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Introducing Civic-Driven Change

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This Policy Brief introduces civic-driven change (CDC) as conceived by the ISS initiative. It describes major concepts, terms and arguments. In addition it explains basic principles, preconditions and areas of disagreement. It addresses frequently asked questions (FAQs) that surround the concept. Other Policy Briefs explore important themes within the overall story.

Background

The CDC initiative started from a conviction that the mix and nature of today's global problems requires a wider range of solutions than those coming from government and market. A missing story is one of people themselves acting as citizens to change the society they live in, not as needy beneficiaries, participants, political clients or economic producers and consumers, but as agents of their own future. Finding out what such a story might look like has been the guiding objective for the core group of ten internationally recognized practitioners, analysts and writers. But the CDC story arising from their work is a starting point for a much bigger task. This is to take forward the challenge of promoting a public debate about the role of citizens - from all walks of life and active in civil society organizations and other spheres - to explore ways in which international cooperation can embrace a different approach to development.

The innovation of this CDC story does not lie in finding an unknown magic ingredient for social change. What is 'new' is to be found in trying to look through the eyes of citizens to gather and join up experiences of bringing about change that are scattered around the landscape of aid.

A unifying theme emerged from the CDC essays. This is one of *citizens re-governing a 'global commons' of resources and relationships*. That is, to take on the task of redressing the fact that the world is suffering from serious inequity and mismanagement. This condition is a product of failed (party) politics, hollow democracy and an over-reliance on self-regulated markets.

What is CDC?

The three words in Civic-Driven Change combine important concepts, each with its own possibility for interpretation. Essays in the ISS initiative view CDC in the following ways.

The core of *civic* is normative behaviour. Important civic values are a broad understanding of inclusion, tolerance of difference and a concern for the whole of society. In the modern era, such a concern includes the environment and nature. 'Uncivic' behaviour would be intolerant, exclusionary and indifferent or hostile to justice in public life or shared well-being.

People do not necessarily treat *citizenship* as a significant aspect of their being. Many other features of 'self' - such as lineage, clan, adherent to a faith or class - hold sway in terms of identity and affinity with and difference from others.

Nevertheless, a prerequisite for talking about (un)civicness is a context where the rights and obligations of citizenship are recog-

nized and respected. Without the 'right to have rights' CDC is not meaningless, but shows a need to create conditions where rights are real.

With or without rights, it is important to be sure what words or terms like citizenship, civil society, empowerment and participation mean to the user and their view of what life in society should be. Depoliticization of citizenship is often masked by the way 'progressive' language is interpreted and deployed by those in control of public agendas.

From this perspective, *civic agency* is a value-based imperative; it is what citizens do when they apply their energy to affecting the way society functions. It is a self-directed *capability for purposeful action* where past experience is brought together with ideas about creating a desired new situation, assessed against the practicality and risks involved.

The *driver* in CDC is a future situation people aspire to. Its force stems from people's *imagination* of different circumstances - like greater equity and security - for themselves, their children and others. And, like values, imagination is strongly influenced by the *world views* that people grow up within and from.

Spirituality - whether religious or secular- is an important source of people imagining a future they would prefer. *Mass media* and control of information are significant, if not dominant, for shaping public imagination and choices made between ends and means.

The 'C' of *change* in CDC translates into the 'C' of (public) choice. That is, *political systems* which gather together citizens' diverse hopes and aspirations tied to the (political) power to determine which collective imagination(s) will prevail in directing a society's path. Essays paint an overall picture of political systems that are 'thin' in terms of citizen engagement. Too often such systems are manipulated by party-based mechanisms, which are themselves often alien in terms of indigenous political cultures.

Low public trust in politicians, and their excessive reliance on experts and technocrats to determine what is best for society, is endemic. The 'C' of change, therefore is as much about reclaiming political processes and democracy as it is about determining their outcomes.

For the essayists three issues are in contention. One is the degree of *personal responsibility* for changing life's circumstances set against that of *public responsibility*. Citizenship does not give an answer *a priori* - context matters. But trends suggest that 'co-production' between government and citizens to bring about change in society is a subtle form of privatization. Does this

process subordinate political citizenship, giving primacy to a competitive, market-driven model of human relations with citizens as clients?

Another unresolved debate is whether or not there is a legitimate *role for 'outsiders'* in determining what is to be considered desired 'civic' behaviour and what the desired futures for others are. Tied to this critical point is the question of who assesses and carries *risk of change*. More likely than not, it will be insiders, and this poses a moral dilemma for aided change.

Third, there are many barriers – class, race, gender, belief, ethnicity – to equality in practice as opposed to legal prescription. Over-coming such barriers often calls for assertion and conflict and *civil disobedience* – but when can this be justified, what means are acceptable and who is to judge and decide?

Disagreements about the location of civic responsibility play out at a fundamental level. Highlighted by feminist analysis, an underlying issue challenges arguments for a division between public and private domains in society. Rights-based citizenship is both a personal and collective identity that exists irrespective of a person's social institution or place of livelihood. However, all rights have costs. Consequently, adequate *taxation* is critical to ensuring that rights of citizenship can be enjoyed. Moreover, in this CDC perspective, paying taxes does not absolve individuals or corporations from fulfilling obligations to the whole.

Further, globalization means that risks accompanying private wealth creation are rapidly transmitted across the globe and among a country's population. Typically these processes translate into an unfair distribution of risk towards marginalized socio-economic groups, which may provoke revolt and insecurity. Food riots, fuel riots, suicides of indebted farmers, reactions of poor people to privatization of public utilities, are seen on many continents.

Overall, the idea that social or environmental problems can be separated from their private sources and 'externalized' into a public responsibility is open to serious question. Terrorists' families live in the world made more insecure by terrorism. Children of personnel in polluting industries face the same threats to their health as do others. Banking crises where defaults on private mortgages in the USA mean bail-outs using public finance in other countries, showing that arguments supporting the separation of domains must be treated as propositions, not inviolable facts.

What does this brief review add up to in terms of the guiding ideas in CDC emerging from this ISS initiative?

CDC and Its Guiding Ideas

Language matters. Be critically conscious about what terms are being used by whom for what purposes. The capacity of the words and terms used to gain citizens' acquiescence to their political and social circumstances as dictated by the prevailing powers in sway, must not be underestimated.

Media and communication matter. Mass media shape people's worldviews, values and imaginations towards particular futures.

As a vital tool for influencing and gaining popular compliance with flawed political processes, it is an issue that needs to be addressed. Horizontal communication between citizens is seen to be a necessary counterweight.

Citizenship does not belong to an institutional 'sector'. Locating civic-driven change in civil society confuses the concept of citizenship. This approach also appears to tolerate people acting in uncivic ways in other walks of life. Claiming citizenship for all is critical to counter marginalization and exclusion. But those already enjoying rights need to be 'civic' in what they do.

Politics needs to be (re)invented. Failed party politics and hollow democracy underlie an inability of societies to respect socio-political differences and deliver social justice. (Re)building politics where citizens exert adequate control over government and market is a core, long-term element of CDC. Connecting the 'politics of the local and of small things' can be a guide.

Rethink 'local'. People's immediate worlds of living and working are all sites of civic agency. Whatever happens 'globally' plays out locally somewhere. For CDC, local is seen in an interconnected way, enabling new approaches to scale and linking tiers of relationships in rebuilding politics from small things.

Civic ends may require civic disobedience. Contestation can often be 'developmental'. There is a constant dilemma of judgment about circumstances where such behaviour is merited. Decisions for such a course of action must be transparent in terms of whose interests are served in the end.

Taxation matters. Paying taxes affirms rights, forming an essential basis for demanding political accountability. Because rights have costs, CDC is directly concerned with this aspect of state-citizen relations.

Questioning the public-private divide. Globalization and growing layers of interdependence make the notion of separating public and private domains less and less tenable. CDC focuses on what new arrangements need to evolve.

Risk distribution matters. Asking who carries the risks of change, and why, is critical in CDC thinking and approach.

Inclusion is broad. Inclusion in CDC respects socioeconomic differences and identities; embraces divergent roots of 'spirituality' in world views and values; cuts across all types of social institutions; and brings nature into the equation. Broad inclusion recognizes that while many nation-states may be secular, much of politics is not.

Other interesting elements are to be found in the CDC book. But these shown above are likely to feature in debates and questions about civic-driven change.