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International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

Canada

A FEMINIST APPROACH TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

COLLABORATION WORKSHOP

June 21-22, 2018

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Overview

Women's economic empowerment was introduced in the 1980s as a radical proposal to tackle the underlying and systemic inequalities in our economy that disadvantage, exclude and harm women. The ambition was to tackle these power imbalances to promote women's rights, gender equality and social justice.

Women's economic empowerment has experienced a resurgence, particularly in the international development space. Governments have acknowledged the critical importance of ensuring that women participate in and benefit from the economy for tackling poverty, fighting inequality and driving economic growth. Donors, including the Canadian government, are providing resources and support for the economic empowerment of women.

Oxfam Canada and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) are joining forces to convene a collaboration workshop to **identify opportunities for taking a feminist approach to, and scaled action on, women's economic empowerment**. Drawing on the complementary experience of Oxfam and IDRC, as well as the deep experience and expertise of Canadian and international participants, our ambition is to take stock of best practice and start to identify opportunities for scaled action for robust programming and Canadian leadership on women's economic empowerment.

2. Rationale

There are two key rationales for convening this workshop. First, work on women's economic empowerment that focuses almost solely on providing economic opportunities to women to promote their entry into the labour force without addressing the manifold constraints they face is not enough. Economic empowerment can also be addressed from a rights-based approach to promote and protect women's economic rights. In either approach, there must also be a focus on tackling the underlying power dynamics that disadvantage and marginalize women in the economy. Indeed, many women's rights organizations have highlighted that efforts of the international development and private sectors on women's economic empowerment have often fallen short of producing the wide-scale structural changes needed to promote gender equality and realize women's economic rights. In short, interventions and programming to promote women's economic empowerment have not always taken a feminist approach. A feminist approach requires eliminating the structural and social barriers that prevent women's achievement of their full and equal economic rights, including harmful social norms, women's unequal responsibility for unpaid care work and lack of voice in decision-making. Supporting women's organizing of and influence over gender transformative economic policies is also key, as is investing in organizations that focus on women's labour rights and collective action. This workshop will focus on best practices for taking a feminist approach to women's economic empowerment.

Second, the Canadian government is currently developing its implementation strategy and action area policies for [Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy](#). In addition, the 2018 federal budget will increase the aid budget by \$2 billion over five years. This together could position the Canadian government as a global leader on implementing transformative programming on women's economic empowerment. This workshop seeks to provide ideas and recommendations to Global Affairs Canada on how to take a feminist approach to scale up action on its programming, particularly on the growth pillar of the Feminist International Assistance Policy - "[Growth that Works for Everyone](#)".

3. Objectives

Given this context and rationale, the objectives of this workshop will be:

- Develop a shared understanding of what a feminist approach to women's economic empowerment is;
- Identify latest research and best practice on taking a feminist approach to women's economic empowerment;
- Understand Canada's approach to women's economic empowerment programming and identify global gaps and Canada's value-added globally;
- Start to identify entry points, partnerships and opportunities for scaled action, investment and global leadership by the Canadian government on women's economic empowerment and how to work together to move this agenda forward.

The Canadian government's commitment to inclusive growth, its leadership on and commitment to taking a feminist approach to policy, the Feminist International Assistance Policy and the increased Canadian aid budget mean that there is a great opportunity for Canada to take bold feminist action on women's economic empowerment. The ambition of this workshop is to provide the ideas and start to stimulate the partnerships that could enable this to happen.

4. Themes

Given the expertise of IDRC and Oxfam, our assessment of what should be prioritized to take a feminist approach to programming on women's economic empowerment, as well as emerging areas that require attention from a women's rights and gender equality perspective, the five proposed themes for the workshop are:

- **Economic rights, finance and decision making:** Addressing women's access to and control over capital (i.e. property rights and land inheritance, access to finance and control over earnings, intra-household decision making)
- **Decent work and segregation:** Implications of labour rights and labour trends (gender and occupational segregation, collective action, gig economy, automation, growing urbanization, etc.) for women's workforce participation and access to decent work.
- **The care economy:** Addressing women's disproportionate responsibility for paid and unpaid care work.
- **Social norms and women's agency:** Exploring interventions that can help to change societal behaviors and norms that disempower women and identifying ways to evaluate this change through direct and indirect measures.
- **Gender-based violence and women's economic empowerment:** Exploring the impact of gender-based violence for women's economic empowerment.

5. Format

The two-day collaboration workshop will bring together 30-40 Canadian and international stakeholders from the research community, civil society, government, multilateral organizations, philanthropic community and the private sector.

The workshop will involve a mix of short panel discussions for sharing evidence and best practice with interactive sessions that will enable participants to share expertise, experience and ideas. There will be considerable time spent in group discussions. A wrap-up session, where highlights from the workshop are shared with senior government officials, is proposed.

The workshop will differ from a conference in that it will specifically seek to foster learning, drive collaboration and stimulate partnerships for working together to support scaled and feminist action on women's economic empowerment and the growth pillar of the Canada's international assistance policy.

6. Why Oxfam and IDRC?

Oxfam Canada is a leading Canadian actor on women and the economy, working on these issues both domestically and internationally. It has also invested considerable resources in advocating for a feminist approach to Canada's international assistance. Beyond this, Oxfam International participated in the UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment in 2016-2017 and has recently published its [Conceptual Framework on Women's Economic Empowerment](#), drawing on experience in over 40 countries. Oxfam's best practice programming on women's economic empowerment is based on an

approach which recognizes: the holistic approach to women's economic empowerment which works across individual and systemic shifts, across informal and formal spaces; the importance of identifying economic entry points alongside political and social entry points, and promoting linkages with other gender equality programming; and the need for action from governments, private sector and civil society, which supports the role of women's rights organizations and the voices of women.

IDRC supports leading thinkers who advance knowledge and solve practical development problems through research. IDRC provides the resources, capacity and training they need to implement and share their solutions in order to make a real difference in people's lives. The Inclusive Economies (IE) programs at the IDRC supports growth that works for everyone and women's empowerment by focusing on economic growth, sound governance and public policies, improved capacity of southern thought leaders, and quality and accountability of health services for mothers and children. [The Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women \(GrOW\)](#) program, as part of IE, aims to strengthen the evidence base to inform social and economic policies that enhance women's economic empowerment, close gender gaps, and simultaneously promote economic growth. The ultimate goal is to enhance economic outcomes and opportunities for poor women in low-income countries.