Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance – A Feminist Approach

Purpose

Global Affairs Canada's policy on Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance (referred to as the Civil Society Partnerships Policy or the Policy) sets out the Department's approach to enhancing effective cooperation with Canadian, international and local[Footnote 1] civil society organizations (CSOs) to maximize the impact and results of Canada's international assistance and foster a strong and vibrant civil society sector. To that effect, the Policy outlines the guiding principles for and overall objectives of Canada's engagement with CSOs.

Introduction

Canada's objective is to reduce extreme poverty, and build a more peaceful, inclusive and prosperous world. Consistent with its Feminist International Assistance Policy, Canada sees the empowerment of women and girls and gender equality as the most effective way to achieve this objective. Fostering strong partnerships with civil society and a safe and enabling environment in which they can work are essential to achieving these objectives. Civil society organizations have their own diverse purposes, priorities, capacities and constraints. They bring valuable and unique experience, and they make important contributions to achieving more effective results, fostering new ideas, building local capacity and engaging with Canadians as global citizens. Global Affairs Canada will therefore work with CSOs and other actors to implement a feminist approach across all its international assistance programs, prioritizing those partnerships, innovations and advocacy activities that have the greatest potential to close gender gaps and advance the government's priority objectives. Thus, during the lifespan of this policy, the Department commits to continuous dialogue with CSOs on what it means to have a feminist approach to partnerships. A feminist approach challenges us to assess how we do things and recognizes the many interconnected factors that affect women, men, girls and boys differently.

Canada's commitment to advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, at home and abroad, is a key entry point for partnerships with CSOs. Canada views making progress under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, Achieve gender equality and empowering all women and girls[Footnote 2], as essential in driving progress on the other SDGs.

The Civil Society Partnerships Policy is built upon lessons from international best practices and a long history of partnership between the Government of Canada and CSOs involved in international assistance.

What is civil society?

The term "civil society" refers to a wide range of non-government, non-profit, and voluntary-driven organizations, as well as social movements, through which people organize to pursue shared interests, values, and objectives in public life. These actors are found at the international,

regional, national and community levels and are recognized as independent actors in their own right.

Civil society contributes to Canadian international assistance in diverse ways that complement the roles and functions of governments, the private sector and multilateral and global organizations. For instance, CSOs pursue advocacy to drive change, provide valuable insights regarding conditions on the ground and contribute to poverty reduction, including through socioeconomic development and the delivery of services. Canada benefits from its engagement with members of civil society, who possess valuable expertise and understanding of the local context in which they operate, as we seek to effectively utilize our international assistance. Global Affairs Canada engages with Canadian, international and local CSOs through policy dialogue, consultations, program design and implementation. The overarching goal of these efforts is to advance gender equality, and the empowerment of women and girls to reduce poverty and build a more inclusive, peaceful and prosperous world for all.

In Canada and around the world, civil society:

- plays an important role as a trusted partner by implementing a range of international assistance programs, often through direct engagement with the poorest, most vulnerable, and most marginalized;
- promotes and protects the realization of gender equality, empowerment and human rights, particularly among vulnerable and marginalized communities;
- mobilizes the voice of the poorest, most vulnerable, and most marginalized, thus enhancing their capacity to realize their human rights, advocate for their interests and hold governments to account;
- challenges harmful social norms and practices;
- promotes inclusive sustainable change by addressing underlying causes of poverty or raising new issues and perspectives;
- engages in research, policy dialogue and advocacy on issues of importance to international assistance objectives;
- pilots alternative ways of working, and uses innovative approaches and technologies to address challenges at the international, regional and local levels;
- provides basic services, enhances resilience and builds capacity in the areas of health, education, social protection, and environmental sustainability, among others;
- acts as honest brokers in situations of conflict among government, private sector and communities;
- helps build trust and social cohesion, which is particularly important in rebuilding communities affected by or at risk of political violence, radicalization to violence, armed conflict or ethnic strife;
- responds to the impact of natural disasters, and climate change, acute food insecurity, and complex humanitarian crises through principled and coordinated humanitarian action;

- spearheads the engagement of individual Canadians to become global citizens and raises awareness of and involvement in international development;
- co-invests in economic endeavours and facilitates public–private partnerships; and
- helps to finance development by raising funds and volunteer services directly from the Canadian public and private sectors.

Guiding principles

Global Affairs Canada's engagement with CSOs in international assistance will be guided by its Feminist International Assistance Policy, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act (where applicable to Canada's international assistance programming), a human rights-based approach and recognizing the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness.

Feminist International Assistance Policy: Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy identifies six action areas as drivers of transformative change to reduce poverty for everyone and build a more inclusive, peaceful and prosperous world:

1. gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, which is the core action area;
2. human dignity;
3. growth that works for everyone;
4. environment and climate action;
5. inclusive governance; and
6. peace and security.

In placing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the heart of its international assistance priorities, Canada recognizes women and girls as powerful agents of change, driving stronger economic growth, encouraging greater peace and cooperation, and improving the quality of life for their families and communities.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Canada recognizes that inclusive, multi-stakeholder partnerships are essential to achieving sustainable global development, and that resources from all sectors need to be mobilized to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. SDG 17, Partnerships for the goals, clearly articulates the importance of this critical element.

This commitment to partnerships builds upon previous commitments made by government and civil society, such as the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness, the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States and the Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship[Footnote 4]. Canada recognizes CSOs as independent actors in their own right, acknowledges the importance of supporting an enabling environment for civil society and supports CSOs in achieving greater development effectiveness. The partnership principles of inclusivity, transparency and accountability, results and ownership, as well as mutual respect and a commitment for learning, will form a foundation to achieving these international commitments.

Official Development Assistance Accountability Act: The majority of Canada's international assistance is composed of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and is subject to the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act.Where applicable, Global Affairs Canada's engagement with CSOs will align with the Act's requirements to contribute to poverty reduction, consider the perspectives of the poor and be consistent with international human rights standards. To ensure sustainability of results, Global Affairs Canada's international assistance programming will continue to support CSO-led initiatives that produce enduring results, that is, results that can be locally sustained when external funding comes to an end.

Human rights-based and inclusive: Canada is committed to supporting international assistance policies and programs that are grounded in a human rights-based approach. Human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, and transparency and accountability are integrated in Canada's international assistance. These rights must be protected in both physical and online spaces, and Canada will continue to support CSO partnerships that advance these principles in all areas. Civil society promotes inclusion, protects human rights and provides a voice to hold governments accountable for delivering public services, defending the rule of law and promoting participation and inclusive decision-making at all levels.

Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness: The Istanbul Principles form part of the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness. The eight principles, developed by and for civil society to assist organizations in achieving greater development effectiveness, address:

1. a commitment to human rights and social justice;
2. gender equality and equity;
3. people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation;
4. environmental sustainability;
5. transparency and accountability;
6. equitable partnerships and solidarity;
7. creating and sharing knowledge and committing to mutual learning; and
8. realizing positive sustainable change.

Objectives

Global Affairs Canada's civil society partners are recognized as essential actors in helping advance Canada's feminist international assistance priorities. Guided by the above principles, Global Affairs Canada will work with CSOs in collaboration with national governments, the private sector, multilateral organizations, the research community and other actors to pursue the following policy objectives and achieve gender transformative change that reduces poverty and contributes to building a more inclusive, peaceful and prosperous world.

1. Empower women and girls, promote gender equality, and reach the poorest, most vulnerable and most marginalized as the most effective means to reduce poverty: Recognizing that women and girls are diverse and powerful agents of change, Canada's partnerships aim to support and

build on their strength and innovative contributions to reduce poverty for all. Canada will work with CSOs, including local women's organizations and other partners, to tackle the root causes of gender inequality and address the systemic discrimination that prevents women and girls from realizing their human rights and reaching their full potential, recognizing that inequalities exist along intersectional lines.

To reduce poverty and ensure sustainable and transformative change, all members of society must be empowered to reach their full potential and exercise their human rights. Greater gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls can deliver strong economic growth, reduce chronic hunger, help cut down extreme poverty, lead to longer-lasting peace, benefit entire families and help empower those who face discrimination. Men and boys must also be engaged in the fight for greater gender equality, take opportunities to advocate and lead by example by respecting the rights and interests of women and girls. Civil society provides a vehicle for the voices of the poorest, most vulnerable and most marginalized–including children and youth, seniors, persons with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced people, Indigenous peoples, religious groups, ethnic communities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit and intersex (LGBTQ2I) people–to be heard by their governments and for individuals to hold their leaders to account.

In support of its Feminist International Assistance Policy, Canada launched the Women's Voice and Leadership Program. This targeted initiative allocates $150 million over a five-year period (2017 to 2022) to respond to the needs of local women's organizations in developing countries that are working to advance the rights of women and girls, and promote gender equality.

Action Area examples:

- Global Affairs Canada will work with CSOs and other partners to empower citizens to participate in and assume ownership of their civil, political, social and economic development and protect and promote their human rights.

- Global Affairs Canada will ensure that closing gender gaps and overcoming barriers for women and girls as a means to reduce poverty and achieve Canada's feminist international assistance goals are key considerations in the selection of the Department's partners and program investments and at all stages of the programming process.

- CSO partners will ensure that:
    1. women and girls are consulted and engaged at all stages of program design, implementation and evaluation;
    2. decisions on project focus respond to their specific inputs; and
    3. women are actively involved and participate in implementation and decision-making.

- Global Affairs Canada will collaborate with partners to pilot, design and champion new and innovative ways of working with women's organizations and movements to advance women's rights.

- Global Affairs Canada will support women's organizations and movements of various sizes, particularly in activities that contribute to raising the leadership, visibility, influence, capacity and access of women and girls in the context of international assistance.
- Global Affairs Canada will work with CSOs to address the specific challenges women and girls face, including support for the meaningful participation of women, women's organizations and networks in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, post-conflict state building and preventing and addressing sexual violence, as described in Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

2. Facilitate a safe and enabling environment for civil society: In Canada and other countries, an empowered civil society is a crucial component for championing positive transformative change, including gender equality, inclusion, respect for diversity and human rights, peace and security, and development. The sustainability of international assistance investments, and consequently effective contribution to poverty reduction, depends on the ability of populations to hold governments to account over the long term. For civil society to thrive, it must operate in a safe and enabling environment that promotes inclusive, transparent and accountable institutions, respects human rights and where the rule of law protects and promotes the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Increasingly, it is important that this enabling environment extends from physical to online spaces as well, which are often the locus of public debate and mobilization. Many actors, including governments, have a role to play in creating an enabling environment for civil society to operate effectively and independently. This includes understanding and mitigating the distinct barriers and risks faced by civil society entities, including human rights defenders and women's, LGBTQ2I, youth and Indigenous organizations and networks.

- Action Area examples: Global Affairs Canada will work, within the scope of the Department's mandate, to engage a wide array of new, existing and non-traditional Canadian, international and local stakeholders to facilitate an enabling environment for civil society. Global Affairs Canada will work, within the scope of the department's mandate, to facilitate a safe and enabling environment for women's organizations and women's rights defenders.
- Global Affairs Canada will leverage the full scope of Canada's diplomatic assets to promote and protect an enabling environment for civil society, particularly for women's organizations, including through advocacy and public mobilization activities.
- Global Affairs Canada will take leadership in promoting and protecting an enabling environment for civil society, for example, through its participation in the Community of Democracies[Footnote 5] and other forums.
- Global Affairs Canada will identify trends and potential areas for positively influencing the enabling environment for civil society as part of its regular country human rights reporting.
- Global Affairs Canada will work to ensure that the Policy informs other relevant departmental policies and programs.

3. Protect human life and dignity: Global Affairs Canada's humanitarian assistance programming aims to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain the dignity of people affected by conflicts, acute food insecurity and natural disasters by providing principled, timely and needs-based responses. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the need for complementarity between security, humanitarian action and development programming in protracted and complex crises. The Department also recognizes the importance of international humanitarian law and the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity.

Humanitarian CSOs are an essential element of Canada's response to humanitarian crises around the world, and women's organizations play a unique role in addressing the needs and rights of women and children, and their communities, in humanitarian situations.

Action Area examples:

- Global Affairs Canada will work with humanitarian CSOs to promote and protect humanitarian principles collectively, and address key humanitarian policy and operational issues, including gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Global Affairs Canada will increase the proportion of Canada's humanitarian assistance that is provided through local and national CSOs, including local women's organizations, using mechanisms such as country-based pooled funds, in line with Canada's Grand Bargain[Footnote 6] commitment to support the "localization" of humanitarian assistance.
- Global Affairs Canada will work with humanitarian CSOs to invest in and report on sex and age disaggregated data and analysis to deliver more effective responses to humanitarian crises.
- Global Affairs Canada will work with humanitarian CSOs to integrate gender equality and human rights-based approaches in humanitarian assistance to support community preparedness for, and ensure effective responses to, humanitarian crises, while responding to the unique needs of women and girls.
- Global Affairs Canada will facilitate capacity building and organizational development and learning among humanitarian partners.

4. Foster CSO leadership in innovation: Innovation[Footnote 7] presents tremendous opportunities to maximize the impact of Canada's international assistance and advance Canada's priorities. Global Affairs Canada, therefore, looks to CSOs to collaborate within and outside the sector to propose and adopt innovative approaches to international assistance, to deliver results more effectively and efficiently. This includes local CSOs, given their important role in generating locally driven, innovative solutions that reflect local priorities and approaches and that are, therefore, often most enduring.

Action Area examples:

- Global Affairs Canada will work with CSOs and other partners, through programming, to incubate innovative ideas, test promising initiatives, adapt, replicate and scale up those

solutions with the potential for widespread impact and effectiveness, while accounting for the gender dimensions of innovations.

- Global Affairs Canada will adapt mechanisms to facilitate innovation through modernized business tools and processes with a range of CSO partners.
- Global Affairs Canada will work with CSOs and other stakeholders to facilitate knowledge-sharing regarding best practices and processes in development innovation, including innovations that are informed by gender analysis.

5. Integrate the role of CSOs as independent actors into international assistance programming: Global Affairs Canada recognizes CSOs as independent actors that provide resources, expertise and networks that help achieve Canada's international assistance objectives. Canada understands the importance of considering a diversity of perspectives in international assistance programs and strategies, and is committed to deepening, extending, and operationalizing principles of democratic ownership.

The International Assistance Review (IAR) provided an opportunity to discuss how Canada can establish more productive partnerships with a broader range of stakeholders, and ensured that Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy was informed and shaped by CSOs. Canada commits to building upon the networks strengthened during the IAR and to leveraging new and diverse partnerships with CSOs to support Canada's international assistance

- Action Area examples: Global Affairs Canada will maintain active engagement with diverse Canadian, international and local CSOs, through regular formal and informal policy dialogue to seek their perspectives on Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy.
- Global Affairs Canada will support a broad range of CSO partners to ensure a diverse civil society is represented through Canada's international assistance.

6. Establish more predictable, equitable, flexible, and transparent funding mechanisms: To support a robust CSO ecosystem, Global Affairs Canada is committed to working with CSOs of diverse size and scale, sector and region to achieve Canada's international assistance priorities and empower women and girls and promote gender equality. While the Department engages with civil society in many forms, funding is recognized as a component of this engagement.

The Small and Medium Organizations for Impact and Innovation initiative allocates $100 million over five years (2017 to 2022) in dedicated funding for small and medium-sized Canadian CSOs. This pilot initiative sets aside $76 million for thematic programming, $18 million for development innovation and $6 million for capacity-building/knowledge-sharing and public engagement.

Global Affairs Canada recognizes the importance of providing a variety of merit-based selection mechanisms to allow for diverse Canadian, international and local CSO partners, to plan and deliver international assistance initiatives. At the same time, Global Affairs Canada encourages CSOs to be financially independent and to seek funding from multiple sources, as this enables them to better secure their own sustainability.

Global Affairs Canada understands that equitable access to a mix of short-, medium-, and long-term funding, appropriate to the context, can enhance the achievement of international assistance outcomes and support a thriving civil society sector. Global Affairs Canada also recognizes that responsive selection mechanisms and more flexible funding can provide the impetus for innovative approaches, and that CSOs require time and effort to plan their programming.

- Action Area examples: Global Affairs Canada will streamline its international assistance selection processes and design programs that offer equitable and predictable funding opportunities for a variety of CSOs.

- Global Affairs Canada will ensure detailed and current information on existing selection mechanisms is available on the Department's website.

- Global Affairs Canada will invest in multi-year humanitarian funding to increase the ability of our humanitarian partners to respond more efficiently and effectively to humanitarian crises.

- Global Affairs Canada will streamline and accelerate procedures related to funding and reporting (including results-based and risk management) to reduce the administrative burden on partners.

7. Foster multi-stakeholder approaches to international assistance: All relevant actors, including CSOs, the private sector, the research community, multilateral organizations, national governments and other actors (such as Canadian youth and cultural communities), contribute to development in distinct and complementary ways. Global Affairs Canada is committed to supporting multi-stakeholder approaches and seeks to foster effective partnerships among these actors. Global Affairs Canada recognizes the important role that dialogue plays in facilitating mutual respect and accountability, particularly in the context of multi-stakeholder approaches.

- Action Area examples: Global Affairs Canada will work with CSOs to facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships that build on the comparative strengths of each actor and mobilize partners in pursuit of a common goal, including through engagement in international forums such as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation[Footnote 8].

- Global Affairs Canada will work to encourage dialogue and effective collaboration and partnerships between international assistance actors, including multi-stakeholder partnerships.

- Global Affairs Canada and Canadian CSOs will draw on their memberships in key multilateral and multi-stakeholder groups to work with a broad range of partners to further Canada's international assistance priorities.

8. Engage Canadians as global citizens in international assistance: Canadian CSOs are globally recognized leaders for their expertise in the areas of peace and security, humanitarian action and sustainable, transformative development. They also have a unique and positive approach to supporting local CSOs to build capacity and take ownership of their programming and results.

Their strong relationships with local CSOs, including women's organizations, strengthen Canada's engagement at the community level and enhance Canada's networks abroad. Global Affairs Canada is committed to engaging with diverse Canadian CSO partners, to build their capacity and maximize the global impact of Canada's CSO community. Establishing new Canadian CSO partnerships can increase the effectiveness of the Department's and CSOs' own international assistance efforts, and ensure that Canada's investments yield lasting results.

Canadian CSOs play a key role in expressing Canadian values and telling Canada's feminist international assistance story, which can foster global citizenship, particularly among youth, and help inspire Canadians to engage in transformative action to reduce poverty and overcome gender inequality. CSOs engage Canadians in a broader and deeper understanding of international issues, including promoting global citizenship and mobilizing citizens to participate actively in Canada's international assistance efforts.

- Action Area examples: Global Affairs Canada will, where appropriate, encourage Canadian CSOs to create pan-Canadian partnerships with global reach that can tackle major development challenges, such as gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

- Global Affairs Canada will amplify the work of CSO partners to strategically engage Canadians in international assistance through innovative digital technologies and an enhanced online presence.

- Global Affairs Canada will invest strategically in Canadian CSO public engagement activities, in Canada and abroad, that enhance visibility and raise awareness of Canada's international assistance results, as well as building citizen engagement and contributions to international assistance efforts.

9. Promote sustainability, transparency, accountability, and results: Canada is committed to sustainability, transparency and accountability. Access to comprehensive, timely information about international cooperation facilitates the coordination, monitoring and accountability necessary to achieve sustainable results. Canada is committed to being a model publisher and user of open data regarding its activities and results. It also aims to improve access to information about the activities and results of its CSO partners, including those of the local organizations supported by Canadian CSOs. Global Affairs Canada looks to all of its development partners to uphold similar transparency and accountability standards, and increase the impact of Canada's development investments.

- Action Area examples: Global Affairs Canada will work to identify opportunities to enhance transparency and accountability, including by publishing information on international assistance activities in accordance with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard and encouraging the use of IATI data by stakeholders in developing countries.

- Global Affairs Canada will work with CSO partners to establish a plan to implement these transparency and accountability standards, including capacity building.

- Global Affairs Canada will invest in policy research, better data collection, including of sex and age disaggregated data, and monitoring and evaluation approaches for gender equality, building on the experiences and best practices of other countries.

Implementation and monitoring

The Partnerships for Development Innovation Branch will coordinate Global Affairs Canada's response to the implementation of this civil society partnership policy.

While this policy identifies specific areas for action, it seeks to maintain flexibility to adapt and enhance objectives and action areas as the context warrants over time. In this vein, an implementation plan will be produced, in consultation with civil society, to enhance the effectiveness of the Policy.

Global Affairs Canada will engage with CSO representatives on an annual basis to review mutual implementation of the Policy against its objectives and action areas, discuss the evolving global and domestic CSO challenges and opportunities and exchange knowledge and good practices. The Department will work collaboratively with CSOs to establish the outline of these annual meetings and determine the priority areas for focus each year.

Conclusion

Cooperation with civil society greatly improves Canada's ability to reduce poverty and achieve transformative results with its international assistance, including the empowerment of women and girls and the achievement of gender equality. CSOs are important partners in promoting inclusive engagement and sustainable change, particularly through their work to increase the participation of individuals in the decision-making processes that affect their lives and to empower poor, vulnerable and marginalized people and communities.

Canada's support for an enabling environment for civil society helps ensure that CSOs can function effectively and independently in ways that complement the efforts of governments and other actors and facilitates the aspirations outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Global Affairs Canada will regularly engage with CSOs, including through an annual implementation meeting, to ensure the objectives outlined in the Policy are met. Together, the Government of Canada and its CSO partners will continue to be global leaders in international assistance.

Footnotes

Footnote 1: Local refers to organizations working on the ground in host countries.

Footnote 2:   For more information on the SDGs, please visit: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs

Footnote 3: This definition is derived in part from the OECD *Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness. Findings, Recommendations and Good Practice* (2009).

Footnote 4: For more information on the Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship, please visit: https://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/principles-good-practice-of-ghd/principles-good-practice-ghd.html

Footnote 5: For more information on the Community of Democracies, please visit: http://www.community-democracies.org/

Footnote 6:   For more information on The Grand Bargain, please visit: http://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/thegrandbargain.htm

Footnote 7: Global Affairs Canada defines "innovation" to include new business models, policy practices, technologies, behavioural insights, or ways of delivering products and services that benefit and empower the poor in developing countries; that is any solution with the potential to address an important development problem substantially more effectively than existing approaches.

Footnote 8: For more information on the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, please visit: http://effectivecooperation.org/