



The McLeod Group



HOW CAN GLOBAL AFFAIRS CANADA PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY?

For three decades, Canada was a respected leader in promoting gender equality as a human right, both domestically and internationally. However, over the ten years that the Harper government was in power, that reputation was squandered. The Conservatives systematically reduced funding at home and abroad for those working on gender equality, women's rights, responsibilities and access to resources, and slashed funding for access to modern methods of contraception and sex education. The Liberal government has pledged to promote women's rights in its development and foreign policies, but has not set out a concrete plan of action. Below, we propose some ways in which Canada can reclaim its global leadership as a champion of gender equality, both at home and around the world.

UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development

In 2015, at the UN General Assembly, the world's nations agreed on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The new goals include significantly stronger gender equality commitments than the MDGs. The adoption of these goals represents a critical opportunity for Canada to support the full integration of women into the 2030 global agenda for sustainable development. Research has proven over and over that empowered women and empowered communities are the best engines of development – and the best defence

against endlessly destructive cycles of despair, radicalization and violence.

These Global Goals, unlike the MDGs, are intended to be universal, applied to both developing and developed countries. On an issue like gender equality, no country has been successful in all respects, but by sharing our challenges as well as our successes, Canada can encourage others to adopt an evidence-based approach to achieving gender equality.

Making progress on the SDGs at home through strengthening transparency and supporting better data collection and analysis

Canada can exercise leadership in developing and testing gender equality indicators related to the Global Goals. Getting the evidence-based approach right is challenging, but to show progress on the post-2015 goals we need *better* data collection and analysis.

Canada has a strong international reputation in the field of statistics and could take a leadership role in the SDG agenda by setting standards to measure the impact of the full range of its policies and programs on women. Canada could establish measures to rectify unintentional exclusion, track the progress of remedial action and offer testing tools and techniques for other governments to use or adapt.

The McLeod Group works to strengthen Canada's contribution to a better world.

The McLeod Group is made up of professionals with many years of experience in government, civil society and academia, working across the fields of international development, diplomacy and foreign policy. We work with others who value human rights, inclusion, equality and sustainable development to advance Canadian policy and action on international cooperation and foreign affairs.

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By demonstrating Canada's own openness to learning, Canada wins allies. With a solid approach to defining desired impacts and current country baselines, we could measure our progress, as well as share common measures with other countries to identify best practice and to close any gaps domestically. We could work closely with development partners to build on each other's experiences – setting the foundation for mutuality in our partnerships.

Achieving the new government's ambitious agenda will take a concerted focus, resource restoration and the identification of catalytic investments at home and abroad in order to build momentum in the actions of others.

Canada could make a major contribution by working with like-minded funders on an independent evaluation mechanism. Such a mechanism could follow the model that tracks progress on "Education for All", which includes governments, academics, teachers' unions and the UN in assessing progress on education.¹

Promoting gender equality internationally

Efforts to regain a position of global leadership in promoting gender equality must go beyond the SDGs. Canada could play a useful role in the following areas:

- Provide management advice and core financial support to UN Women – the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.
- Expand Canada's efforts in maternal, newborn and child health by investing in sexual and reproductive health services, especially family planning, and encouraging other countries to increase women's autonomy through access to methods of family planning. Global Affairs Canada should also restore multi-year core financial support the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).
- Announce a reinvestment in decentralized Gender Equality and Human Rights Funds in recipient countries and regions. Such funds, created by

CIDA in the 1990s, proved their effectiveness and evaluations recommended their continuity.² They would support local and regional civil society organizations working to advance equality between women and men.

- Encourage and support networking among Canadian funded programs to scale up good practices and to provide connectivity among these organizations.
- Expand research on new sources of gender discrimination, such as technological and labour market changes; use existing and new networks to disseminate research findings on women's significant contributions to peace building, economic development and sustainability; and document best practices which support "he for she", that is, including men and boys to build positive gender relations.
- Ensure that all Canadian trade and development cooperation investments are gender intelligent – that they proactively measure the impact of Canada's interventions and take remedial action to even the playing field for girls and women. For example, in the education sector, address the issue of menstrual hygiene in schools so that puberty does not mean the end of schooling for girls.

Implications for Global Affairs Canada of a refocus on gender equality

Taking on global leadership in promoting gender equity would mean fundamental changes in how Global Affairs Canada operates. The department will need to ask itself whether it has the capacity to deliver and to report. Does it have access to the expertise needed to provide solid quality analysis? Are its missions equipped with access to local gender and equity advice?

GAC needs to look at past evaluations and action plans in the context of the new departmental structure. It will need to reassess its accountability to deliver on gender equality results. GAC should also examine the structures and systems used by high-performing peers to identify how to resource and strengthen its capacity and accountability for contributing to gender equality.

Finally, GAC needs to strengthen partnerships with that work to advance gender equality. The department could start by developing gender equality proposal calls in such areas as: advancing women's human rights; reducing forced or child marriage (i.e., marriage under the age of 18); preventing violence against women and girls; dealing with women's rights in situations of conflict; and promoting women's economic empowerment through inheritance, land rights, skills development and investment in women-owned businesses.

Advancing gender equality domestically

To become a credible actor in promoting gender equality internationally, the government needs to recommit to domestic policies that prioritize the glaring gaps that Canada still needs to address at home. The fortieth anniversary of the creation of Status of Women Canada in 1976 is an opportunity for a commitment to a national strategy for gender equality to which all

Canadian and international civil society organizations government departments contribute and for which all are held accountable. This should be aligned with the Global Goals and draw on indicators proposed by UN Women. For example, Canada may need to address the decreasing proportion of young men in post-secondary education, and support caregivers, largely women, in an aging population and one with increasing incidence of special needs children who are now living a normal lifespan.

Further, the inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women must result in a convincing program of action that also proves that Canada's practices are in line with international human rights standards.³

Together, these domestic and international actions would do much to start the process of re-establishing Canadian leadership on gender equality and as a partner of choice for countries and international agencies seeking to champion this agenda.

NOTES

¹ As described by UNESCO, "The Global Education Monitoring Report (the GEM Report, formerly known as the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*) is an editorially independent, authoritative and evidence-based annual report published by UNESCO. [...] The report does not represent the voice of one organization or group of countries. It is an international project that tracks the performance of governments, communities, civil society, bilateral donors and international agencies towards the education goal by 2030". See UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, "About us", <http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/about>.

² See Recommendation 2, Bytown Consulting and C.A.C. International, *Evaluation of CIDA's Implementation of its Gender Equality Policy* (Gatineau: CIDA, 2008), p. 23, www.oecd.org/derec/canada/42174775.pdf.

³ For more information on gaps in Canada's application of such standards, see the McLeod Group Policy Brief on "Canada, Human Rights and the United Nations", available at www.mcleodgroup.ca/mcleod-group-resources/policy-briefs/.