

# Civic Driven Change: synthesising implications for policy and practice

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It speaks for itself that despite the intensive collaboration with stakeholders this final paper is solely the responsibility of the writers. Feedback is welcome and can be provided to any of the organisers of this DPRN process.

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## I. Introduction

Civic driven change (CDC) is an emerging analytical and normative framework about citizen action and social change. It originated from a joint initiative by civic actors and academics in the Dutch development sector who were looking for a better theory of change based on citizen action. In 2008, a process labelled the 'Think Tank' or 'CDC Initiative' was started by several practitioners from Dutch development cooperation agencies and academics from the Global North and South. Together they further explored the concept of CDC through discussions and by writing a series of essays. Their initiative was hosted by the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) and facilitated by Context, international cooperation. This process culminated in publication of the book *Civic Driven Change – Citizen's imagination in action*.<sup>1</sup>

The publication of the book, followed by dissemination and discussion events in various countries, took place at a time of waning public support for development cooperation and increasing doubts about the future of the Dutch cofinancing system. Since then, the publication of the landmark report, *Less Pretension, More Ambition* by the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) and the coming to office of a new government have added to the turbulence, re-emphasising the need to revisit some of the fundamental assumptions underlying development cooperation.

From the outset, the development of CDC has been a transdisciplinary endeavour. This made it a natural fit with the Development Policy Review Network. DPRN was initiated in the Netherlands in 2003 to stimulate informed debate and cooperation and synergy between policymakers, practitioners, scientists and business people.<sup>2</sup> In 2010, a network of Dutch and Belgian organisations set out to further explore a number of key outstanding CDC issues, within the DPRN framework.<sup>3</sup> The three main issues explored in the DPRN process were the relation between CDC and local politics, markets, and development policy. During 2010, the network organised two events in the Netherlands and Belgium, involving representatives from more than 50 organisations active within and outside the development sector.<sup>4</sup> In addition, existing CDC resources were updated and brought together by gathering documents and website references.<sup>5</sup>

The objective of this synthesis paper is to bring together the main findings, questions and recommendations arising from the DPRN process. It is not our aim to present a final analysis on CDC but to take stock and offer a building block for follow-up research. In this paper we

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<sup>1</sup> For details see: <http://www.iss.nl/Portals/Civic-Driven-Change-Initiative/>

<sup>2</sup> See [www.DPRN.nl](http://www.DPRN.nl) and [www.global-connections.nl](http://www.global-connections.nl) for more information.

<sup>3</sup> The organisations involved in the organisation of the DPRN process 'Civic Driven Change: implications for policy and practice' were Hivos, the Institute of Social Studies, Context, international cooperation, Cordaid, Social Evaluator, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (all in the Netherlands) and Broederlijk Delen (Belgium).

<sup>4</sup> On 29 March 2010 a workshop on 'CDC and local politics' was hosted by the ISS in the Hague with 40 participants. On 1 December 2010 a seminar on 'CDC and development policy' was hosted by Broederlijk Delen in Brussels, in which almost 100 development professionals participated.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.civicdrivenchange.org/dprn-process](http://www.civicdrivenchange.org/dprn-process).

make reference to the existing body of literature on CDC and related studies on citizen action. We largely draw on the events that we have organised throughout 2010 but we have also taken the liberty to include our personal and professional experience and current CDC thinking in our respective organisations.

In section two we revisit the emergence of CDC. Section three analyses a number of CDC fundamentals and dilemmas. Section four offers two perspectives for action through a CDC lens. Section five offers implications for the different partners and audiences in this process, and concludes by looking forward.

## II. Civic Driven Change (CDC) – a stone in the pond of the development sector

‘Can citizen action save the world?’, asks Kumi Naidoo, a seasoned NGO activist in his latest book ‘Boiling Point’.<sup>6</sup> The title refers to the unsustainable exploitation of the planet as well as to rising social tensions, caused by socioeconomic inequality and growing intolerance.

The question is, however, not a real question. In actual fact, it is an answer. Naidoo starts from the conviction that citizens hold the key to preventing a global meltdown, where states and markets are obviously failing. He then works back to paint a vision on how this is to happen. In the process he disregards at least two important problematic issues. First, he uses civil society, civil society organisations, NGOs and citizens interchangeably, emphasising the prominence of (I)NGOs as key agents of change, without problematising the relationship between citizens, citizenship, NGOs and other inhabitants of the associational ecosystem called ‘civil society’. More importantly perhaps, he puts civil society at the centre of social change, a heavy burden that does not correspond with how change processes tend to happen.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently we are left with a legitimate and passionate plea, that surely appeals to those who believe in the power of civic action. However, it is not likely that passionate pleas are going to serve as a substantive counterweight to the dominant development paradigms presenting states and markets as the appropriate drivers of change. This dominance is confirmed by the landmark report of the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) on Dutch development cooperation *Less Pretension, More Ambition*, in which thinking about the potential of citizen action is remarkably absent.<sup>8</sup> Passionate pleas no longer suffice. What is needed is a solid theory of change on citizen action.

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<sup>6</sup> Kumi Naidoo headed Civicus and is a former Executive Director of Greenpeace.

<sup>7</sup> For recent contributions on this topic see e.g. Gaventa and McGee (2010) and Knorringa (2010).

<sup>8</sup> 2010. See for example in Chapter 4, where citizen action is omitted as a driver for development, while markets and states are discussed extensively.

That need was also felt by a number of Dutch private aid agencies that put their weight behind the development of the civic driven change framework in 2007 and 2008. As Konijn and Van den Ham state:<sup>9</sup>

‘Engagement was borne out of our shared concern about the current debate within development circles about the [...] added value of private aid agencies in the fight against poverty [...] It was felt that these debates are dominated too much by state and market perspectives on development. In these perspectives civil society is seen as merely instrumental to government policy or in addressing market failures.’

Looking back in early 2011, it seems that these agencies got both much more and much less than they had aimed for.

On the one hand, civic driven change turned out to be a stone in the pond of a traditionally inward-looking sector. It questions some of the key (often hidden) assumptions underlying the business of aided change. For example, CDC introduces the notion that civic action is a cross-sector phenomenon that is not confined to civil society *as we know it*. Another example is the impetus to the debate on the boundaries between civic and non-civic behaviour. The framework also raises questions about big issues such as the future of party politics and the management of global public goods. And because CDC offers an opportunity to contemplate social change ‘beyond aid’, it seems to also have led to new connections and new sources of knowledge.

The WRR is now using the CDC framework as input for a new research project on citizenship in the Netherlands and has tapped into CDC-type case studies of the Hivos Knowledge programme. In addition, some of the CDC discussions in the context of this DPRN process have strengthened contacts between the development sector and researchers that are working on similar citizen-focused studies in other societal realms, such as various research groups at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam.<sup>10</sup> Most importantly perhaps, civic driven change is taking on a life of its own. In the context of this DPRN process, it was found that several agencies are actively attempting to apply CDC to their programming.<sup>11</sup> The CDC network of activists and academics is expanding and a programme for follow-up research is in the making.

On the other hand, those that supported the CDC initiative also got less than what they might have hoped for. Firstly, throughout the process some of the initiators expected that civic driven change would confirm the relevance of the Dutch cofinancing agencies, whereas CDC strongly nuances the importance of aided change. Others, secondly, were looking for new intervention ‘recipes’, whereas civic driven change works on the basis of complexity theory and attempts to move beyond the notion of projectable change. It offers a number of

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<sup>9</sup> 2008, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> See the ‘Citizen Briefings’ on [www.eur.nl/fsw/burgerschap](http://www.eur.nl/fsw/burgerschap).

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.centreforcivicdrivenchange.org/dprn-process/policy-documents-of-partners/> for an overview of policy documents and CDC programme plans collected in the course of the DPRN trajectory.

attractive propositions about citizen-led change processes, but it also challenges the short-term institutional interests of aid agencies such as budgetary growth, manageable programmes and a more active role beyond funding in the South.

Third, as the CDC concept was explored by increasing numbers of actors, it was hoped that some of the emerging findings would influence the design of the MFS II system.<sup>12</sup> This clearly did not happen. The conduciveness of the MFS system to CDC was discussed during the DPRN process, specifically during the workshop on CDC and development policy.<sup>13</sup> The prime objective of the MFS system is to support social change initiatives and poverty alleviation in the South. However, the strong focus on short-term results and projectable change is biased towards intermediate national NGOs and aid-driven interventions, while civic initiatives outside the aid chain seem less eligible.<sup>14</sup> This is not so much a specific observation about the policies of the Dutch foreign ministry, but rather a reflection on the broader parameters of the aid system, in which Northern development NGOs struggle to live up to the responsibility of securing sufficient space for civic initiatives in the South. Critical commentators have regularly pointed out that Northern development NGOs, especially those that rely heavily on government funding, form part of the system and rarely take a strong stance to claim space for alternative approaches. More efforts could also be expected from them to take their own initiatives in the spirit of CDC, such as supporting more informally organised forms of civic action but also forging strategic alliances with likeminded actors within government.<sup>15</sup>

In 2007 and 2008, the emerging CDC narrative played a prominent role in national and international discussions around the future of aid, the roles and tasks of the development sector and the position of Dutch development NGOs and their Southern (often intermediary) counterparts. In the aftermath of the MFS II application process, the installation of a new Dutch government and the subsequent cost-saving measures, the debate is flaring up again.<sup>16</sup> We are of the opinion that the current context of critical public opinion and decreasing support for solidarity more than ever confirms the need, already felt in 2008, for a stronger theory of change underpinning citizen-led change. We believe that a CDC lens offers insights that contribute to that debate. The next section will revisit some of the fundamentals of civic driven change, focusing on those elements that featured most prominently during the DPRN process.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> MFS: Medefinancieringsstelsel / Cofinancing System. MFS is the grant system through which (alliances of) NGOs, companies and research institutes apply for government funds in the Netherlands. MFS II funds have been allocated for 2011–2015.

<sup>13</sup> See 'DPRN workshop report on CDC and Development policy', Brussels, 1 December 2010.

<sup>14</sup> For example, it is not possible for organisations registered as a company to apply for MFS II funds.

<sup>15</sup> The fact that representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs participated in this DPRN process confirms the potential for such cooperative action in favour of CDC.

<sup>16</sup> See for example [www.viceversa.nl](http://www.viceversa.nl) and [www.thebrokeronline.eu](http://www.thebrokeronline.eu).

<sup>17</sup> See also Fowler and Biekart (2009), *Civic Driven Change – A concise guide to the basics*. An updated guide is forthcoming and will be informed by the results and discussions of the DPRN process.

### III. CDC fundamentals: dilemmas and challenges

From the DPRN process, it became clear that a number of issues keep surfacing as challenges and dilemmas within the civic driven change debate. Some of these issues are related to the innate complex nature of social change, the location of CDC within, across and beyond traditional sectors, the normative dimension of the concept and the implications of CDC for the appropriate role of ‘outsiders’ or supporters of change processes.

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

CDC radically departs from some of the basic assumptions of change underpinning much of the work in the development sector. These assumptions, representing a modernist approach to development, are possibly best summarised by Allan Kaplan: development and change is something which is created and engineered, rather than existing in itself. Interventions are designed to bring change to those amongst whom it is lacking, by others who presumably are more developed. Advocates of this view see the development practitioner as someone who brings development interventions which are designed and financed by third parties, not by the communities and clients who are the subjects of the intervention. Such development practitioners work primarily out of the specifications of the world from which they have been sent, rather than out of an accurate and sensitive reading of the particular situation with which they are actually faced. In addition, it is presumed that development is linear and predictable: there is a direct line between cause and effect, between input and output. This gives rise to the concept of the ‘development project’ which is generally short term, time bound, limited in terms of resources and both limited and finite (predictable) in terms of output. Finally, those who are underdeveloped lack certain resources; development entails the effort to transfer those resources from those who have them to those who do not.<sup>18</sup>

CDC adds weight to the antithesis of this orthodoxy, represented by people-centred approaches,<sup>19</sup> as well as more recent debates around complexity thinking in the development sector.<sup>20</sup> It acknowledges the complex nature of social change, which happens everywhere, all the time, when people take up own initiatives to change something (small and incremental) in their own surroundings. Such actions are the result of events, traditions, beliefs and habitual mechanisms at the very local level, combined with influences and pressures from the broader context, upon which single or united agents act. Societal change is an un-linear, fuzzy process, where cause-effect relations are hard to identify. The mechanisms at the local level, the ‘politics of small things’, are often rooted in intricacies of relations both new and old, perceptions of how things are done, available resources and

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<sup>18</sup> This paragraph paraphrases two pages from Crossroads: A Development Reading, From the CDRA’s Annual Report 1997/1998.

<sup>19</sup> Long represented by Paolo Freire, Bernard Lievegoed, Gerrit Huizer and Robert Chambers, and more recently the Buenviver movement in Latin America.

<sup>20</sup> For complexity debate, see for example Fowler (2008).

other intangible and invisible elements that are difficult for an outsider to understand or analyse, let alone predict.<sup>21</sup>

At the other end, contextual influences can be processes both at regional, national and global level, as well as trends and changes happening in specific themes or domains, a concept to which we will return later. In fact, social change initiatives can be seen as efforts to tackle ‘wicked problems’. Wicked problems have multiple, interdependent causes and no ‘best’ solution. In trying to address one aspect of a wicked problem other problems may be revealed or created.<sup>22</sup> Alan Fowler introduces the concept of *super* wicked problems which have a number of additional complications: they are time constrained in terms of solutions, it is not clear who has overall responsibility for fixing them, and those who should help fix them are part of the problem in the first place.<sup>23</sup>

The points above sound obvious, even trivial perhaps, and yet they stand in stark contrast with the logic of the aid chain and its policies and procedures in which development outcomes are simplified, predicted, strictly planned, quantified and assessed by outsiders. The current focus on results, data or evidence that ‘prove’ that the applied intervention ‘works’, overlooks the role of personal relationships, social networks, passion and power, family and community dynamics. The point in the context of the CDC framework is that the acceptance of the complex, endogenous and political nature of change enables a new range of questions to come to the fore. How does change happen? When is change actually civic? A particular challenge might be to find alternative ways to make CDC processes visible. Understanding the forces playing a role in societal change requires probing well into the underlying complexities.<sup>24</sup> Also, if change happens all the time, primarily unaided, then where does civic agency reside, and can it be aided at all? These issues will be elaborated in the next sections.

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

Mainstream development thinking in most aid agencies equates ‘civic’ actors and their actions with NGO interventions, located in civil society (or the third sector – the other two sectors being state and market). As Knorringa observes, ‘even in recent debates we often continue to employ simplistic images, with the state as the rule-maker, civil society as the do-gooder and watchdog, and private actors as the enemy or the hero of development, depending on one’s ideological stand’.<sup>25</sup> The acceptance of more complex models of social change renders this view highly simplistic. CDC steps away from the traditional dichotomy between rights holders and duty bearers,<sup>26</sup> to underline that citizens of all walks of life may

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<sup>21</sup> By the ‘politics of small things’, Goldfarb (2006) means that routine micro-politics and mundane practices led by ground-level social actors act as a fundamental political force.

<sup>22</sup> See Rittel & Webber, Ritchey, and Conklin.

<sup>23</sup> Private communication, January 2011. An example of a super wicked problem would be climate change.

<sup>24</sup> See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7oz366X0-8>: Dave Snowden of Cognitive Edge explains how to strategise based on a model of complexity, the Cynefin framework.

<sup>25</sup> Knorringa, 2010, p.8.

<sup>26</sup> As presented in the Rights Based Approach (RBA).

initiate, drive and achieve social change. Thus, civic agency is not confined to one sector but 'civic agency and citizenship are simultaneously collective and individual attributes of people who make up the polity'.<sup>27</sup> During the DPRN process this often proved difficult to digest as most aid agencies firmly locate themselves and their key Southern allies in the 'third' sector, positioning much of their programming and policies in the traditional sector model and identifying related traditional change initiatives and actors as their partners.

By contrast, CDC recognises that individuals, organised formally, informally, or not at all, have the agency to change their surroundings. This reiterates a view that every daily activity is a choice that has an impact on society, both near and far, thereby seeing for example consumerism or raising children almost as political acts. A related alternative looking glass that was introduced during the seminar on CDC and policy, is thinking in terms of domains. This approach recognises that wicked societal problem areas such as anti-corruption, emancipation of women or reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS are tackled by individual citizens, organised civic initiatives and a variety of actors across the traditional sectors, allied simply by their joint objective.<sup>28</sup> This can be illustrated with a recent example from the practice of Hivos.

Support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights is one of Hivos' key policy priorities. In the traditional 'sector view', Hivos would link up with LGBT movements and activist groups in the South and support them in advocating for LGBT issues, primarily at local and national level. It would complement this by supporting international LGBT advocacy groups and networks. Because of aid chain dynamics most of these partners would be formally registered NGOs. When a domain approach is applied to LGBT issues, other linkages and opportunities emerge. One example is that fairly recently Hivos learned about the Company Pride Platform, a global network of LGBT communities within large multinationals, including Shell, Cisco, ABN AMRO and IBM, working towards better working environments for LGBTs. This is a clear example of civic action in corporate environments.<sup>29</sup> The global footprint of these corporations and consequently this network offers opportunities for global and local advocacy as well as new alliances between NGOs and corporate groups in Southern countries. It also offers unconventional entry points into power structures to complement or even replace the current sector informed strategy of supporting local LGBT groups.

A domain approach in applying a CDC lens then also begins to explore the future of international civic cooperation in a post-aid era. Recent analyses are already pointing out that ODA is rapidly becoming less relevant as a percentage of international resource flows.<sup>30</sup> Contrary to traditional development thinking, there are more ways to connect the global North and global South than the aid chain. The next section reflects on what that means for the concept of aided change.

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<sup>27</sup> Fowler, A. (2011), p.8.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> See <http://www.companyprideplatform.org>.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. Glenzer (2010).

### 3. Debating the ‘civicness’ of CDC

The common approach among aid actors automatically assumes that civil society performs a positive role in development and equates civil society with ‘civicness’, seeing it as the prime locus of citizenship and civic agency. Civic driven change problematises this assumption, first by pointing out that all over the world, civil society can also have un-civic, exclusionary, undemocratic and often violent features. Hence ‘civic’ is not presented as a given but rather raised as a normative standard and qualification because, secondly, CDC recognises that change is never a neutral process. The ‘civic’ contained in the concept of CDC refers to change processes that embrace a ‘concern for the whole’ and that allow for diversity both stemming from the idea of the global commons.<sup>31</sup> One of the often debated dilemmas in this discourse remains: who defines what is civic and what is un-civic action, on a case-to-case basis? The boundaries between benign and malevolent are culturally and morally confined. What can be perceived as civic by one person or group, can be perceived as un-civic for others, e.g., homosexuality in the Netherlands or in Uganda. In this regard, Evelina Dagnino makes a strong call to ‘interrogate the ontological essence of civicness in relation to contending political projects, their actors and the material base from which they emerge and subsist’.<sup>32</sup> The qualification of ‘civic’ in CDC (concern for the whole and respect for diversity) is perceived by some as a weakness of the CDC lens. However, we prefer to see this very element as a strength as it reveals tensions and dilemmas about cultural, ethnic or religious differences and serves as a starting point for exploring normative biases.

This also brings us to the question of why people want change. Whereas the CDC discourse easily speaks of processes displaying a ‘concern for the whole’, the discussions at the DPRN events showed from participants’ experiences that change processes usually start with some degree of self-interest. For example, during the ‘CDC and local politics’ workshop, several speakers underlined that change processes are often aimed to improve the situation of a specific group of people rather than whole communities or the entire society, or are even driven by ‘not in my backyard’ (NIMBY) convictions. For some people it is best to have no change at all.<sup>33</sup> This does not need to be a problem or a reason to avoid supporting change processes. Rather, it again points to the need to devote attention to probing into situations and relations in order to understand what drives the change, and then make appropriate choices. Seeing the politics in every situation, and doing proper power mapping will help in probing, making choices and, again, *communicating* about these choices to a constituency.<sup>34</sup>

A related debate took place at the same workshop around civic action and economic position: an assumption often held by development organisations in cooperation with states, as Joop de Wit concluded, is that poor and marginalised people need to organise themselves in CBOs (community-based organisations) in order to acquire the power of numbers and claim their rights vis-à-vis the local authorities. However, De Wit found in his research in

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<sup>31</sup> See Fowler and Biekart (2010) p.174.

<sup>32</sup> Fowler and Biekart (2008) p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> Report ‘CDC and local politics’ 29 March 2010.

<sup>34</sup> See [www.powercube.net](http://www.powercube.net) for a variety of power mapping approaches and tools.

several Indian slums, that slum-dwellers rather rely on relations of vertical patronage as a survival strategy, to be employed in times of need.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, upper class Dutch citizens employ personal relations to drive changes sparked by NIMBY needs.

The question here is, when we talk about civic driven change, are we referring to civic intentions, civic means or civic outcomes? The Kwanda case, which featured in the Brussels workshop, raised such controversies. It was questioned if a competition between communities for a TV show is a form of civic action. The civic intentions of change defined and driven by people in their own communities were clear, as well as the fact that Kwanda is having a significant impact on South African society. At the same time, the fact that a reality TV show was used made some feel uneasy about the ethics of the initiative, and opinions differed on whether the change agents were portrayed as victims helped by outsiders, or as heroes sparked by their own action.

Commentators in earlier CDC debates have also pointed at the tension between pre-defining a set of preferred CDC values and the CDC idea of supporting bottom-up, emergent change. In this paper we take the position that these critical comments actually all confirm the argument that a CDC lens forces one to engage in a debate on values and the contextual rooting of civic agency, instead of perpetuating the myth of value neutrality.

A dilemma remains especially for the role of outsiders, whether they should try their best to understand the intricacies, underlying power relations, values etc, or rather leave that to the 'experts', i.e. the local people who understand their own context based simply on gut feeling, upbringing and tackling daily challenges.

#### **4. Aided versus non-aided change**

If CDC revolves around endogenous energies driving change, then one of the main dilemmas remains: can any actor (institution, organisation) support a civic driven change process without 'killing' those original energies? In other words, can civic driven change be aided? Given its strong ties to the aid chain this is a logical question around which a lot of discussion has emerged, both before and during the DPRN trajectory. One set of views equates civic driven change with community-based development, implying that CDC would be a pure grassroots phenomenon with the potential to help development actors to look beyond NGOs. An even more narrow interpretation, which emerged during the Brussels workshop, equates CDC with citizen participation in merely non-aided governance processes. Another set of views suggest that CDC-type initiatives are better left alone, as aid would only damage them. In our opinion, all these views are incorrect. Civic driven change includes grassroots level dynamics but also links processes of local change with the global. It does so by envisaging the connection between local manifestations of civic agency and wicked problems to achieve larger transformation.<sup>36</sup> The domain approach from section 2

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<sup>35</sup> De Wit (2008).

<sup>36</sup> Fowler and Biekart (2009) p.17.

also points at the possibilities of civic action being undertaken at various levels with various actors to address important issues, without being confined to the aid chain as such.

With regard to the possibility of aiding change, a CDC lens differs from traditional development frameworks in that it neither takes aided change as a starting point for analysing societal change processes, nor does it start from the position of the usual suspects in the aid chain. However, CDC does not imply that change processes cannot be aided. Rather the application of a CDC lens both reduces and enhances the scope for aid as a vehicle for social change. CDC nuances the scope for aid in its traditional definition of a resource transfer (money, capacity) between North and South. It does so primarily by highlighting the endogenous nature and complexity of change processes and by stating that within that complexity, aid at most plays a minor role. This is congruent with a recent study of IDS which suggest that aid at best can play a facilitating role.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, CDC also enlarges the scope for aid actors to make a positive contribution to change processes in roles they may not currently perform. The aforementioned shift in thinking from sectors to domains releases private aid agencies from the confines of traditional sector boundaries. In addition, a post-aid vision of international civic cooperation encourages aid agencies to think about competencies and constituencies. A discussion about civicness entices a reflection on the value base of aid agencies. Lastly, a domain analysis also enables the exploration of intervention opportunities from the global to the local. One clear example of this is the positioning of private aid agencies in policies and debates in their own society with far-reaching effects abroad. Another is the idea of NGOs as network brokers, resurfacing in current debates and already featuring in, for example, Fowler (2002).

## IV. Perspectives

Drawing from our experiences throughout this DPRN process, we present two perspectives that we have seen emerging from applying a CDC lens. Section one engages with ‘the self’. Section two discusses the enabling environment. We believe that first looking at these two layers of influence, rather than at the different actors confined to their traditional sectoral boundaries, helps identify implications for policy in practice, which are discussed in the conclusion.

### 1. The self

In section 3.2 we referred to the framing of contemporary development challenges as wicked problems. Super wicked problems add the dimension of the solver being the cause of the problems. This draws us to the perspective of the self. ‘CDC understands society as a political project in which everyone is a player.’<sup>38</sup> CDC is located everywhere, thus also in the

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<sup>37</sup> Gaventa and Barrett (2010) present a meta-analysis of 100 cases of citizen participation by the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability, p.11.

<sup>38</sup> Fowler and Biekart (2008).

global North, within any citizen, be it a parent, business person, student, volunteer, policymaker, entrepreneur etc. On a more fundamental level, CDC is associated with values such as wellbeing of the whole and respect to difference. This connects with the current debate on a broader, less formalistic interpretation of rights holders and duty bearers, in the sense that citizens not only have rights but also responsibilities, and not just vis-à-vis the state, but also in all other spheres of their daily lives. In this sense, CDC could be considered a sociological phenomenon, a sort of human behaviour.

In the case of e.g. Dutch and Belgian citizens, this could encompass a global citizenship outlook, which can be translated into civic actions such as ethical consumerism (consume less, buy fair trade, biological, seasonal and local produce), ethical producer-ism (corporate social responsibility and social business approaches), active citizenship (vote, be involved and engaged), ethical employee-ism (relate, take up responsibility). This notion underlines that CDC thinking is not just a mere replacement of the term 'community development' but focuses much more on the concept of the civic agency of any human being.

CDC thereby draws attention to the individual, to the spark ignited within an extraordinary person wanting change, coming into action for change, and driving change. Related 'tags' in our modern age are youth leaders, social entrepreneurs, digital activists and positive deviants. There is energy in such a perspective, as it focuses on seeking out change and active citizenship, whilst the mainstream debates on social change and the average media focus on negative features like oppression, marginalisation, disasters, poverty and lawlessness. We want to make a plea however, not to focus only on civic heroes but also on the ordinary, less visible, expressions of (collective) citizen action.

This view challenges the sceptical idea that citizens cannot be expected to take up initiatives in favour of change. During the workshop on local politics, the simple truth was reiterated that people tend to be naturally averse to change, and prefer what they know, even if it is less than perfect, rather than aspire to a possibly better but unknown future. Being actively 'pro-something' appears to be less evident than to be against something and mobilise civic action around that theme. However, we have seen enough examples of the opposite; of brave citizens taking small and large steps to change their own surroundings. Besides encouraging each of us to take a critical look at our own actions in our communities, and in our professional activities and private relationships, this optimistic perspective also implies that it is possible to reinforce an enabling environment for civic agency.

## **2. The environment**

In the section on aided and non-aided change, we have already highlighted that there is scope for directly aiding CDC. A second perspective for action is therefore contributing to a breeding ground that is conducive for CDC: an enabling environment. Some urge to leave CDC types of change processes alone, for fear of 'killing' them. In this view, if actors interfere in these processes, even with the best intentions, the process is no longer civic driven, and will not bring about change. Some go even further by arguing that the ultimate implication of CDC thinking is that the development sector will become obsolete. Aid can play at most a marginal role in what are uniquely endogenous processes which cannot be instigated by external actors.

However, although CDC thinking indeed goes well beyond the aid system, it does not seem to be an alternative for it, nor does it exclude the relevance of the aid sector. At the same time, CDC thinking pushes us to look at the role of development actors in a whole new way. Northern actors (as far as the North–South dichotomy is valid) might not be able to bring about change in the ‘South’. They can however attempt to contribute to the context in which CDC can more easily flourish (e.g. through the promotion of civiness in education in both the North and the South).

During the year it was discussed how CDC comes about, and which factors could hamper or catalyse progress. In this debate, there were no clear-cut answers, and opinions on the most appropriate approach differed. However, some possible actions were mentioned in the DPRN process. We list some of the options mentioned in the course of the process, as investments in specific fields that could be beneficial to CDC initiatives and enlarging civic agency:

- Strengthening citizenship and civic agency; the capacity to imagine and shape a different future. One avenue for action here is civic education either as a stand-alone intervention or by supporting alternative basic education systems.
- Acknowledgement of values and politics as being inherent to change processes, and addressing these through proper stakeholder and power mapping, as well as clear communication on each actor’s own values and theory of change.
- Strengthening the rule of law.
- Promoting basic rights such as a free press, the right to information, freedom to organise.
- 360° accountability (upward and downward, process and results) with space for emergent outcomes and processes, rather than focusing only on predicted and quantified results.

What these ideas have in common is the notion that strengthening civic agency needs to happen all round, across domains. This is in line with one of the major conclusions of the already mentioned study by IDS. It finds that, besides governance and democracy engagements that focus primarily on institutional arrangements, intermediate outcomes such as awareness of rights, knowledge, a disposition towards action, organising skills and the thickness of civic networks may be equally important in achieving developmental and democratic outcomes.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Gaventa and Barrett (2010).

## V. Implications and conclusion

In this last section, we will draw the main findings of this DPRN process together. This process builds on a number of questions and issues that arose from the emergence of the CDC framework. Subsequently, the findings might feed into its further development. To date, a strong pillar of the development of this framework has been the collaboration between academics, practitioners, policymakers and social entrepreneurs, which fitted well with the DPRN philosophy. We will address possible implications for each of these actors, as well as a number of gaps that the DPRN process identified, and offer some concluding remarks.

### 1. Implications for practitioners

Practitioners, in this process represented mainly by the staff of development NGOs, wonder how they should 'deal' with CDC. The concept easily strikes a chord, but agencies struggle with putting it into practice. As a main conclusion we would like to re-emphasise here that CDC was never meant to offer a toolbox for development intervention, but that does not render the concept less valuable. On the contrary, in a sector dominated by short-term thinking, an eternal 'to-do-mode', and a constant search for new quick and best 'recipes', CDC offers the possibility of a refreshing step back, the potential for questioning underlying assumptions, an opportunity for inspiration and a source of critical reflection. We are of the opinion that these are precisely the ingredients that are most lacking in a sector that is criticised for being inward-looking, out of touch, and ineffective. What is more, delving into these questions, inspirations and reflections in turn leads to different strategy and programming choices, as some of the implementing partners in this process have shown.

The CDC framework thus asks pertinent questions that practitioners could use to scrutinise current practices, rather than offering a one-size-fits-all new approach. Some of these questions are:

- Does our policy leave space for endogenous change initiatives, or are we imposing our priorities and approaches on our partners?
- Do we also allow our partners to be involved in defining our strategies and policies? How?
- Are we transparent and outspoken about our own values?
- Do we promote capacities such as imagination and civic agency within our programmes?
- Do we pay attention to power relations and interests by supporting people in mapping these?
- Do our procedures and systems (most notably for result assessment and learning) leave room for complexity and emergent outcomes or are they based on linear models of change?

- Do we take our own role as civic actors in our own country and sector seriously, by promoting our values within our societies, by acting as a watchdog and advocating for policy space for the types of changes we aim to support?
- Do we support the efforts of our own staff and networks to be conscious global citizens?
- Do we ourselves take risks, for example by reserving funds to support emerging CDC processes using a hands-off approach, with no strings attached?

At a more fundamental level, CDC offers the beginnings of a stronger theory of change underneath civic action which potentially strengthens the hand of civic aid agencies in advocating for the changes they aspire to support, and in seeking linkages and collaboration with other actors.

## 2. Implications for researchers

CDC is a work in progress. Currently, ISS and others are preparing a plan for follow-up research. At this stage the transdisciplinary character of the process to date is expected to continue. Some of the knowledge gaps identified in the DPRN process are:

- A better understanding of societal patterns of change. By working more with complexity theory, we can learn more about the nature of wicked and super wicked problems and possible strategies for addressing them more effectively. This corresponds with some of the main suggestions for further research of the Participation, Power and Social Change team of IDS (U.K.).<sup>40</sup> This would include further research into ‘domain dynamics’, complementing an already substantive body of knowledge of civil society dynamics.
- A better understanding of ‘intervention’, or the appropriate supporting roles for outsiders in change processes. How can external actors facilitate societal change without curtailing existing civic energies?
- Further development of a normative framework of civic/un-civic norms, values and morals, including a discussion on drivers of (collective) citizen action.
- Further deepening of the theme of civic driven change and markets, as included in the original DPRN proposal.<sup>41</sup> (See 4. Implications for entrepreneurs)

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<sup>40</sup> Gaventa and Barret (2010).

<sup>41</sup> Due to circumstances, we were not able to include a session on CDC and markets in the DPRN process, but the key preparatory readings have been posted in the website.

### 3. Implications for policymakers

For policymakers in development too, CDC offers an alternative lens for looking at societal dynamics, and therefore potentially also new policy options. These could range from a new policy with regard to promoting civic agency through better education, to changing methods of civil society assessment.<sup>42</sup> One implication from the workshop on local politics is the importance of accepting the uniqueness of each country context and to adopt more realistic expectations on the nature and rhythms of development processes. Specifically for the Dutch development sector, we are of the opinion that the CDC framework still offers a source of inspiration for dialogue between the cofinancing agencies and the ministry on future strategies for collaboration. Putting the common ground of citizens and civic agency at the centre of such a discussion might steer the debate away from short-term institutional interests. In addition, the application of a domain-lens as discussed in section 3.2 offers a starting point to reflect on the position of the development sector, and in particular the role of non-state actors, in future foreign policy.<sup>43</sup> Lastly, we would like to point to the connection between civic values in the context of 'global commons' and current policy debates on the management of global public goods, closely linked to the issue of climate change.

### 4. Implications for entrepreneurs

CDC and markets was identified at the start of this DPRN process as one of the fields that urgently needed more reflection. The fact that CDC underlines the importance of civic agency across and beyond sectors, and the introduction of the concept of domains confirm this need. As the topic was not addressed specifically within the process, three interesting perspectives were identified: the connection of CDC with the practice and theory of corporate social responsibility, an inquiry into the future of mega-philanthropy, and civic agency within the business sector. On a more conceptual level, the relation between civic agency and entrepreneurship also merits further research.

### 5. Going forward

The findings of this DPRN process will feed into the next phase of the development of CDC. In this section we offer a number of suggestions for a way forward. The development of CDC has been a trans-disciplinary endeavour, involving academics from different disciplines, entrepreneurs and development practitioners and policymakers. Throughout this process we have experienced the tensions that are inherent to such an approach, but these are outweighed by the synergies. For example, development agencies like Hivos are now using CDC to inform their long-term programming strategies. This practice in turn serves as a basis for case studies and action research in the future development of CDC. We therefore suggest maintaining a transdisciplinary approach in the future.

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<sup>42</sup> E.g. See Fowler (2011).

<sup>43</sup> See also the recent WRR report *Aan het buitenland gehecht* (2010).

This process has also demonstrated that there is value in bringing together Dutch and Belgian practitioners and academics. While there are similarities between the development sectors, there are also marked differences that serve as useful sources for reflection and comparison. NGO cofinancing is but one example in this regard. Going forward, we suggest using the results of this process as a springboard for more collaboration between the two countries.

Related to the previous point, we would also argue for the inclusion of Dutch and Belgian case studies of change initiatives in their own countries, complementing perspectives on CDC from the global South. However, it also remains important to continue the involvement of activists and academics from the global South. In addition, the further development of the process might be served by bringing in more actors from outside the aid chain.

Lastly, we would call for a continuation of publications and events 'revisiting CDC'. Upon reflection, we find that this DPRN process has been able to do so in a limited way. The events and publications clearly generated a lot of debate and proved relevant in the current context and trends in thinking about change processes. The book *Civic Driven Change – Citizens imagination in action* contains inspiring contributions that deserve a closer look. Examples are the chapters on religion, spirituality and deep democracy.

## **6. Final words**

In an address at the 2010 Hivos knowledge conference, Michael Edwards discussed the relation between knowledge and change. He distinguished between 'know-what' and 'know-how'. 'Know-how' relates to the politics of knowledge: What and whose knowledge counts? How does knowledge translate into power?

CDC arose out of a need for a theory of change based on citizen action. This need was informed by existing knowledge gaps on how citizen action leads to social change (know-what). These knowledge gaps are still substantive. CDC was also informed by the perceived necessity to countervail dominant development paradigms of states and markets (know-how). Recent developments in the Dutch development sector – a renewed interest in market-based growth and marginalisation of civilateral aid indicate that this too is still a work in progress.

This then brings us back to Naidoo's question: Can citizen action save the world, where markets and states are obviously failing? By itself it probably cannot, but we argue that citizen action and civic agency are always the first spark as well as indispensable ingredients of the quest for global social justice. CDC is not a revolutionary new concept but it brings components together and draws renewed interest to them. Therefore, in our eyes, it is a strong asset in the battle of ideas in a world indeed reaching boiling point.

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**Cordaid**



geen grenzen  
aan mensen  
**Hivos**

**social e-evaluator**<sup>TM</sup>  
valuating social impact

**Broederlijk Delen**   
omdat het zuiden plannen heeft

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*This process is organised within the framework of the Development Policy Review network. DPRN ([www.dprn.nl](http://www.dprn.nl)) is a network of Dutch and Flemish development experts whose aim is to stimulate informed debate on development policies and enhance cooperation and synergy between scientists, policymakers, practitioners and entrepreneurs in the field of international cooperation. DPRN has a web portal which provides searchable access to development expertise in the Netherlands and Belgium ([www.global-connections.nl](http://www.global-connections.nl)) and a repository for publications of Dutch development organisations ([www.Search4Dev.nl](http://www.Search4Dev.nl)).*