

# Capturing the Relationship between Governments and Social Economy Organizations

Project 21

Dr. K. L. Brock

Cheryl Bulpitt (06/07)

DeNeige Dojack (07/08)

School of Policy Studies

Queen's University, Kingston ON K7L 3N6

Kathy.Brock@queensu.ca

Date: May 1-2, 2008



Social Economy Centre

[SOCIALECONOMY.UTORONTO.CA](http://SOCIALECONOMY.UTORONTO.CA)



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



# Introduction

- ❑ In the past two decades, the nature of the state has changed from more interventionist to more facilitative. As the state has become increasingly hollowed out, it has come to rely on the private sector and nonprofit organizations in all facets of the policy process, and especially for expert and technical advice, research and program feedback, information delivery, and service provision. As organizations have come to play a greater role in the policy process, concern has arisen in government over both the accountability and capacity of these partners in policy. These concerns are heightened by a second trend--an explosion in the number of organizations representing citizens and providing services to them. Increasingly disillusioned with the state, citizens have turned to organizations both to represent their interests to the state and to provide services previously extended by governments. A key dilemma for the state then becomes how to reinforce the accountability and capacity of the social economy sector without undermining its autonomy or vitality.

# Background and Rationale

- ❑ This framework provides a basis for both categorizing and analyzing the wide variety of relationships between the state and social economy organizations. This summary first defines the context of current relations between the two sectors, then notes the criteria that government actions must meet if it is support a vibrant social economy and then provides the framework itself with an explanation of each type of relationship. Although the framework is intended to capture all organizations that have some type of relationship with government, however tenuous. For example, organizations that are completely financially autonomous, might still be captured under the legislative or regulatory regime in place.

# Project Methodology

- The project employs a combination of qualitative analysis and semi-structured interviews.
  - **Qualitative Analysis**
    - Review of existing literature on relations between the public and social economy sectors
    - Review of government and sector documents including websites, promotional and informational literature
  - **Selected, semi-Structured Interviews**
    - Government officials
    - Social Economy Organization officials

# Role and Participation of Community Partners

- ❑ Three Methods
  - Interviews and review of documents
  - The Social Economy Public Policy Research Committee
  - Presentations to and Feedback from Social Economy and Government Organizations on Research Findings
- ❑ In addition, materials will be circulated to organizations

# Main Findings/Deliverables

## □ A Continuum of Relations

- **Three Objectives:** First, state action is necessary to support the social economy given the recorded fluctuations in voluntary activity and the sense of social responsibility on the part of citizens. Second, state actions to support the social economy should enhance the ability of organizations to promote engagement, belonging and democracy given the well-documented benefits of a vibrant civil society and citizen participation in organised and informal activities. Third, government must foster the ability of social economy organizations to serve as partners in policy in such a way that reflects the complexity of contemporary public policy and the changing and blurring roles of each sector.
- While the continuum is generally helpful in characterizing the different types of actions that the state might take to support the sector, it should be noted that enabling actions may shade into more coercive ones in certain contexts and vice versa.

State as Enabler						State as Enforcer					
Hard		Soft				Soft		Hard			
Partners	Accord	Seeks to support	Promote Common Goals	Provide Information	Exhorts action Praise	Exhorts Action Threats	Eligibility rules	Tied Aid	Regulations	Legislation	Legislated Penalties
	Collaborative	Benevolent	Kind	Passive	Parental	Parental	Guardian	Directive	Imposing	Mandated	Coercive Unequal

# Implications for the Social Economy

❖ As the Ontario government has become more embedded in society and as organizations have become more embedded in the work of government, the ties between the two sectors have multiplied creating a diverse array of arrangements and heightening expectations on each side. While embracing organizations to different degrees as policy participants, government officials have remained concerned about the accountability, legitimacy and good governance of organizations. The underlying importance of this concern to the relationship can be seen in the areas where government takes some of its boldest actions as an enforcer. The legislation and regulatory framework governing nonprofit corporations and charities operates to ensure organizations are well governed and meet certain standards. Noncompliance with this framework or with the terms of contribution agreements, contracts and programs is punished. Here, government is within its comfort zone, adopting a traditional, directive and, at times, coercive stance towards social economy organizations. Even in its enabling role, the government is reluctant to relinquish control over the definition of priorities and design and execution of policy making it a reluctant or cautious policy partner.

❖ The concerns that have arisen over the capacity of organizations to engage as full participants in the policy process have been shared by government and social economy officials alike. Even in its endeavours to build the capacity of organizations, the government is ambivalent and inconsistent. On the one hand, it is embracing key agencies as collaborators in the development of social policy and the restructuring of and delivery of health care. It actively seeks out opportunities to fund and support organizations and promote common goals. However, these endeavours are the most robust in areas where the organizations' goals and objectives parallel those defined by the particular ministry or government. Passive support is offered to organizations more generally in the guise of providing information and services. And while the government has enthusiastically undertaken the need to expand volunteering and to exhort citizens to get involved through exhortation and awards and honours, it has been less enthusiastic about adopting stronger measures to ensure citizen engagement. On the one hand, the government has enacted programs to assist seniors and newcomers or people of diverse races and backgrounds to engage, or citizens to become involved as volunteers in the traditional areas of health care, social services, culture, sports and community building and economic development as well as the less usual areas of corrections, housing and disability services. On the other hand, its program on community service in the schools remains anemic and it has shied away from legislating employee involvement in volunteer activities and a corporate social conscience or responsibility.

# How Students Benefited from the Project

## □ Four Ways

- Literature and Document Research Skills Improved
- Interviews Skills Improved
- Participation in Preparation of Academic Presentation and Paper
- Forged Useful Contacts in Two Sectors



# Next Steps

- Three Steps
  - Deepen Interviews
  - Presentation of Materials to Workshop hosted by the Community Services Council in St. John's. NL, May 2008; and others (Fall 2008)
  - Preparation of Practical Papers for submissions to practitioner outlets
  - Presentation of Academic Paper
  - Preparation of Academic Papers to two Academic Journals