



Reflections on Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy

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The government has set out a unique and ambitious [vision for Canada's international assistance for the next five years](#), one that is firmly rooted in its commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment through the active promotion of the rights of women and girls. Most donors, including Canada, have had long-standing gender policies to guide their assistance priorities. But with this Ministerial directive for an exclusive focus on women's rights in international assistance, Canada is unique among its donor peers in the OECD's Development Assistance Committee. It sends a critically important global signal that the achievement of Agenda 2030 will not be possible without meaningful and substantial progress on SDG Goal Five – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Canada is prepared to step up its leadership for this Goal.

This vision for Canada's international assistance is both a specific area of programming (A Core Action Area for "Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls) and the exclusive programmatic emphasis in each of the other five Action Areas.¹ These five areas correspond to most of the current programming priorities, but call for extensive mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives within the sector. If implemented, it could result in a major progressive shift in the content of Canada's international assistance over the next five years.

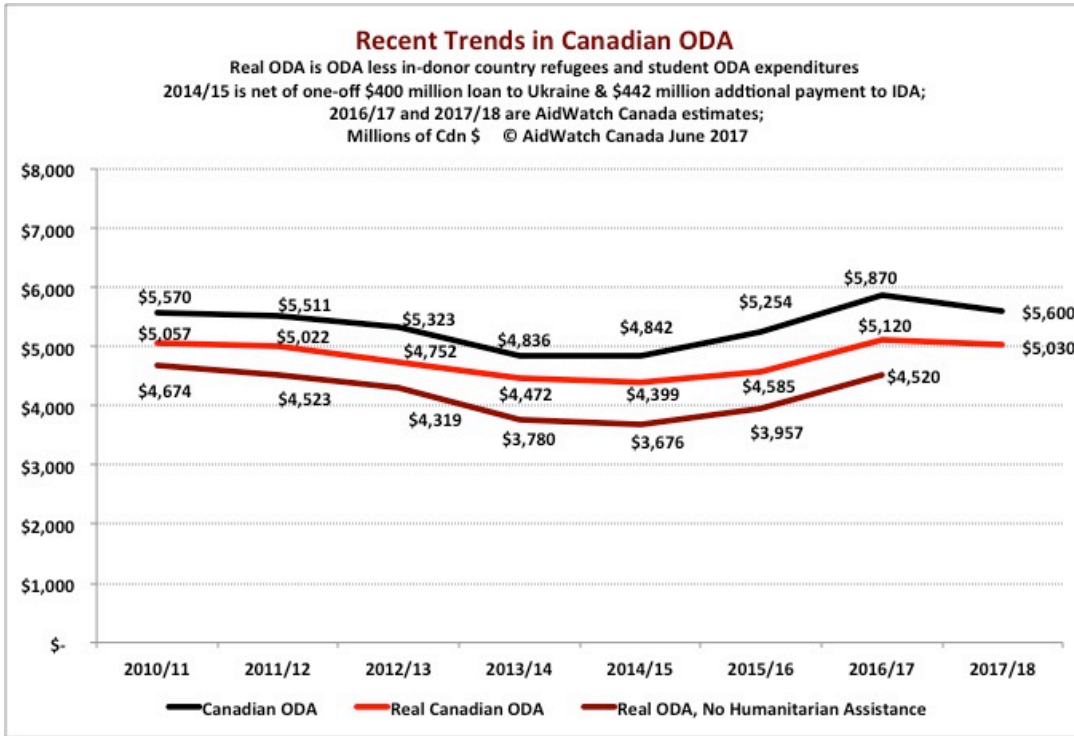
The Policy calls for 95% of Canada's international assistance to be focused on gender equality and women and girls empowerment within five years – 15% where this goal is the sole purpose of the activities and 80% where gender equality is mainstreamed within the objectives of the initiative. It will ramp up support for organizations implementing programs devoted to women's rights with up to \$150 million investment in these organizations.

The Policy has been welcomed and praised as bold and innovative. No doubt the Policy will drive change within Global Affairs Canada and establish strong policy incentives for initiatives relating to gender equality. After several decades of [concern about the implementation of Canada's gender policy](#) in Canadian development cooperation, these initiatives will be very welcome. Unfortunately, without complementary efforts, its ambition and reach may be substantially tempered by long-standing limitations and challenges in GAC's capacities to meet the Policy's ambitious goals.

¹ These Areas are Human Dignity (health and nutrition), education and humanitarian action; Growth that Works for Everyone; Environment and Climate Change; Inclusive Governance, and Peace and Security.

1. An ambitious and welcomed focus on gender equality and women’s empowerment, but where’s the money and human resources?

After extensive consultations and many months in its evolution, the Policy is accompanied by not even a hint at new resources for Canada’s international assistance, beyond the government’s 2016 commitment of \$128 million in each of 2016/17 and 2017/18. It’s announcement came in the same week that the government launched a new Defence Policy with a ten year planned investment, increasing the defence budget from \$18.9 billion to \$32.7 billion by 2026/27 (a 70% increase in defence spending). There is no corresponding plan for future investments in Canadian ODA, which is expected to be \$5.6 billion in 2017/18. When increased in-Canada support for refugees and students and increased demands for humanitarian assistance, resources for long term development efforts, so essential for making progress in women and girls empowerment, at \$4.5 billion in 2016/17 was still not at the level achieved in 2010/11. Canada’s performance as a donor, at an expected 0.27% for 2017/18, remains among the lowest for donors that report to the OECD Development Assistance Committee.



As a consequence no new money for development cooperation, there are few new financial target for the six Action Areas set out in the Policy. The government reiterated an announcement in March 2017 of \$650 million for sexual and reproductive health and rights for women and girls over three years. But in other important areas, such as education, climate-smart food production, or inclusive governance, among others, the government gave no indication of its financial commitment. Canada’s investments in agriculture, for example, have declined from \$379 million in 2010 to \$345 million in

2015/16.² Support for basic education, a sector that is critical for the advancement of the rights of girls, has declined by 38% since 2010/11, from \$295.8 million to \$184.2 million in 2015/16. Even in the priority area of population policy, sexual and reproductive health, in 2015/16 Canada invested \$189.5 million, down slightly from \$191.2 million in 2010/11.

The Policy right suggests that its effective implementation would “represents both a dramatic shift in focus and a significant increase in investment. [emphasis added]” [page 29] But how realistic is increased investment?³

While there can be shifts in programming over time, without even a projection of new aid resources for these five years, it is very difficult to understand how GAC is going to realize the Policy’s goals beyond what is already programmed and committed in these action areas. The average length for implementation of bilateral development projects, for both bilateral and partnership branches, is well over 40 months. It takes at least a year to initiate a project. Therefore, with no new aid resources, new initiatives taking up uncommitted programming resources will be very limited, and money for these new initiatives assumes that terminating projects are not renewed and/or somewhat re-profiled to be consistent with the priorities set out in the Policy. Any major increases in investments are likely well beyond the end of the current mandate of this government in 2019.

To what extent has GAC reviewed the experience of the gender policy in setting out strategic directions for its “feminist” International Assistance Policy? Canadian CSOs monitoring the implementation of CIDA’s long-standing gender policy identified major challenges in mainstreaming gender equality within CIDA’s projects and programs.⁴ As John Sinclair points out in his review of the International Assistance Policy, during the Harper era, many highly experienced professional staff were lost to CIDA/DFATD, and others were absorbed into the amalgamated Global Affairs Canada in 2012:

“Canada’s focus on women and children — the feminist development agenda — extends and deepens a role started in the 1980s. At that time CIDA even had mandatory gender sensitization training for all staff. Canada’s future development work will need to accommodate more than just feminism and CSOs; it will remain engaged in multilateralism, humanitarian aid, agriculture and much more, all to co-exist within a flat budget. The vision of a feminist policy needs practical approaches to implementation....”⁵

² <http://aidwatchcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/May-2017-CCIC-Update-to-spending-on-food-security-2006-2016-April-2017.pdf>

³ Page numbers refer to word version of the document created by the author from the web version of the Policy statement.

⁴ A published version of the gender policy is no longer available on the GAC site. For a critique in its implementation, see the Canadian CSO Working Group on Women’s Rights, “Strengthening Canada’s Leadership in the Promotion of Gender Equality,” in *A Time to Act, Implementing the ODA Accountability Act*, pp 77 – 81 CCIC, 2010, accessible at http://www.ccic.ca/files/en/what_we_do/002_aid_2010_05_a_time_to_act_e.pdf

⁵ Sinclair, John, 2017. “Canada’s new feminist development policy: the good, the bad and the next steps,” OpenCanada.org, accessible at <https://www.opencanada.org/features/canadas-new-feminist-development-policy-good-bad-and-next-steps/>

To effectively implement the Policy, GAC will need to invest in its human resource capacities, in training programs in the application of gender equality and women's empowerment principles in programming, also accessible to its key partners in civil society and developing countries.

2. Establishing credible measurements for the Policy's overarching targets for gender equality

The Policy is committed to improved monitoring and accountability, but it is not clear the means by which this will be accomplished. What is the measure of the over-arching targets set out in the Policy? The most likely option is the OECD DAC's policy marker for gender equality. All providers, including Canada, report to the OECD DAC on this purpose code that measures the degree to which gender equality and women's empowerment are expressed in the objectives of each project. A similar purpose code is used by GAC in the Historical Projects Dataset, but is slightly different in that it uses a results matrix for each project.

The Policy commits to ensuring "that 15% of all bilateral international development assistance investments specifically target gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by 2021/22 [i.e. in five years]."

The Policy also aims to increase "the integration of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls across all international assistance efforts." [page 29] No less than 80% of bilateral international development assistance through GAC will be designed to achieve this goal of gender equality mainstreaming.

For the DAC purpose code, for the last year in which data is available (2015), Canada reported that only 2.1% of its bilateral projects (includes projects through Partnerships for Development Innovation Branch as well as the Bilateral Branches) had gender equality and women's empowerment as their principal objective (i.e. the 15% goal in the Policy). A further 50.6% had these objectives as one of several objectives (where gender equality and women's empowerment was reported as "significant" (and the measure of "mainstreamed" in the Policy). Almost half (47.3%) of bilateral projects, including those in Partnerships Branch, were screened for these objectives, but the objectives were not targeted in these projects.

The Policy's overarching targets will be crucial for driving change in support of new International Assistance Policy, but given current performance indicators, there will be a need for a considerable growth in bilateral investments to achieve the 15% in particular. The 15% target will require new initiatives, not just putting some greater emphasis on these objectives in existing projects or programs (which may advance the 80% target). Using the DAC numbers for Canada, the 15% target would have required US\$450 million (Cdn\$610 million) in 2015 for bilateral projects with gender equality and women's empowerment as the principal objective, rather than the US\$64.2 million (Cdn\$87 million) reported for that year (an increase of 700%!). Meeting this target will be a considerable challenge for GAC by the end of the five-year target period.

The DAC's Creditor Reporting System gives access to project information, including a description of the objectives, for all projects marked for gender equality and women's empowerment. To ensure robust accountability, it may be important to review the major projects that Canada is marking for

“significant” objective, in order to determine the degree to which there is indeed mainstreaming of gender equality in these projects.

3. Increased support for local organizations and movements that advance women’s rights

The Policy makes a very important commitment “to support and expand this work [in gender equality], Canada will dedicate \$150 million over five years to support local organizations that advance women’s rights in developing countries”. [page 11] It will do so, so that these organizations “can better advocate for changes in policies, legislation and services; and so that they can more effectively challenge harmful and discriminatory social beliefs and practices.” [page 11] Feminist organizations devoted to advancing gender equality will be essential to ensuring progress for the Policy’s goals (and SDG Five) in developing countries and in Canada, as leading partners for GAC.

This commitment is very welcomed, but at the same time, it is not entirely clear what is included in “local organizations that advance women’s rights in developing countries”. To what degree are these “women’s rights organizations” and/or “organizations that are supporting women’s rights”. According to the latest GAC Statistical Report (for 2015/16), there was only a mere \$4.55 million in disbursements of Canadian ODA directed to “women’s equality organizations and institutions.” Currently these disbursements were ‘bits and pieces’ in programs supported by Canada. None of the 2015/16 disbursements were made from any GAC bilateral program; they mainly came from ODA allocated to multilateral institutions, the World Bank, and IDRC. So, significant change in GAC current priorities will be needed to achieve this essential target.

Women’s rights organizations, whose primary purpose is to promote women’s rights, are crucial actors for both advocacy and in programming for gender equality and women’s rights in their respective areas and countries. But how is this important recognition of organizations advancing women’s rights reflected in the Action Areas? The Policy is very uneven in this regard. For health and nutrition (a major area of programming), education, economic growth, and even for the most part, in the area of inclusive governance, the agency of women’s rights organizations is not even mentioned. In other action areas there are references, albeit sometimes oblique:

“To better amplify women’s voices around the world, Canada will collaborate with partners to pilot, design and champion new and innovative ways of working with local organizations that advance women’s rights.” [page 9]

“Canada will work with local and national women’s groups to involve women and girls in program design, delivery, and monitoring of humanitarian assistance.” [page 16]

“It is especially important ... that women and girls be given an active role in designing and developing strategic responses to climate change,” although the means by which this will happen is not stated. [page 19]

“Support the protection of women’s human rights defenders” by “listening to their concerns and advocating for their safety and security, as well as their ability to continue their vital work in support of greater gender equality.” [page 22]

“Support the meaningful participation of women and women’s rights organizations in peace

negotiations and conflict prevention efforts. This will be accomplished through a combination of targeted support to local women’s organizations and programming to help women strengthen their mediation and negotiating skills and expertise so that they can more fully participate in – and influence – peace negotiations.” [page 24]

A more coherent strategy for implementing this important objective, along with transparent criteria for allocating the \$30 million in annual resources, would be welcome.

4. A human rights based approach to programming “feminist” Canadian bilateral aid?

The Policy suggests that it “represents a significant evolution in how we [GAC] work.” [page 26] Earlier it states, “Canada is committed to providing international assistance that is human rights based and inclusive.” [emphasis added, page 9] It clearly acknowledges that women’s rights are human rights. But unfortunately, nowhere does the Policy coherently spell out what a human rights based approach (HRBA) implies for changing the way GAC works and improving its effectiveness to address gender equality and women’s rights. Canadian CSOs have long argued that the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act calls for a human rights based approach.

As a legislative obligation, the Policy acknowledges that “Canada’s *Official Development Assistance Accountability Act* (ODAAA) requires that all official development assistance contributes to poverty reduction, takes account the perspectives of the poor, and is consistent with international human rights standards.” [page 27] Yet this is only an isolated statement in the Policy; it says nothing about how GAC intends to implement its Action Areas in ways that explicitly respect these tests through a human rights based approach. Nevertheless some elements of a HRBA are at least implicit in different aspects of the Areas for Action, but not in others.

A human rights based approach for GAC’s international assistance programming should provide direction for both the content and the process for determining priorities and implementation. Key elements should include:⁶

- Non-discrimination Canadian ODA programs must give priority to the needs and circumstances of the most marginalized for various sectors in which GAC works, and GAC programs must avoid actions that discriminate based on human rights standards.

The Policy is intended to represent “a shift towards a focus on the poorest and most vulnerable,” [page 10] “including those living in fragile context.” [page 31]. However, there is no outline of changes in GAC practices that suggest how GAC country and global assistance programs identify and take account the needs of the most vulnerable women and girls in a given context. The focus, derived from SDG One, is on extreme poverty (destitution); however there is no notice given to the broader measure of poverty, conditions which continue to affect the lives of hundreds of millions of people across

⁶ Derived from Brian Tomlinson, 2010. “An Overview: An Agenda for Change – Implementing the ODA Accountability Act,” in *A Time to Act – Implementing the ODA Accountability Act: A Canadian CSO Agenda for Aid Reform*, CCIC, accessible at http://www.ccic.ca/files/en/what_we_do/002_aid_2010_05_a_time_to_act_e.pdf

developing countries (SDG 2).⁷

In some Action Areas, however, there are hints at approaches that stress the importance of working with the most vulnerable. While such a shift would be welcome and at the core of a HRBA, without clear directions and mandated methodologies for GAC country programmers and partners to identify the needs and circumstances of the most vulnerable, in ways that ensure their meaningful participation and voice (see below), this dimension of the Policy may easily become a meaningless “checked box.”

One measure that is explicit in the Policy is Canada’s commitment to transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Policy makes an important commitment that by 2021/22 [i.e. in five years] no less than 50% of Canada’s bilateral assistance is directed to Sub-Saharan Africa, where half the world’s extreme poor, live. Currently, according to GAC’s Statistical Report for 2015/16, 40.3% of bilateral ODA [less the in-Canada support for refugees and students] was disbursed to Sub-Saharan Africa (and 42% of GAC bilateral aid). This performance is already relatively close to achieving the Policy target, but with what emphasis on the poorest and most marginalized in Sub-Saharan Africa?

- Due diligence Access by the most marginalized to their rights should be systematically considered as the basis for determining the priorities for Canadian ODA. Various Canadian commercial and foreign policy interests are not to be the basis for allocating ODA. Canadian ODA initiatives should be designed not only to not undermine rights [do no harm], but also to proactively promote capacity and access to rights.

GAC has already in place practical guidance documents for assuring that the three criteria of the ODAAA, including consistency with international human rights standards, are met.⁸ Taken together and if implemented, they would go a long way in assuring due diligence in assessing consideration of the rights of the most vulnerable. But there is no reference to these directives in the Policy and no accessible evidence that they were ever implemented.

In relation to Canadian commercial and foreign policy interests, the Policy in fact calls for “better integration of development and other objectives, such as trade” which “can have positive economic effects for developing countries – and for Canada.” [page 27] The Policy however does commit “to strengthening our policy framework to ensure Canadian companies reflect Canadian values, respect human rights and operate responsibly, particularly in operations in developing countries where Canada is providing international assistance.” [page 27]

⁷ See the discussion of patterns of global poverty in Brian Tomlinson, “Global Aid Trends, 2016 Financing Agenda 2030: Where are the resources?” in Reality of Aid, Global Report 2016, accessible at <http://aidwatchcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Final-Global-Aid-Trends-2016.pdf>

⁸ “Official Development Assistance Accountability Act – Contributing to poverty reduction,” “Official Development Assistance Accountability Act – Taking into account the perspectives of the poor,” and “Official Development Assistance Accountability Act – Consistency with international human rights standards,” See <http://international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/odaaa-lrmado/index.aspx?lang=eng>.

A key mechanism for promoting private sector investment in developing countries will be the newly resurrected Development Finance Institution. The Policy calls for attention to the needs of women entrepreneurs in the Institution, but fails to address critical issues about how the DFI will reflect the criteria of the ODAAA in its business plan and modalities of operation, consistent with a human rights based approach and a feminist assistance policy.⁹

In a worrying trend, already seen in climate finance assistance, the Policy calls for increased use of “repayable contributions” (i.e. loans) in Canada’s aid program, particularly in relation to women entrepreneurs. Canada had been among the leading donors that had abandoned in 1986 the use of loans as an inappropriate modality for delivering aid for the poorest people. What is GAC’s assessment now regarding the reassertion of this modality in Canadian ODA and climate finance for the ability of small-scale initiatives by marginalized populations and the poorest countries to repay ODA-based loans? There is evidence of a reappearance of a debt crisis for some of the poorest countries, for which ODA loans in these countries only can exacerbate.¹⁰

- Participation of affected populations Canadian ODA programs should take account and actively build the capacities and opportunities for affected populations to participate in all dimensions of development affecting their lives.

GAC’s ODAAA guidance note, “[Taking account the perspectives of the poor,](#)” provides some practical ways in which GAC can ensure participation of affected populations, and in particular marginalized communities of women and girls. Support for local women’s rights organizations, particularly those whose constituencies are women and girls living in poverty or otherwise marginalized, will be an effective way to support and take account their perspectives in shaping appropriate country development strategies and Canadian interventions.

Efforts to promote women entrepreneurs, enabling access to capital and markets, and vocational training can support and strengthen economic leadership and women’s empowerment. But in doing so, a human rights based approach requires deliberate due diligence with respect to impacts of ODA-supported private sector initiatives on the rights of marginalized women and their communities, on small scale agriculture in which women can be a key participant, and on access to decent work beyond the insecurity of the urban informal economy.

Agenda 2030 call on all countries to create opportunities for inclusive processes for determining and implementing country priorities for the SDG. Canada is focusing on SDG Five, gender equality and women’s rights. In what ways do Canada’s country programs

⁹ For an international civil society analysis of ODA and blended finance see <http://www.eurodad.org/Entries/view/1546703/2017/02/13/Blended-Finance-What-it-is-how-it-works-and-how-it-is-used>

¹⁰ See <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/sep/21/united-nations-unctadwarns-debt-crisis-poor-developing-countries-oil-prices> and <http://www.eurodad.org/statement-FfD-UN>

promote inclusive policy dialogue on issues in gender equality at the country level? How is Canada empowering women's voices at the country level, particularly from poor and marginalized communities, in these dialogues?

- Support for rights which enable civic engagement Canadian ODA should enable access to information, promote the rights to organize, to freedom of speech, and to access development processes and resources, as well as access to institutions and mechanisms for redress (where rights have been adversely affected).

Support for the protection of women's human rights defenders is an important commitment in this Policy. [page 22] CSOs also welcome the notion that "the government benefits from a robust ecosystem of civil society partners." [page 30] But attacks on women human rights defenders is the only reference to wide-spread conditions of shrinking and closing civil society space, which significantly limit CSO roles in development in many countries. CIVICUS documents worsening conditions in 106 countries where civic space is being seriously constrained, representing over half the membership of the United Nations. In 2017, such conditions appear to be the norm, not the exception as may have been the case in previous years.¹¹

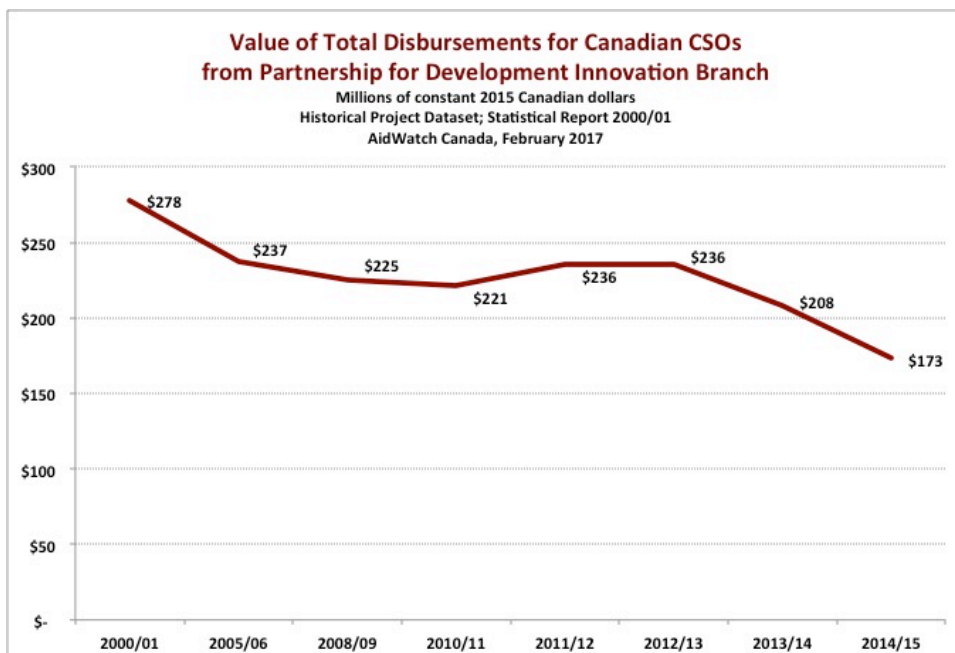
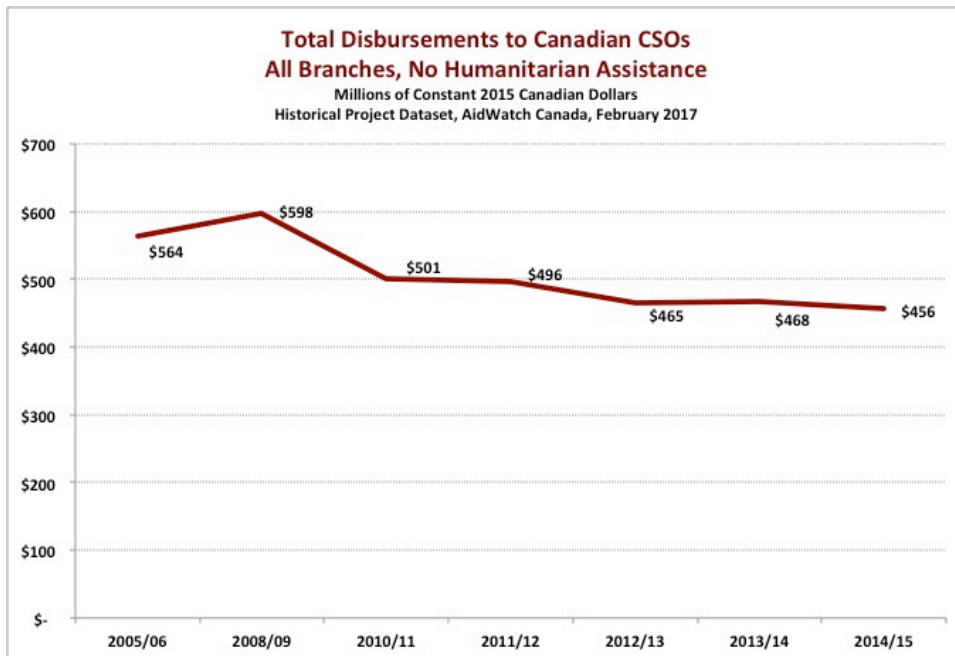
Support for organizations promoting women's rights will be undermined if there is no corresponding material and diplomatic support from Canada for reversing this closing civic space. Action is required to support organizations facing regressive laws and regulations, restrictions on funding, and limited spaces for multi-stakeholder and government fora for policy dialogue and advocacy.

It may well be that Canada is continuing its efforts in support of an enabling environment for CSOs, as reflected in this country's continued role on the Working Group on Promoting and Protecting Civil Society in the Community of Democracies and in the Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment, neither of which are mentioned. It is also reflected in the International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Civil Society Partnership Policy. The latter may need some alignment with this new International Assistance Policy. [page 30] But such alignment should not undermine the positive action agenda identified in the current version of the policy. There has been increasing discouragement among Canadian CSOs that the Liberal Government has seemingly ignored the need for its systematic implementation, and has yet to fulfill the CSO Policy requirement for annual accountability with Canadian CSOs.

The already-announced \$100 million fund, over five years, for small and medium Canadian CSOs is welcome news. Nevertheless, now more than two years into the mandate of this government, there is no indication of systematic reforms in GAC's funding modalities with civil society as called for in the Civil Society Policy. There is only a vague promise of an updated Policy.

¹¹ CIVICUS, 2017. "Executive Summary," State of Civil Society Report, accessible at <http://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2017>

Clearly the government sees civil society as a critical partner in implementing the International Assistance Policy, and there are indications throughout the different Action Areas where CSOs can engage. But such engagement will be substantially more effective if there are diverse and transparent funding mechanisms, real opportunities for dialogue on a transparent roll out of the International Assistance Policy in the different Areas, and deliberate support for learning and accountability between GAC and civil society in relation to the Policy's ambitious objectives. As the chart below, this renewed engagement with CSOs must also be reflected in reversing the trends in the value of GAC's support for CSOs through all Branches (excluding humanitarian assistance) and the dedicated Partnerships for Development Innovations Branch.



- Effective aid policies and practices Canadian ODA must explicitly support mechanisms of accountability and redress that are rooted in democratic ownership by citizens in developing countries over the policies and decisions that affect their lives (including but not exclusively through government). Public access to relevant and timely information on the purpose, priorities and terms of Canadian ODA allocations is essential.

The main Policy messages in its section on strengthening aid effectiveness focus on 1) leveraging aid for private investment through loans and the Development Finance Institution, 2) more integrated assistance with other aspects of Canadian foreign policy, 3) streamlining funding and reporting procedures for more responsive assistance, and 4) improved transparency for the International Assistance Envelope on an annual basis (but not a three-year forward projection that is the practice of most Federal departments such as National Defence).

Given Canada's recent seat on the Steering Committee of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), it is inexplicable and troubling that there is not even a reference in the Policy to the globally agreed development effectiveness principles, let alone an outline of how Canada is implementing these principles. These principles and accompanying commitments were agreed by the global community, including Canada, in Busan in 2011, reaffirmed in Mexico in 2014, and in Nairobi in 2016.¹²

How will Canadian aid practices in determining and delivering its support for gender equality and women's rights, for example, be consistent with the principle of developing country ownership of their own development priorities?

The Policy suggests, for example, greater efforts in strengthening legal systems and reforms relating to discrimination against women and girls and in supporting the capacities of governments to deliver public services that meet the needs of women and girls, all excellent goals for Canada. At the same time, there are complex socio-cultural and political issues in addressing these concerns in many developing countries. What are Canada's strategies, in this context, for addressing the principle of "country ownership" and results "aligned with the priorities and policies set out by developing countries themselves"?¹³ This is not to argue that donor priorities for gender equality cannot be aligned with country ownership, but the Policy takes little notice of these issues in its implementation.

Other areas of aid effectiveness should have been acknowledged and briefly discussed. The creation of the Development Finance Institution, and greater use of loans in climate finance, can easily lead to greater tying of Canadian aid to Canadian business interests

¹² See the various outcome documents setting out these commitments:

<http://www.oecd.org/development/effectiveness/>

¹³ In the outcomes of the latest country monitoring for the Global Partnership Canada received only a middle of the road ranking in alignment of its project objectives with country plans and strategies, which may be in tension with Canada's gender equality goals. See <http://effectivecooperation.org/monitoring-country-progress/explore-monitoring-data/>

through loan and investment guarantee mechanisms. How is Canada going to mitigate these risks and not backslide on its commitment to fully untie aid de jure and in practice? How is Canada strengthening accountability with partner country counterparts? What has been the experience and impact of the several Mutual Accountability Agreements for Development Cooperation with governments in Africa where Canada has a major program (Senegal and Ghana for example)? These are all important issues in determining Canada's coherence with internationally recognized principles for aid effectiveness, which are seemingly ignored in the International Assistance Policy.

5. But where does development cooperation fit in Canadian foreign policy?

The Policy argues that “when it comes to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, a more integrated approach is needed – one that also includes diplomacy, trade and expertise of a wide range of Canadian government departments and agencies.” [page 27] The Policy acknowledges that such an approach is consistent with Agenda 2030, “which recognizes that global challenges are connected and require coordinated responses.” [page 27]

A coherent focus on gender equality and women's empowerment in Canadian foreign policy would indeed position Canada's progressive place in the world and in implementing Agenda 2030. So how are the goals and broad Action Areas of this new International Assistance Policy reflected in the overarching foreign policy statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs on Canada's foreign policy priorities, delivered in Parliament only days before the release of the Policy? Unfortunately, at best, they are reflected at the margin in passing rhetoric and are largely invisible in the orientation put forward by Minister Freeland.¹⁴

While the Minister states towards the end of her speech, “we will put Canada at the forefront of this global effort [of gender equality],” there is no reference where these feminist goals, and Canada's development cooperation more generally, fit within the means and priorities of Canada's foreign policy. They appear as an insignificant side-line to Canada's main focus on efforts to take “active role in the preservation and strengthening of the global order from which we have benefited so greatly.” Yet this is a global order that many would argue sustains global inequalities and leaves hundreds of millions of people living in poverty, to which Canada and the global community in 2015 committed to “leave no one behind”.

The Minister does refer to global poverty, but in the context of threats facing Canada: “Civil war, poverty, drought and natural disasters anywhere in the world threaten us as well—not least because these catastrophes spawn globally destabilizing mass migrations [emphasis added].”

The inter-connectedness of the world and Agenda 2030 is acknowledged in passing, but the implications of Agenda 2030 for Canada's defence, diplomatic and development agenda is seemingly not a part of a defining statement of Canada's foreign policy. The integration of CIDA into Global

¹⁴ Address by Minister Freeland on Canada's foreign policy priorities, June 6, 2017, accessible at https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/address_by_ministerfreelandoncanadasforeignpolicypriorities.html

Affairs Canada in 2013 was to be the foundation for an integrated foreign policy in which commitments to development, with the latter guided by the ODAAA, were to be a critical part of Canada's foreign policy alongside diplomacy, trade and defence. But seemingly not in this expression of Canadian foreign policy!

Canada is supporting a global order that has "at its heart the core notions of territorial integrity, human rights, democracy, respect for the rule of law, and an aspiration to free and friendly trade," all important values and orientations, but seemingly cooperation for development is not one of them. Lester B Pearson is acknowledged for his contribution to peacekeeping, but forgotten in his role in establishing a shared goal for aid as a global responsibility – the UN-mandated target of 0.7% of a provider's GNI. The vision of the Global South, in this expression of Canada's foreign policy, is "countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia" that "are on the ascendant." Seemingly hundreds of million of people living in destitution and many more millions living in desperate conditions of poverty in these countries do not enter Canada's picture of an ascendant Global South.

Development cooperation appears to be invisible at the highest level of this government, except perhaps where the government may want to situate itself to take credit for a "signature initiative" on the global stage. Where does this marginalization of development cooperation leave the ambitious goals of Canada's first "Feminist International Assistance Policy"? Its achievements will depend upon a concerted government-wide effort in implementation, embedded in Canada's foreign policy strategies, guided by a human rights based approach, with the required strategies and resources for real transformative change for women and girls' rights and empowerment. Canadian CSOs and the global community will be watching closely as Canada lives up to its unique feminist International Assistance commitments in the coming five years.