and innovative thinking,” including from its members.”¹³²

6) Global Affairs Canada and Innovation

The overview to this discussion paper already briefly touched upon the different ways in which the current government is driving an innovation agenda at the federal level. As noted, Global Affairs Canada for its part has a Partnerships for Development Innovation Branch, a departmental

¹²⁸ The Spindle (2018).

¹²⁹ Stephanie Thoo (2017, October), p. 11.

¹³⁰ Bond (2016c). *Bond Strategy 2016-2021 – Building a network fit for the future*. Retrieved from: https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/bond_strategy_2016-21.pdf

¹³¹ Bond (2016b), p. 18.

¹³² CISU (2014).

Champion for Innovation, and a Development Innovation Unit to help drive the innovation agenda within the department and build staff capacity. In 2017, the Unit established a Multi-Stakeholder Development Innovation Community of Practice, which meets several times a year with members from the development community. In 2019, GAC will likely release an innovation policy and an innovative financing policy to help guide the Department's thinking and its work with partners. With all of this, GAC wants to become a leader in development innovation.¹³³

a) How is innovation defined?

But how, exactly, does the Department think about innovation? How does this compare to how different national platforms are thinking about it, as identified above? And how might this context impact how CCIC itself engages?

Not unlike many of the national platforms profiled in this paper, GAC's thinking about innovation is broad. Like the platforms, it focuses on the newness, effectiveness and impact of innovation (as well as improving existing approaches), where and how it can occur, on what scale, and to what end. More specifically, development innovation is defined as:

"New or improved business models, policy practices, technologies, behavioural insights or ways of delivering products and services that benefit and empower the poorest and most vulnerable living in developing countries.

Innovation can be either transformational (e.g. a brand-new solution or approach to a problem) or incremental (i.e. an adjustment to an existing solution to make it more effective and/or efficient).

The aim of development innovation is to find and adopt concrete solutions that address problems more effectively and efficiently than existing approaches or that address needs that have not yet been met."¹³⁴

Like Partos, GAC also focuses on the important elements of ensuring that the solutions generated are inclusive, locally-driven and promote and support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls:

"These innovative solutions must also create inclusive opportunities for the poorest and most vulnerable and marginalized populations. For example, women and girls should play a role in the design, testing, learning and adoption of solutions to improve their lives and those of their families and communities."

In short, GAC is focused on generating socially inclusive solutions that address unmet needs, challenges or gaps facing the poorest and most vulnerable, and that have the potential to have greater impact on development outcomes than existing practices and approaches.

Learning is also a central tenet of GAC's understanding of innovation. The new Feminist

¹³³ OECD (2018, September 14), p. 73.

¹³⁴ Global Affairs Canada (2018). *Development Innovation*. Retrieved from: http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/development_innovation-innovation_developpement.aspx?lang=eng

International Assistance Policy (FIAP) re-affirms the government's efforts to developing more innovative international development programs by listing “innovation, research, and results” as one of their main areas of focus:

“Global Affairs Canada will also seek out new ways of working and new partnerships that can increase the effectiveness of Canada’s development efforts. This will include innovation funding partnerships and greater investments in research, as well as closer collaboration with Canada’s IDRC, Canadian universities and other research institutions.”¹³⁵

In addition, the government pledged to improve monitoring and evaluation activities by developing more meaningful performance indicators, and is in the process of developing a learning strategy for the Department.

b) Central elements to how GAC is approaching innovation

How is GAC coupling this understanding of social innovation with its approach to pursuing an innovation agenda? The *Whistler Principles to Accelerate Innovation for Development Impact*, adopted at the G7 meeting chaired by Canada in June 2018, gives further shape to this and includes the following:

- Promote inclusive innovation, working to design, test, learn and adopt solutions, that engage women, adolescent girls and people with disabilities as the recipients of innovation but also as innovators;
- invest in locally-driven solutions that support local innovators;
- taking intelligent risks by experimenting responsibly, using rigorous data to generate strong evidence of impact, viability and proof of concept;
- use this evidence and disaggregated data to drive decision-making;
- learn quickly, iterate, and ensure potential innovations have impact before scaling;
- collaborate and co-create across sectors, drawing on different sector expertise and innovations;
- identify scalable solutions that have the potential to realize and sustain significant and cost-effective impact;
- integrate proven innovations into organizational programming and culture.¹³⁶

These eight principles build on the International Development Innovation Alliance’s (IDIA) 2015 “Call for Innovation”¹³⁷ but bring a greater focus on inclusion and gender equality, looking to unlock “the potential of women and adolescent girls as innovators [in a way that] can transform the development of their communities.”¹³⁸ The intent of the both the IDIA Call and Whistler

¹³⁵ Global Affairs Canada (2017b) *Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy*, p. 72. Retrieved from: <http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/iap2-eng.pdf>

¹³⁶ Group of 7 (G7) (2018). *Whistler Principles to Accelerate Innovation for Development Impact*. Retrieved from: <https://g7.gc.ca/en/g7-presidency/themes/investing-growth-works-everyone/g7-ministerial-meeting/g7-development-ministers-meeting-chairs-summary/whistler-principles-accelerate-innovation-development-impact/>

¹³⁷ International Development Innovation Alliance (2015). *A Call for Innovation in International Development*. Retrieved from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b156e3bf2e6b10bb0788609/t/5b1718b603ce649e65fff143/1528240311484/Call+for+Innovation+%28English%29.pdf>

¹³⁸ G7 (2018).

Principles is to accelerate inclusive, locally driven innovation and solutions within G7 countries' development organizations, and their respective programs, policies and partners, building on aid effectiveness principles.

c) Partnerships as key

A core medium for realizing this agenda is GAC's strategic partnerships with a range of actors. GAC and the Government of Canada financially support a number of Canadian governmental and inter-governmental development-oriented organizations, each of which places a strong emphasis on innovation, notably FinDev Canada, Grand Challenges Canada, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and the International Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA)).

The work of these organizations on innovation provides the government insights and recommendations, empirical data and case studies which contribute to a better understanding of innovation within the sector. Furthermore, the Multi-Stakeholder Community of Practice on Development Innovation hosted by Global Affairs on a regular basis, of which CCIC is a participant, provides a useful opportunity and forum for engaging with Canadian partners for collective learning and sharing with government and others on good practice in innovation.

Moreover, the Feminist International Assistance Policy highlights GAC's commitment to increasing government partnerships with Canadian institutions. Canada's *Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance – A Feminist Approach*,¹³⁹ which guides GAC's approach to working with civil society organizations, has as its fourth objective to "Foster CSO leadership in innovation." Through it GAC is looking "to CSOs to collaborate within and outside the sector to propose and adopt innovative approaches to international assistance, to deliver results more effectively and efficiently. This includes local CSOs, given their important role in generating locally driven, innovative solutions that reflect local priorities and approaches and that are, therefore, often most enduring." While GAC is already encouraging a focus on innovation in the programs it funds with civil society, the CSO Policy Advisory Group, a mix of GAC officials and CSO representatives tasked with co-developing the implementation plan for the policy, will be giving further shape to what this looks like more broadly in practice as it turns its attention to this objective in 2019.

d) Challenges to innovation

Although not unique to Global Affairs, one of the biggest challenges to any organization's desire to innovate (including other donors, CSOs and major development organizations), is the degree to which it can be flexible, fail fast and iterate quickly, learn and adapt, and take risks. This is not evident for a large bureaucracy like GAC, charged with managing thousands of projects and programs overseas, and robust mechanisms for holding these organizations to account against linear results-based management frameworks. In fact, in its recent 2018 Peer Review of Canada, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development noted that while "Canada has set itself the goal of becoming a leader in development innovation [...]his positive initiative needs to be accompanied by appropriate changes to programming processes, risk management and financial delegations that will enable Global Affairs Canada to innovate."¹⁴⁰ Further, "it will be challenging for

¹³⁹ GAC (2017a).

¹⁴⁰ OECD (2018, September 14), p. 73.

staff in Global Affairs Canada to innovate if the department is unable to simplify, streamline and speed up its programming processes.”¹⁴¹ Domestically, efforts are well underway to do this through a joint GAC-CSO Taskforce on Increasing Effectiveness, which is examining ways to simplify and streamline the processes and mechanisms that guide how GAC and partners work together to deliver international assistance programming and advance the objectives of the FIAP. Internationally, Canada is working actively with other members of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee to better understand, share and learn from other donor governments how they are approaching innovation and are measuring the performance and impact of innovative approaches.¹⁴²

That said, as a recent OECD report on innovation in the public sector has noted, while the public service has a strong base, and long demonstrated history of innovation, most of the low-hanging fruit has already been picked (awards, hurdles, and new tools). Without a more systemic approach involving significant steps and continuous efforts, “the innovation system will not be able to consistently and reliably contribute to the delivery of the best outcomes”.¹⁴³

7) Final thoughts

This paper draws on the experience of five national platforms in thinking and working around innovation in the global development and humanitarian sector. It will hopefully surface further reflection and discussion among and between CCIC members and the broader sector about what an innovation agenda might look like for the sector in Canada, and for CCIC more specifically.

Ultimately, national platforms should exercise caution before jumping on the innovation bandwagon: carefully-worded definitions and intentionally developed plans formulated by CSOs offer no assurance that impactful and sustainable innovation will occur, especially if the rationale for doing so is purely exogenous. Looking forward, CCIC’s approach cannot be about innovation for the sake of innovation, but about making a very intentional decision as an organization and national coalition to build on existing approaches and solutions, and explore new options where appropriate, to better address the needs of affected communities and have greater impact. Furthermore, so as not to be fully distracted by what may simply be the latest donor-driven agenda, the Council should consider how to situate innovation within longer-standing efforts to enhance civil society development effectiveness, practice and accountability, as defined in the Istanbul Principles.

Innovation is an inherently risky endeavor. We must not forget that central fact. Yet, as ACFID notes, the biggest risk for CSOs may be to ignore innovation.¹⁴⁴ CCIC is now committed to “Inspire and support the growth of a more relevant, responsive and effective global development and humanitarian assistance sector that, through a broad range of innovations, can create sustainable impact and change in collaboration with our partners.”¹⁴⁵ If CCIC is to be successful in this effort,

¹⁴¹ OECD (2018, September 14), p. 73.

¹⁴² OECD (2018, September 14), p. 73.

¹⁴³ OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI) (2018, November 24). *New Report - The Innovation System of the Public Service of Canada*. Retrieved from: <https://oecd-opsi.org/new-report-the-innovation-system-of-the-public-service-of-canada/>

¹⁴⁴ James Whitehead et al. (2016, May), p. 16.

¹⁴⁵ CCIC (2018).

and to continue to challenge the sector to enhance CSO development effectiveness, it must recognize that “daring to take risk and fail” is among the core competencies that Canadian CSOs will need to develop to achieve “a future we want.”¹⁴⁶

But we cannot do this alone. To be innovative will also require an enabling environment in which CSOs can pursue inherently risky activities that they themselves – as independent development actors – identify as key to increasing their development and humanitarian impact. National platforms can play an important role in identifying and advancing these priorities within the sector. National platforms, working on behalf of and alongside individual CSOs, will also need to work with government to open and maintain the space and resources necessary to allow CSOs to innovate freely and effectively and achieve their full potential.

If the intentional and collaborative pursuit of the innovation agenda can be an opportunity to establish new partnerships, unleash new potential among Canadian CSOs, and demonstrate increased impact, that may be the most significant innovation of all.

¹⁴⁶ Partos (2018). *Adapt, Counteract or Transform: The Future of Dutch Development Cooperation*, p. 42. Retrieved from: https://www.partos.nl/fileadmin/files/Documents/180411_Exploring_the_future_of_Dutch_development_cooperation.pdf

