



FOSTERING A CULTURE OF COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP FOR INNOVATION

A CASE STUDY OF THE CECI - WUSC PARTNERSHIP

ANNE DELORME

*Two craftswomen from the Federation of Women
Entrepreneur Association Nepal (FWEAN) in their
workshop producing felt items, 2019 © Frédéric Séguin*





International Seminar participants in Malawi discuss their research project, 2019. © Mphatso Dumbe

Introduction

There is a critical need for bold and collective action to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Unfortunately, far too few partnerships and consortiums succeed. This case study will examine the strategies that drive effective partnerships. But more so, it will explore the strategies needed to foster a collaborative partnership culture, which was key to the CECI-WUSC partnership's unparalleled success.

Initiated in 2003 to respond to the challenges and build upon the historical experience of international volunteering for development (V4D) in Canada, CECI and WUSC united to run a new, larger and innovative initiative called the Uniterra program. The partnership was heralded as the first major social innovation among global development actors in over 30 years (Adler, 2007). This partnership was unique because it was not simply transactional

in nature - dividing responsibilities according to various sectors of expertise. It is unusual in a consortium to fully integrate operations in order to manage a single program. Furthermore, no other Canadian partnership in the development sector has demonstrated such performance and longevity over 16 years. Indeed, long-term collaborations or partnerships between organizations are difficult to sustain over time.

Our purpose in this case study is to contribute to learning about partnership building within the development sector, and to propose a framework for joint action. The case study attempts to investigate and interrogate the mechanisms that drove collaboration and innovation in the CECI-WUSC partnership. They built on the traditional strategies for effective partnerships as a foundation to create and sustain a culture of collaborative partnership for innovation. This case study will begin by reviewing how the partnership was initiated (Part 1). CECI and WUSC invested in specific strategies to cultivate a culture of

collaboration, specifically relationship building, expert support, fostering good governance and framing and mindful communication (Part 2). As demonstrated in the table below, this thoughtful and deliberate approach led to collaborative outcomes and innovations, far beyond the expected results of the Uniterra program (Part 3).

Methodology

The insights generated in this case study are based on a review of key documents, evaluations and articles written internally and externally about the partnership and its flagship program, Uniterra. The methodology also included 25 internal and six external informant interviews, 30 survey responses and two focus groups composed of Uniterra volunteers, completed in the fall of 2019. Using thematic content analysis, a number of key themes were identified that contributed to the partnership's success.

	Building effective partnerships	Fostering a collaborative partnership culture
Partnership strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visionary leadership • Internal value alignment • Complementary value-added • Clear roles, responsibilities and finances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships and trust building • Expert support • Transparency and good governance • Framing and mindful communication
Partnership performance outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development results • Highly skilled volunteers deployed • Funding secured and size of budget • Number of countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A shared culture of learning and innovation • New opportunities for collaboration • Greater accountability • Sector-wide change

PART 1 :

The CECI-WUSC

Partnership Origin Story

All human cultures have constructed origin stories. At their best, these stories (including modern day superhero origin stories) provide models of coping with adversity, they help us to understand ourselves (in particular our strengths) and inspire us with a common vision. In a sense, they pull us toward the notion of living for a communal and greater purpose. When CECI and WUSC developed their partnership, they too needed to create and document an origin story to communicate (internally and externally) the strategic value of the partnership and build buy-in, but also to strengthen and shape a new Unitera partnership culture.

The new millennium brought new attention to aid effectiveness. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Paris Declaration of 2005 called for developing countries to set their own strategies and priorities in the form of Poverty Reduction Strategy papers. Likewise, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) demanded greater accountability for delivering and measuring development results. In light of this new global agenda, the Government of Canada began reviewing the role, rationale, and added-value of the Canadian voluntary sector.

“CIDA staff, during the second half of the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium, were unclear about the value of volunteer-sending: some asserted that volunteer-sending was outmoded as a development strategy, or saw it as a highly visible example of supply-led development.

Rieky Stuart, 2007

The CECI-WUSC partnership was created to respond to this fragile context, that some

qualified as a crisis for the V4D sector. CECI and WUSC recognized that together, they would have a stronger voice to support the sector in its negotiations with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Yes, the two agencies were concerned about the success of each individual organization, but more importantly, for the success of the community of V4D programs in Canada. Further, CECI and WUSC, who both have a long history of V4D, understood the intrinsic value of volunteer cooperation. They believed that the sector could effectively contribute to the challenge of the MDGs and the Paris Declaration. Finally, V4D programs are adept at shaping global minded Canadian and Southern global citizens and leaders, skills sorely needed to achieve these common global goals.

Thus the CECI-WUSC partnership was forged in a common and bold vision, intent on creating a new, larger and innovative V4D initiative called the Unitera program. Both agencies were also grounded in **shared values**, such as the importance of contributing to an inclusive, sustainable, and equitable world. Such language was embedded in both organization's mission and vision statements. Furthermore, CECI and WUSC share a long history of Southern driven programming in socio-economic development.

While similarities grounded them together, their differences spurred greater potential for innovation and impact. The broader research (see case studies with Raufflet, HEC; and Adler, McGill University) consistently highlights the importance of **complementarity** in solidifying the partnership in its early stages. For example, WUSC is an Ottawa-based, predominantly anglophone

organization, with a strong cross-Canada presence via an extensive network of university and college campuses. CECI is a Montreal-based, predominantly francophone organization, operational in Quebec since 1958. The CECI-WUSC partnership enabled each organization to expand its network across Canada and to strengthen its offering in both official languages, which had important benefits for volunteer recruitment, alumni relations, fundraising and public engagement.

Together they created complementary advantages when it came to sector expertise and regional focus. Although both worked across all continents, CECI was concentrated in francophone regions of Africa and the Americas, with solid sectoral proficiency in rural economic development, food security, gender equality and humanitarian aid programming. WUSC had a long history of operating in Asia and anglophone areas of Africa, specializing in

health, education, vocational training and refugee programming, as well as a strong focus on youth engagement. The partnership therefore expanded the reach of programming to some 40 countries, while the network of sectoral partners and expertise enabled significant depth of programming for development results.

Thus, the origin story highlights how the partnership was born from necessity, but also driven by a collective broader goal. While the CECI-WUSC partnership was rooted in common values, it capitalized on their differences to increase value.

PART 2 :

Cultivating a Partnership Culture: Key Strategies

As demonstrated by the origin story, CECI and WUSC had a strong foundation for a successful partnership: A bold vision for a new pan-Canadian international V4D program, the robust business case for combining organizations with complementarity and value-added operations, and effective internal alignment. There is also a general consensus of subjects interviewed as to the importance of the leadership that enabled the creation, maintenance and performance of this partnership. The Executive Directors (EDs) and the Uniterra program Director were the visionary architects behind this social innovation. CECI and WUSC also followed best practice by establishing clear roles and financial responsibilities from the outset. A memorandum of understanding was renewed periodically to clarify roles and responsibilities (CECI-WUSC joint MOU, 2016).

However, many partnerships fail, despite applying these traditional strategies for effective partnership: visionary leadership, alignment of core values, shared purpose, complementary strengths, and formal clarification of roles and responsibilities. In fact, a wide body of research has demonstrated the high failure rate of joint ventures, particularly in the private sector (Kwicinsk et al., 2016). In the development sector as well, partnerships tend to be short lived, as demonstrated by those that followed

the Uniterra experience (Canada World Youth and Youth Challenge International, VSO and CUSO, and multiple consortiums).

If not proven strategies for effective partnerships, what then was responsible for the CECI-WUSC partnership's initial success, as well as its ability to sustain a high degree of performance throughout the partnership's 16-year lifespan? The answer lies in how CECI and WUSC created **a collaborative partnership culture**, distinct from their separate organizational cultures. This process was far more complex but also far more rewarding. The origin story helped to define and communicate the "learned and shared behaviours and beliefs and common understanding and purpose that define culture" (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). CECI and WUSC also invested heavily in strategies to cultivate this collaborative partnership culture. As table 1.0 below illustrates, this case study distinguishes between proven strategies for effective partnerships, which are necessary ingredients for any collaboration, and the unique strategies employed by CECI and WUSC to build a collaborative partnership culture. Relationship and trust building, expert support, transparency and good governance, and framing and mindful communication are strategies that advance collaboration and innovation outcomes.

Table 1.0 Strategies that drive effective partnerships

Proven strategies for building effective partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visionary leadership • Internal value alignment • Complementary value-added • Clear roles, responsibilities and finances
Strategies for cultivating a collaborative partnership culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship and trust building • Expert support • Transparency and good governance • Framing and mindful communication

#1 Invest in relationship and trust building for mutual gain

Among the most common partnership pitfalls, true for social innovation as well, is the resistance to change and mistrust. The development of the Uniterra program, a jointly managed and delivered V4D program, demanded that old processes be set aside to allow for innovation: new sectors, new types of volunteer mandates, and new joint operational processes. But resistance to change is common; there is always a cadre of individuals strongly vested in the "old ways" of working, despite the clear advantages brought by the partnership. The establishment of a strategic business case will not guarantee internal buy-in (Raufflet et al., 2005). For this innovation process to be successful, both organizations invested highly and proactively in developing relationships and building trust. Top management spent long hours together working through initial ideas, and continued meeting and communicating regularly throughout the partnership.

“When establishing a partnership we rely on the basics, such as the consortium contract. It is implicit that the clearer the roles, responsibilities and finances, the more effective the partnership can be in the long term. However, we see with CECI and WUSC that a good partnership is also about trust, strong bonds, and fun. More often than not, the specific philosophies of each organization in the consortium usually prevail over the objectives of the program. It was an inspiring partnership, it is disappointing to see them separate.

External informant #3,
ED of Canadian NGO

Senior management also understood that trust and ownership of this program had to spread to all levels of the organization. "One of the early, critical steps in large scale changes is developing a sense of oneness and community. The resulting trust and "glue" appears to help large, multinational, multicultural, geographically dispersed organisations risk change and survive the consequences" (Adler & Osland, 2016). CECI and WUSC invested in board exchanges and shared team building retreats (from Montebello to Ouagadougou), that included administration, communication and programming teams. The Director of CIDA's partnerships branch was even invited to a retreat involving both boards. Periodic meetings (quarterly and sometimes monthly) of the joint program management unit successfully established an operational framework necessary to yield results and operate optimally. Indeed, survey respondents highlighted how most teams and counterparts were also speaking informally and regularly.

“CECI and WUSC completely harmonized strategic and programmatic orientations and operations, yet each maintained their institutional identities. This created a unique programmatic culture, where employees have developed very close relationships with their colleagues from the other organization. In sum, both organizations were able to create a sound model for fostering the creative and risk-taking environment necessary for innovation while also investing in the establishment of an authentic and respectful collaboration.

Survey respondent #25

This strategy soon delivered the desired results: the full integration of operations and management of the Uniterra program in both CECI and WUSC. Across a multitude of country offices, the strong operational systems that were co-developed enabled the program to be implemented seamlessly by the two organizations. In this study, focus groups with Uniterra program volunteers highlighted the successful joint management of operations.

“ I had my pre-departure training with CECI, and in the field with WUSC. I like the fact that there are two organizations working seamlessly. I also admire the Uniterra platform that offers a huge catalogue for Canadians to have an overseas experience and I just think it is wonderful to have so many options in both languages.

Uniterra Volunteer

2011, 2015, 2018, Ghana

However, organizations face internal challenges from time to time and CECI and WUSC were no exception. Over the 16 years, they respectively faced external and internal challenges that at times tested the foundations of the partnership. One such example is the response to the Haïti earthquake in 2010, which was all consuming, both in terms of fundraising and communication activities in Canada as well as actions on the ground. This crisis drew high-level focus and time away from the CECI-WUSC partnership, particularly at the senior management level, which then suffered when interpersonal relationships were not maintained as consistently. Yet the fact that ownership of the program had spread to all levels of the organization, and did not rely solely on senior management, meant that the partnership was never significantly at risk.

“ All relationships are host to disagreements, these are easily managed by dispute resolution mechanisms. But this became more difficult when the Uniterra program was not central to both organizations. Then, individuals who found that the partnership did not bring enough return on the investment, would start “pull the blanket more to their side” (look after their own interests). It is in these moments that potential for disputes arise.

Internal informant,

Former ED CECI

One final example will demonstrate how purposeful relationship building was intrinsic to the CECI-WUSC partnership. In its initial variations, the CECI-WUSC partnership was not an equal one, creating a power differential. Throughout the first two phases, various pro-rata and other partnership splits provided CECI with a larger share of the budget. An unbalanced budgetary split between the two organizations was a minor but constant irritant throughout the partnership. Demonstrating unprecedented insight, the ED of CECI understood that balanced power relations was key to the partnership’s success. Despite internal pressure, especially regarding the loss of revenue, she advocated a move towards a 50-50 split. WUSC also understood the need to invest more in the program to justify a more balanced budgetary distribution. Equal power relations were essential to avoiding growing resentments that can erode trust and high performing relationships.

#2 Seek expert support

The partnership and launch of the Uniterra program were also aided by academics, such as Nancy Adler from McGill University and Karianne Aarup and Emmanuel Raufflet from HEC-Montréal and with support from the McConnell Foundation. Few organizations have understood the importance of seeking out support from outside experts and learning from research on joint ventures and partnerships. Reaching out to academic experts proved invaluable in understanding organizational culture, especially getting away from “deficit thinking”. The process allowed participants to appreciate the assets each organization brought to the table and to accept inherent differences among the parties.

“ Many partnerships fail because organizations go into it naively. I’ve tried to do partnerships. It always becomes difficult at the end when you reach negotiations about the finances. Experience has demonstrated it is best to lay out terms of the agreement early on. Many Uniterra Directors had participated in the McGill/McConnel non-profit management program and had benefited from top management advice throughout the partnership.

External Informant #1,

ED of Canadian NGO

This expert support also contributed to the sense that something exciting and bold was happening at CECI and WUSC. The high-paced operational nature of global development work does not often allow pause for reflection or for taking stock of innovations as they are evolving. Thus, the Canadian and international workshops, as well

as half a dozen case studies published about the partnership, helped draw out best practices and lessons learned. It also served to remind the team of the significance of this collective endeavor. Not only is it a demonstration of the partnership’s strategic emphasis on process and evidence-based decision making, it also spread the excitement around building something in a sector that was well-established and used to doing things the same way. This energy and perspective gave the team the necessary strength to execute on a difficult goal, from launching the Uniterra program to sustaining the partnership over time.



Frederic Lavoie was a local micro-enterprise management consultant with the Red Nacional de Promocion de la Mujer in Tarapoto, Peru in 2012-2013. © Valerie Paquette



Tea pluckers at the Battalgalla Estate in Hatton work alongside one another to sort out the poor quality leaves. The study tour program that brought the pluckers to the big tea auction in Colombo taught them the importance of high quality tea leaves and the important role they play in keeping their crop at a high price at auction.
© Nina LaFlamme

#3 Foster transparency and good governance

As per guidance from the academic advisors who were present at the onset of the partnership, CECI and WUSC invested heavily in good governance. Two mechanisms were essential to ensuring transparency between the organizations: embedding the role of the Uniterra Director in both organizations and establishing a strong steering committee. The quarterly meetings of the joint steering committee provided oversight, and allowed for decision making at the highest levels and deep accountability. This dynamic of trust was essential to both organization's ability to expose information, at the highest level, on internal issues such as human resources or security challenges.

The Uniterra program Director role was particularly unique in bridging the two organizations. This role was fully embedded in both organizations and the Uniterra program director sat on both management committees. Both EDs understood that the Uniterra Director needed to understand the strategic vision of each organization in order to steer the

program in a way that built on the strengths of each organization's strategic interests. This was also an example of the extraordinary levels of trust within the partnership, as there was a clear organizational risk to their participation on the senior management team. The Uniterra Director was privy to all the internal and confidential information of each organization. Therefore, they had to carefully manage at times competing interests to avoid being pulled between each organization. The role demanded a skillful attunement to areas of commonality and complementarity, while ensuring that divergent opinions surfaced and were resolved constructively. The Uniterra Director could not be perceived as a champion for one organization over the other; they had to be a leader of both. "The Uniterra program has to deliver results for communities in the South and to do so, needed to draw on strengths and opportunities offered by both organizations. It meant always rowing in the same direction." explains the Director of the Uniterra program (2015-2020).

#4 Learned behaviours and values: consistent framing and mindful communication

Few partnerships have demonstrated such longevity, and ability to generate added value over a 16 year period in the development sector. In order to foster this longevity, mindful communication and consistent framing were essential, especially during vulnerable periods of leadership and staff transitions. As previously mentioned, CECI and WUSC were successful in ensuring the dissemination of the partnership's vision and *raison d'être* to all levels of the organization. Nonetheless, the process of re-affirming this vision needed to be continuously revisited through the 16 years of the Uniterra program to maintain group cohesiveness. The origin story became the base foundation in framing the importance of the partnership, in terms of highlighting benefits to the sector, its complementarity and value-add to both entities and also the strategic interest to the Canadian government. "Every conversation, every communication, and every decision begins with a frame. When we provide a context that expands our thinking, includes others, and gives meaning to our efforts, we help spark creativity and insight in ourselves, our peers, and our leaders."
(Think Twice, Mauboussin)

Effective framing was translated into practice in important ways. EDs, for instance, spoke of the partnership with one voice, displaying constant unity internally and externally. When meeting with Global Affairs Canada each Director was deliberate in representing both organizations when speaking of the Uniterra program. They also communicated proactively and regularly to their teams, periodically referring back to the origin story, especially at critical junctures, such as the phase renewals or celebratory events. The EDs and the Uniterra Director were much attuned to the context of the internal team and responded pro-actively with jointly crafted communication aimed at refocusing the group on the common goal. In terms of new hires or new partners, orientation often starts with the CECI-WUSC partnership, almost as a condition of employment. As one ED explains: "My first discussion with everyone from the outset, even before their start date, is how this partnership is really important to us, emphasizing that we are going to make this work." Like the learned behaviours and shared values of any culture, all respondents in the study referred to various aspects of the origin story to describe the strategic value of the partnership, whether they were present in 2003 or started in 2018. This is a testament to how successful CECI and WUSC were at embedding the origin story into their new partnership culture.

PART 3:

A Successful Partnership: The Sum Greater Than Its Parts.

Like other V4D agencies, the CECI-WUSC partnership’s performance can be measured by metrics such as funding secured, development results achieved, volunteers deployed and Canadians engaged. The partnership was successful at renewing funding with the Canadian government (2009, 2014). The Uniterra program was consistently achieving development goals in health, education and economic development in communities across Africa, Asia and the Americas, as demonstrated in two consecutive positive external evaluations. It was also meeting recruitment targets for Canadian volunteers. Indeed, it was the largest Canadian V4D program of 3,000 volunteers with 260 partners in 14 countries and a budget of C\$74.4 million (Volunteer Cooperation Program Evaluation, 2018). The CECI-WUSC partnership was also widely recognized for its success by its peers (external informant interviews, 2019).

These achievements of the Uniterra program only partially speak to CECI-WUSC partnership’s longevity and success. By combining resources, and capabilities of each organization, CECI and WUSC created “partnership synergy”—a whole that is greater than the sum of its individual parts. In business, synergy normally refers to the potential benefits provided by economies of scale or cost saving efficiencies. However, in this case study, the richest and most rewarding added value came from how the partnership drove innovation and collaborative outcomes (as seen in the table below).

Table 2.0 Partnership performance metrics

General partnership performance outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development results achieved • Highly skilled volunteers deployed • Number of Canadians engaged • Funding secured and size of budget • Number of countries
Collaborative partnership culture outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation • New opportunities • Greater accountability • Contribution to sector wide change

#1 Innovation

From inception, the CECI and WUSC partnership sought to promote learning and innovation. They fostered an environment to support research, knowledge production, and creative thinking, and that valued the exploration of new opportunities and new ways of doing things. This enabled both organizations to drive innovation throughout the 16 years of programming and to collaborate on new initiatives. While examples of CECI and WUSC’s collaborative innovation include applying an inclusive market systems approach, or investing heavily in results-based management and evaluation, this section will focus on two: **increased responsiveness to partner needs through a sectoral focus and an expansion of the spectrum of international volunteer mandates.**

From the beginning, there was always a strong focus on responding to the needs and priorities identified by partners in the South, and in particular, moving beyond a focus on the supply side of volunteer deployment. Both organizations understood Canadian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) needed to support, rather than replace, local organizations. There was considerable reflection about the best methodology to advance development results and sustainability, and one such strategy was increased sectoral focus. As such, in the Uniterra program each country would only focus on one or two sectors, such as HIV programming or economic development. Acting as conveners, CECI and WUSC created sectoral round tables, developing relationships between the partners that allowed for sharing of best practices and the identification of other synergies. The result was that CECI and WUSC gained the confidence of local partners and governments and became recognized for sectoral expertise. Development results soon followed to validate this approach.

This drive for innovation also enabled the partnership to push boundaries in other areas, such as volunteer recruitment and retention. To attract the skill set required by local partners, the organization broadened its recruitment strategies and their service offering. They developed a variety of international volunteer assignments, from two weeks to two-year North-South mandates, as well as South-South and South-North mandates in order to recognize and strengthen local expertise. One example is the Leave for Change (Congé solidaire) stream, which provides volunteer opportunities tailored to private sector companies seeking to cultivate employee loyalty, commitment and skill development. Through Leave for Change, companies offer their employees a unique personal and professional development opportunity through short-term international volunteer assignments, while contributing to lasting change in developing countries. Approximately 50 employers, from across all sectors, accepted this challenge, and participated in more than 500 assignments that provided Canadians not only the opportunity to contribute to development but, upon return, raise awareness in working environments that were not traditionally attune to global development.

#2 Multiplier effects: the creation of new opportunities for collective impact

The culture of collaborative partnership cultivated by CECI and WUSC created a solid foundation of trust, which enabled proactive response to new opportunities and a desire for new joint efforts. This leveraging of the Uniterra program for the creation of other initiatives was also highlighted in the formative evaluation of the Volunteer Cooperation Program (VCP) (August, 2018):

“ This has occurred in Sri Lanka, for example, around vocational training as well as skills development in tourism and textiles. The same is true in the rice sector within Burkina Faso. (...) Uniterra coordinates with other development actors, for example, in Malawi where there is an ethical tea partnership between a consortium of international private companies and non-profit organizations from Holland and Great Britain. It's a private public partnership aimed at increasing wages, reducing gender-based violence on plantations, where each partner takes on one component of the work. Uniterra's working model is "collective impact" or "collaborative outcomes".

New opportunities for collaborations emerged for joint programming, including WAGES in West Africa, V4D in Haiti, and a number of bilateral programs. One notable example of complementarity at work is when CECI and WUSC secured a mandate from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for programming in Nepal. WUSC had a niche in the education and skill development

sector, and they excelled at developing curriculums and accreditation standards. Meanwhile, CECI was to contribute with expertise on how to integrate gender and inclusion in the curriculum and in the classroom. Thus, in 2014 a CECI-WUSC consortium was quickly formed to conceptualize and deliver the Skill Development Project, allowing CECI to expand into new sectors, while WUSC deepened its presence in Nepal.

Another example is the International Forum, an annual conference that was initially organized by WUSC. As a flagship event, WUSC could have viewed sharing the Forum as a loss, but instead recognized that the partnership allowed for new energy and ideas to infuse the annual conference. Generally speaking, the Forum originally attracted an average of 400 people, a majority of whom were students. After joining forces to co-organize the event (alternating between Ottawa and Montreal), CECI and WUSC were able to reach a broader and more diverse audience, nearly doubling participants, representing students, professionals, academics, civil society organizations (CSOs), business and government, from Canada and internationally,

The high level of success in these collaborations would not have been possible without the foundation of the 16-year Uniterra partnership and the partnership culture, which emphasized the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination.

#3 Greater accountability

One of the most compelling examples of the partnership's success was demonstrated in dealing with emerging security issues. The sector has had to traverse intense security issues: the increase of security concerns in countries vulnerable to violence and conflict, and the eruption of sexual misconduct scandals. While CECI and WUSC gained efficiency by pooling resources to strengthen their systems and processes for dealing with security and safeguarding issues, it is the partnership itself that served as a powerful risk mitigation strategy. A co-governance structure created a very powerful

culture of accountability. The ED of a single organization is accountable to their own decision, but a partnership involves shared liability. The co-management of the Uniterra program meant that CECI and WUSC needed to be extremely transparent about the risk mitigation systems that were in place as well as the various situations that were emerging in the South. CECI and WUSC leveraged their shared governance space to unpack comfort levels, carefully analyze potential situations, and navigate emerging crises. Shared liability also meant shared and stronger accountability.

#4 Sector contribution together everyone achieves more (TEAM)

Innate to the CECI-WUSC collaborative partnership culture is the vision that with collective action there is greater potential to achieve more. This collaborative partnership culture expanded beyond the Uniterra program, beyond the relationship between CECI and WUSC, it expanded to their approach to the entire V4D sector in Canada and globally.

As the largest international V4D program in Canada, CECI and WUSC shared a unique positioning within the sector. Their size increased their influence with Global Affairs Canada, which also strengthened their convening power. They were often turned to as a focal point to respond to various emergencies, emerging issues or for strategic input for new strategic directions. However, they were consistently dedicated and attuned to ensuring space was made for other organizations to take leadership, such as in the creation of the VCP Directors' group in 2004 with Karen Takacs, ED of Crossroads International. Furthermore, whenever the VCP was up for funding renewal, the sector needed to demonstrate with

a harmonized voice the impact and importance of continuity of the program. This was especially necessary under the Conservative government from 2007 to 2013, when the program was particularly at risk. Christian Paradis, Minister of International Development, provided only a single year of funding, essentially in order for organizations to transition out of their programs. By working together, the V4D sector was incredibly effective at opening channels with government and cabinet officials, as well as pooling resources to develop research and evaluations to demonstrate the value of volunteer programs. Within the year, the V4D coalition had made a compelling case and Minister Paradis was willing to champion the program to the treasury board. The CECI-WUSC partnership's convening power has led to many joint statements, including a joint response by no less than 15 Canadian volunteer sending organizations to the Minister of International Development regarding the International Assistance Review Consultation Process in 2016. Consistently, CECI and WUSC have provided a strong convening and leadership role.

“ There was no sense that they were underhanded or out for World Domination; rather, their collaborative interests were aligned with the good of the sector.

External informant #2,
2019

CECI and WUSC also aimed to influence the volunteer sector globally by providing leadership and advocating for the importance of The International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum) and their annual International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations (IVCO) conference. Leadership from both organizations have sat on the Forum’s Board of Directors and together they hosted IVCO in Lima, Peru in 2014. As a large program, they had the resources to invest in this space, and wished to see higher volunteer standards applied throughout the international community. CECI and WUSC’s collaborative culture of partnership was based on learning from one another. They wished to create more space in the sector to capitalize on collective action. As expressed by the ED of WUSC, “IVCO provides an opportunity for thought leaders in

volunteering for development to come together, work together, and most importantly, reflect upon and continuously improve our work and reach in volunteering for development.” As early as the 2012 IVCO Conference, CECI and WUSC participated in the setting of joint priorities and actions to ensure that volunteerism was explicitly recognized and supported in the SDG agenda. They actively participated in the Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group, which led to a strong endorsement of volunteering by the UN Secretary-General in his Synthesis Report “The Road to Dignity by 2030”. They also played a leadership role in the crafting of Forum’s Global Standard for Volunteering adopted at IVCO in Kigali in 2019.

By the end of their 16 years together, the partnership’s success and contribution to the volunteer sector as a whole reaffirmed the strategic importance of the partnership to both organizations. More importantly, the culture of collaborative partnership shared by CECI and WUSC, also influences V4D sector.

Conclusion:

The Curtain Call

The grace with which both organizations managed the final year of their joint program is a testament to the character of the partnership. There is a general consensus among survey and interview respondents that the CECI-WUSC partnership for the delivery of the Uniterra program would have continued as it provides considerable impact, innovation and organizational value. Unfortunately, Global Affairs Canada capped program funding for the VCP at 50 million dollars, which created a strong incentive to dissolve the partnership. After careful consideration and analysis, CECI and WUSC decided to submit their proposals separately. Thus, each organization developed competing funding proposals, while co-managing the last year of the Program and preparing the transition. Management also invested heavily in the relationship to achieve closure for the program on a positive note and this case study is a part of that process.

This case study was developed with the intention of contributing to broader sector understanding of best practices for partnerships and for working collaboratively. We sought to understand how CECI and WUSC cultivated and sustained a unique collaborative partnership culture. Indeed, although the Uniterra program ended in June 2020, the culture of collaborative partnership is well rooted in each organization. Both organizations expressed the political will to continue to collaborate together. Survey, interview and focus group respondents were unanimous about the importance of continuing the working relationship and maintaining collaboration. To develop this culture of collaborative partnership, CECI and WUSC employed key strategies such as relationships and trust building, expert support, fostering transparency and good governance and framing

and mindful communication. This thoughtful and deliberate approach led to collaborative outcomes and innovations: greater accountability, new opportunities and innovations for programs and volunteer sending. Yet most important is the focus on broader sector impacts.

CECI and WUSC will continue to nurture a space for leveraging the collective impact of V4D, whether through the development of a community of practice, or through international spaces like IVCO. There was also consensus among study respondents around the importance of pursuing a whole sector approach. Furthermore, a number of pressing issues still require increased sharing across organizations, such as the duty of care, sharing evidence of V4D impact, and advocating for the importance of South-South and South-North exchanges, which were severely scaled back in the last phase. CECI and WUSC’s collaborative partnership culture will endure through a network of strong allies with a feeling of shared purpose to advance the V4D sector as well as Canada’s impact in the world. But this culture still requires cultivation with the same level of investment and purpose. Because, now, more than ever, inter-organizational synergies are critical. If we are to achieve a more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable world, then organizations and countries need to invest in building stronger bonds of trust and collaboration. Now, more than ever, there is a need for collaborative leaders in Canada and internationally who are working within a global framework.

Postscript:

A Call For Global and Collaborative Leadership

Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy was revolutionary in many respects, yet mention of V4D or notions of global leadership are particularly absent. On its website, Global Affairs Canada conceptualizes volunteering as helping "Canadians to develop a deeper understanding of global development issues and encourag[ing] them to become more actively involved in addressing development challenges." Yet V4D has much greater potential for impact. V4D plays an important and inspiring role in shaping global leaders and promoting global leadership values in Canada and internationally. Fostering more global leadership should be a priority for the new feminist foreign policy, linking the objectives of diplomacy, trade, development and humanitarian programming.

Internationally, diplomatic relations are strained; the achievement of common goals, such as the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, and even trade agreements, is under threat. The World Economic Forum points to a global leadership crisis: "The danger is that instead of innovating and collaborating to tackle societal and economic challenges, leaders will continue to retreat into isolationism, further exacerbated by nationalist rhetoric and a reversion to old paradigms of geopolitical power-play" (WEF, 2015). This trend towards protectionist policies is only exacerbated under the new COVID-19 context.

To solve this leadership crisis, we need moral, effective leadership, collaborating and communicating across boundaries – business,

nonprofit and political leaders all have a role to play (WEF, 2015). This is echoed by a McKinsey study (2012) that identifies culturally and functionally proficient leaders as key to greater effectiveness globally. The Uniterra program was skilled at nurturing the emergence of global minded Canadian leaders. We need only to look at the esteemed alumni of both organizations: various Canadian Ambassadors and Ministers, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Governor of the Bank of Canada, the Director of the Canada Council for the Arts and many leaders of strong civil society organizations.

The Uniterra program also supported the empowerment of southern leaders such as Abigail Quic. Abigail Quic is a young Maya Tz'utujil woman in Guatemala. In 2013, she joined SERES, a Guatemalan organization, from where she continues to facilitate transformative change processes with hundreds of at-risk youth from Guatemala and El Salvador. In 2019 Abigail's leadership was recognized and she was named Co-Director of the organization, making her a role model for many girls and young leaders throughout Guatemala.

The WEF Survey on the Global Agenda 2015 also indicates that global leadership skills need to be cultivated. A Canadian solution exists to meet this need. We need only to turn to international V4D programs and bold and innovative collaborations for producing future global leaders that will help shape a more just and inclusive world.

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