



OXFAM REPORT 2018

# PROTECTED AND POWERFUL

Putting Resources and Decision Making Power in the Hands of Women in Conflict



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The cover of this report features Asia Bibi, a Rohingya refugee and participant in Oxfam programming in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith/Oxfam

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## **METHODOLOGY**

The statistics on Canadian humanitarian assistance are pulled from a report by the Canadian International Development Platform (CIDP), which was commissioned by Oxfam Canada. Details on CIDP's methodology can be found at [www.oxfam.ca](http://www.oxfam.ca)

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# SUMMARY

70 civil wars. 68.5 million people displaced. 730 million in extreme poverty. One person driven from their home every two seconds. For too many people around the world, life is characterized by unimaginable hardship, vulnerability and insecurity. Humanitarian crises are hard for everyone, though particularly difficult for women and girls. They face increased risk of violence, exhausting workloads to ensure their families survive and lack full control over decisions that affect the trajectories of their lives.

Evidence shows a strong link between gender equality and peace. Countries where women are empowered are vastly more secure. Helping women realize their rights in fragile countries helps prevent conflict and increases the likelihood of sustainable peace.

This paper examines the challenges women and girls face in conflict settings and recommends concrete actions that the Canadian government can take to empower women in conflict. Canada, with its feminist agenda—including its Feminist International Assistance Policy—has made a bold commitment to gender equality. Canada is well-positioned to make a strong contribution to world peace by continuing to tackle gender inequality before, during and after conflicts. To do this, the government must continue to transform the way it delivers humanitarian assistance—and adopt a coherent feminist foreign policy.

Humanitarian responses often fail to address women’s specific needs and challenges. Since women are not adequately involved in discussions on how aid is delivered, their needs aren’t prioritized and the complex drivers of conflict, which include gender inequality, go unaddressed.

To change such results, Canada must continue to invest boldly in gender-transformative humanitarian action that aims to change gender power relations and address the unique needs and challenges of women, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights and protection from gender-based violence. It must also drastically increase its support to local women’s rights actors. Women’s organizations and movements are best placed to deliver assistance that works for women and transform the gender power relations that fuel conflict in the first place.

While these changes hold tremendous potential, progress would be undermined if Canada’s other foreign policy decisions are not guided by the same feminist goals. Canada needs policy coherence across all foreign policy actions—in aid, diplomacy, trade and defence. Diplomatic interests, such as economic priorities, should never override women’s irreversible human rights. This means that Canada must take action to stop fuelling wars and gender-based violence through arms sales, step up its diplomatic support to women human rights defenders around the world, and mobilize resources and political will to implement its commitments to women, peace and security.

Gender equality is the issue of our time—the issue by which future generations will judge us. Canada is in a position to make a real difference. The time is now. Millions of women and girls affected by conflict and violence around the world are counting on it.

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

Noor, 30, fled the war in Syria with her disabled husband and two young children. They now live in a dense refugee settlement in Lebanon that resembles an impoverished slum. There they wait, in limbo, for the day they can return home.

Although life as a woman and mother is a struggle in these harsh circumstances, Noor used her teaching background to set up a school in her tent and now offers free classes to children.

‘I started with very basic resources. We even used to go to the dumpsite and gather cardboard to write on instead of notebooks because parents are poor. At first I had 15 students, but when parents heard that the school was for free, everyone was encouraged to educate their children.’

‘Even though I’m a mother and a wife and have to cook, clean and handle many tiring tasks, I’m very optimistic when it comes to those children,’ she says, sitting on the floor of her small tent that turns into a classroom every afternoon. A whiteboard stands in the corner, opposite the kitchen corner where old pots wait for her to cook the day’s main meal.

Wars and conflicts are devastating—they destroy lives and cause immense human suffering. There is no silver bullet that can make war disappear, but supporting women like Noor to realize their rights may be the closest thing we’ve got. When women are able to thrive,

and not just survive, they often work tirelessly to make sure that their children and communities thrive too. The empowerment of women is the foundation of long-term peace and stability.

While conflicts between countries have declined, civil wars and intrastate violence are on the rise. The number of civil wars has more than doubled over the past two decades—jumping from 30 in 2001 to 70 in 2016.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, conflict was the driver of most of the humanitarian crises in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Unsurprisingly, these civil wars are concentrated in poor countries.

**A STAGGERING 72% OF ALL PEOPLE LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY RESIDE IN FRAGILE COUNTRIES.<sup>3</sup>**



Noor, aged 30,  
Syrian refugee.  
Photo: Oxfam

In these places, a toxic combination of poverty, weak governance and institutions, inequality, discrimination and social unrest leaves citizens vulnerable to shocks and conflicts.

Survival in fragile and conflict-affected countries is hard. Compliance with internationally established rules of war is eroding and civilians are increasingly deliberate targets in war tactics. The number of war-related casualties globally has increased tenfold since 2005.<sup>4</sup> Millions of innocent civilians are either killed or forced to flee their homes to find safety elsewhere.

**AT 68.5 MILLION, THERE ARE MORE DISPLACED PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD NOW THAN AT ANY TIME IN HISTORY.<sup>5</sup> TODAY, SOMEONE IS DRIVEN FROM HER OR HIS HOME EVERY TWO SECONDS.<sup>6</sup>**

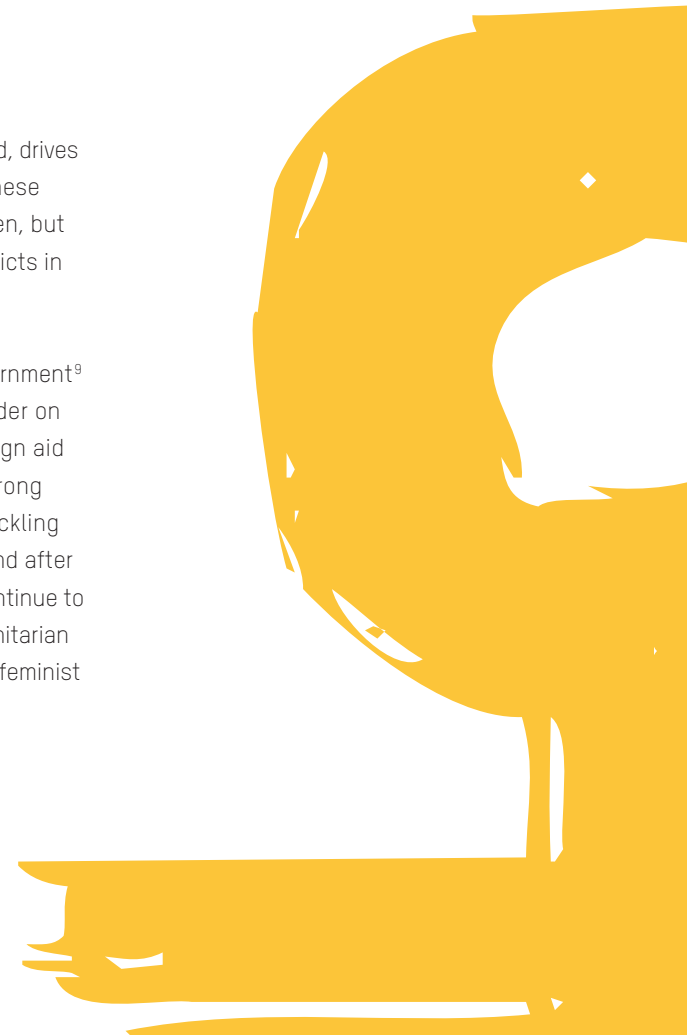
Gender inequality feeds the dominant narrative about women in war. Women are often depicted by the media, and even by humanitarian organizations, as vulnerable victims in need of protection. But this is only one side of their story. The flip side, which often goes unnoticed, is that women are strong and resilient. They have an incredible ability to adapt when their lives are turned upside down. They have skills, ambitions and solutions to the problems that they face. Every day, women like Noor keep life going in the midst of war by educating, mediating, advocating and so much more. But we rarely hear these stories.

To move beyond the idea that women in conflict are only vulnerable, we must expand how we work with them in conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance, and peacebuilding interventions. We must, without a doubt, continue to demand their protection from harm. We must also support their inherent strength and resilience.

**SUPPORTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES IS CRUCIAL BECAUSE THERE IS A STRONG LINK BETWEEN GENDER EQUALITY AND PEACE. IN FACT, GENDER EQUALITY IS THE BEST PREDICTOR OF A COUNTRY'S PEACEFULNESS—MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN ITS LEVEL OF DEMOCRACY, ETHNIC OR RELIGIOUS MAKEUP OR LEVEL OF WEALTH.<sup>7</sup>**

Gender inequality, on the other hand, drives conflict.<sup>8</sup> Focusing on gender in these contexts is not only good for women, but can also help prevent violent conflicts in the future.

With a self-declared feminist government<sup>9</sup> and an ambition to be a world leader on gender equality and feminist foreign aid and policy, Canada can make a strong contribution to world peace by tackling gender inequality before, during and after conflicts. But to do this, it must continue to transform the way it delivers humanitarian assistance—and adopt a coherent feminist foreign policy.



# 2

## CONFLICT AND FRAGILITY: WHAT DOES GENDER HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

“Give women equal rights, and entire nations are more stable and secure. Deny women equal rights and the instability of nations is almost certain. ...The subjugation of women is, therefore, a threat to the common security of our world and to the national security of our country.”<sup>10</sup>

— Hillary Clinton, *former US Secretary of State*

### 2.1 THE LINK BETWEEN INEQUALITY, GENDER AND CONFLICT

Countries affected by, or at risk of, conflict and violence are typically plagued by high levels of inequality.<sup>11</sup> They tend to have weak public services, repressive and corrupt governance and justice systems, and highly marginalized groups. As a result, a large part of a population may not see their government as legitimate. Some groups may respond to government repression and perceptions of inequality through protest, while others may turn to violence, leading to further instability.<sup>12</sup> Conflict and violence, of course, impede development. Countries characterized by these dynamics are classified as fragile. This mutually reinforcing relationship between poverty, conflict and fragility becomes a trap that is difficult for countries to escape.

To prevent conflict, understanding and addressing what drives it is important. Political, social and economic inequality between groups provides a basis for animosity and grievances.<sup>13</sup> Gender inequality interacts with these inequalities. For example, in South Sudan, high bride prices encourage cattle raiding and conflict between groups.<sup>14</sup>

Studies have found that countries with unequal family laws (marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance) are significantly more likely to experience conflict and instability.<sup>15</sup> Family laws that are heavily discriminatory towards women are a codification of male dominance. Consequences of a heavily male-dominant society include values that glorify bloodshed and war, a tendency to resolve conflict through violence, and an economic system based on raiding and accumulating personal profit

at any cost. These consequences also impede national security and stability.<sup>16</sup>

Countries with unequal family laws also experience higher levels of violence against women.<sup>17</sup> When domestic violence is widespread, children grow up considering ‘warlike’ behaviours to be normal. Then, adults are more likely to use aggression to settle disputes—with men and women alike.<sup>18</sup> Whenever violence has been normalized on a small scale, it is more likely to happen on a larger scale. Indeed, socially constructed notions of masculinity play a key role in driving conflict everywhere in the world.<sup>19</sup>

The evidence is clear: the world will not know lasting peace until there is equality between men and women. Investing in gender equality before, during and after conflicts holds tremendous potential for making the world a safer and better place.



## BOX 1

### LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS CHANGING GENDER NORMS IN REFUGEE CAMPS IN UGANDA

Jacky Aciro is a wife, mother and refugee from South Sudan. As she cares for her young children and prepares a family dinner, her husband Yoweri sits by her side, plucking greens from their stems for the meal. It's not what he was raised to do back home, but he cooks and cleans and does whatever is needed for his family in a refugee camp in Uganda.

There, Yoweri is part of a men's group organized by a Ugandan women's rights organization. Through this experience, he has come to believe in gender equality. His change in attitude has improved his relationship with his wife, he says, and she agrees. 'When your husband shares the workload with you, you feel like he cares about you,' she says. 'You feel you can trust him.'

'When I return to South Sudan, I'll take these beliefs with me,' says Yoweri. 'Now, they're a part of me.'

## 2.2 CONFLICTS IMPACT MEN AND WOMEN DIFFERENTLY

Women and men experience conflict differently. The majority of combatants are male and male civilians are often targeted or singled out during major offensives. As a result, men and boys account for the majority of those killed in conflict. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to be displaced and suffer from the challenges that go along with that status.<sup>20</sup> Their bodies are also often battlegrounds for war—women are targets of sexual violence and exploitation, which cause severe and long-term physical, psychological and social damage.

Given pre-existing social norms, gender inequality is exacerbated during displacement. This means that refugee and internally displaced women and girls are less likely than men and boys to have adequate access to food, healthcare, shelter, nationality and documentation, putting them at greater risk of insecurity and violence.<sup>21</sup> Displacement also increases the burden of care-related tasks for women, such as collecting food and water and caring for the sick and injured, since typical infrastructure is not in place.

## FOR EXAMPLE, OXFAM'S RESEARCH ON CARE WORK IN ROHINGYA REFUGEE CAMPS FOUND THAT WOMEN SPEND 72 HOURS PER WEEK ON CARE WORK, WHILE MEN SPEND ONLY FIVE.<sup>22</sup>

Expectations around unpaid care significantly impact women and girls' access to services and distribution activities in the camps as well as their ability to take on leadership roles in their communities. Such expectations also put women at increased risk: they might have to leave camps and wander into insecure territory in search of food, water and firewood or be exploited by those who have power over these supplies.

Moreover, the breakdown of law and order during conflict and displacement makes women significantly more likely to experience gender-based violence. When wars disrupt economies, the lack of livelihood opportunities puts women and girls at heightened risk of exploitation, trafficking and child marriage. For example, research

in Lebanon found that in 2015–16, child marriage rates were as high as 40% among Syrian refugees living there. This is an increase compared to rates of child marriage in Syria before the war erupted in 2011, which suggests that child marriage had become a coping mechanism to deal with economic hardship and protect young women and girls from danger and sexual violence.<sup>23</sup>

Women and girls experience heightened vulnerability in emergencies. Too often, their knowledge, skills and agency are not recognized or appreciated and their gender-specific needs and challenges are not adequately addressed. It is clear that men and women have different needs and face different challenges. 'One-size-fits-all' interventions are often biased towards men's realities and don't work for women.

## 2.3 CONFLICT CAN OPEN UP OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

Conflicts and crises radically affect social, cultural and political structures. While such events create risks for women and can exacerbate inequalities, the collapse of political and social order can paradoxically create opportunities for change. In conflict situations, for example, women can assume

prominent roles in peacebuilding and mediation and men may take on greater care responsibilities when unable to work.

Take the example of South Sudan. More than one million South Sudanese refugees have arrived in Uganda since the onset of the civil war in 2013, 85% of whom are women and children. This huge movement of people, together with the imbalance of men and women in the areas they have settled, has created opportunities to change gender roles in a significant way, especially when women's rights actors step in to support these changes. In addition to emergency interventions like distributing specialized hygiene kits for women and new mothers, local women's rights actors can lay the groundwork for more equal relationships between men and women. In South Sudan, they have organized women's groups, which have been an important source of support and empowerment, as well as men's groups to raise awareness about women's rights and promote positive masculine norms (see Box 1).

Such opportunities for change exist in many different country contexts. Research conducted by Oxfam and CARE showed that

in Yemen, men gained a new appreciation for their wives' work when war and displacement caused them to lose their livelihoods and stay home with their families. One male focus group participant in Hajjah stated: 'When we had to stay at home we saw how difficult it was for our wives to take care of all family issues, especially to get firewood and water.' Female focus group participants noted that there was also more openness to women engaging in work outside the home. One female participant reported: 'It is no longer shame for women to go for work or to go and seek food assistance from neighbours or to borrow money.'<sup>24</sup>

## **AFTER A CONFLICT, THE NEED TO REIMAGINE AND REBUILD SOCIETIES CAN CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO RENEGOTIATE DISCRIMINATORY GENDER NORMS.**

If gender equality is prioritized during and after conflicts, and if this work connects to efforts that were already underway before the crisis, it may be possible to consolidate some of the positive changes

in gender roles that occurred during an upheaval. If, on the other hand, gender equality is treated as an afterthought, long-standing patterns of inequality will return.<sup>25</sup>

Feminist aid and humanitarian assistance should capitalize on the openings created by conflict to transform gender roles and address certain underlying causes of conflict. This is called gender-transformative humanitarian action. Transforming gender roles is a project of generations that can be jump-started in moments of crisis. Taking a long-term view of humanitarian activities only makes sense given the protracted nature of most conflicts in the world today.

Gender-transformative interventions must, of course, monitor and guard against potential backlash from men. Sometimes women experience increased gender-based violence as their status in society grows, with men attempting to reassert their control through violence.<sup>26</sup> Canada is committed to a feminist approach to aid and foreign policy (see Box 2), and we urge the government to continue to tackle this complexity and explore how to seize more opportunities for change.

### **BOX 2**

## **WHAT IS A FEMINIST APPROACH TO AID AND FOREIGN POLICY?**

A feminist approach seeks to redress power imbalances between women and men and address the root causes of gender inequality. Such an approach should be intersectional, acknowledging the multiple forms of discrimination that women, in all their diversity, face. Aid and foreign policy must move beyond seeing women as beneficiaries and instead recognize, value and support their leadership, supporting women's organizations and movements. A feminist approach should strengthen women's voices and decision-making power to ensure their meaningful inclusion in processes that affect their lives and communities.

A feminist approach honours context and complexity. It involves shifting power to local women's rights actors who know their context and offer the best solutions to achieve long-term, sustainable change. Such an approach also takes care to do no harm by recognizing that gender norms create risks and disadvantages for women where there may not be any for men—and that careless programming can unintentionally worsen them.

A feminist approach is sometimes portrayed as being at odds with the humanitarian principle of impartiality, which stipulates that humanitarian aid must be provided solely on the basis of need, without discrimination. However, when a feminist approach is not applied, the status quo favours men due to deep-seated gender inequalities. A feminist approach would help rebalance this injustice.

# 3

## A FLAWED HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM: WHY A FEMINIST APPROACH IS NEEDED

“Too often, donors focus solely on supporting basic services like water, food and shelter, and overlook the particular challenges faced by women and children, some of whom are survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. This is not sustainable as humanitarian crises become increasingly protracted and complex.

— Marie-Claude Bibeau, *Canadian Minister of International Development*<sup>27</sup>

### 3.1 HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES ARE NOT CONSISTENTLY WORKING FOR WOMEN

Women and girls are the most and worst affected by conflicts and crises. At the same time, they are often shut out of discussions on conflict prevention, emergency aid and peacebuilding. Women’s exclusion means that their immediate needs in a crisis are not met and the complex drivers of conflict, which include gender inequality, are not properly addressed.

Take the current state of the response to the Rohingya crisis, for example. Since August 2017, more than 700,000 Rohingya people have fled violence in Myanmar to seek refuge across the border in Bangladesh, leading to a large-scale humanitarian crisis.<sup>28</sup> Due to pre-existing conservative gender norms in the Rohingya community, and the speed at which the crisis unfolded, many humanitarian interventions were implemented without women’s involvement. The result is a humanitarian response that does not adequately meet women’s needs (see Box 3).

#### BOX 3

### ROHINGYA REFUGEE WOMEN MISSING OUT ON VITAL AID

Interviews that Oxfam conducted with Rohingya refugee women in August 2018 indicate that more than one-third of women in refugee camps do not feel safe going to collect water or using toilets and shower cubicles, many of which lack a roof and lockable door. Three-quarters of adolescent girls say they don’t have what they need to manage menstruation, including a female-only place to wash sanitary cloths without embarrassment.

As a result, women are going hungry and thirsty to avoid needing to use the toilet, suffering abdominal pain and infections by not relieving themselves or using unhygienic sanitary cloths. ‘When I can’t get to use the latrine, I tolerate it and I hold it back and my whole body hurts and I have abdominal pain,’ says a female focus group participant. Poor lighting and rushed camp planning also increase the risk of sexual abuse and harassment. Hundreds of incidents of gender-based violence are reported each week.

Single mothers head one in six families in the camps. They face particular challenges, having to take on public roles that challenge cultural and religious assumptions about women’s place in society. Humanitarian actors and local organizations must work together to change the gender norms that make life so difficult for these women.<sup>29</sup>

Deep-seated gender inequality and a failure to include women in decision making are some of the reasons that the humanitarian system is not working for women. Yet, power dynamics between humanitarian actors and local communities are equally important. Power imbalances have contributed to, among other things, deplorable cases of sexual exploitation and abuse of women by humanitarian workers from many organizations, including Oxfam.

A feminist approach to humanitarian action should seek change both within communities affected by conflict and within the humanitarian system. Canada can achieve the former by bolstering gender-transformative programming. It can move the needle on the latter by empowering local women's rights actors.

### 3.2 LOW INVESTMENT IN GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMMING

Although Canada has a Feminist International Assistance Policy, Canadian humanitarian organizations and their partners find it difficult to secure funding for gender-trans-

formative programming. Short-term funding and a lack of funding opportunities for gender equality in humanitarian assistance are some of the biggest challenges.

The Canadian government is increasingly experimenting with multi-year funding, which gives organizations time to do more gender-transformative work. This development is positive and funding should continue to move in this direction. However, Canada prioritizes proposals that align with the main sectors of humanitarian action in the global cluster system<sup>30</sup> such as health, protection, water or shelter. Stand-alone gender programming is not a category, which means that most gender interventions in humanitarian programming are mainstreamed (see Box 4). This approach makes securing funding for gender-transformative programming very difficult.

Some gender-transformative programming is possible within the Canadian government's constraints. For instance, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programming fits under the health cluster and gender-based violence programming fits under the protection cluster. However,

humanitarian actors could do this work in a much more systematic and targeted way—especially around prevention—if stand-alone gender-transformative funding were available (see Box 5). Gender mainstreaming is crucial, but Canada must support projects that go beyond mainstreaming if it wants to invest in and support a truly feminist approach.

Given the lack of funding opportunities for gender-transformative programming, it is unsurprising that Canada's financial investment in this type of work is extremely low. In 2016—the most recent year for which data is publicly available—

**'GENDER-SPECIFIC'<sup>31</sup>  
HUMANITARIAN AID  
ACCOUNTED FOR A  
MEAGRE 0.1% OF  
CANADA'S TOTAL  
HUMANITARIAN AID.**

(see gender equality marker 3 in Figure 1).<sup>32</sup> This is the type of humanitarian aid that has gender equality as a main goal. While this 2016 data is from before the Feminist

#### BOX 4

### WHAT IS GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMMING?

Gender mainstreaming is the process of systematically integrating a gender perspective into all aspects of a program to ensure that men and women benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. For example, in April 2018, Oxfam collaborated with architecture students to work with Rohingya refugee women on user-centred designs for toilets and laundry areas. Rohingya women suggested putting a screen in front of the latrines so that the doors don't open directly to the camp, giving women and girls more privacy as they enter and leave the facilities. Two of the proposed designs were then built, to see whether women are more satisfied with them than the standard designs. This type of intervention is necessary, though doesn't tackle the root causes of gender inequality.

Gender-transformative programming, in contrast, has advancing gender equality as a primary goal. For example, in the Philippines, Oxfam addressed women's heavy and unequal responsibilities for unpaid care work through a cash-for-work program. Women who were acting as caregivers for their families after a natural disaster or conflict were included in cash programming. Their inclusion challenged social norms about what constitutes work and the value of women's roles in communities, with the goal of contributing towards gender equality over the long term.

Together, gender mainstreaming and gender-transformative programming can deliver real impacts for women in conflicts and crises.

**BOX 5**

## WHAT TYPE OF WORK COULD STAND-ALONE GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE FUNDING SUPPORT?

A feminist approach to humanitarian action should seek to transform power imbalances between men and women, ensuring equitable access to and control over resources as well as increased decision-making power for women.

Achieving these transformations in humanitarian settings requires multi-faceted approaches. Sometimes desired change can be achieved through programming. Other times, it must be achieved through broader system-level interventions.

Some concrete examples include:

- Operational and technical support to local women’s rights actors that allows them to respond to humanitarian crises or advocate for the inclusion of women’s needs and interests in responses.
- Training for local government leaders and officials, including members of the military, on gender-based violence prevention and mitigation.
- Identifying and addressing barriers to access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, such as restrictive national legal provisions that prevent access to abortion.
- Delivering a humanitarian cash-for-work program, where displaced women acting as caregivers for their families are included in cash programming.

International Assistance Policy was launched, and some laudable progress has been made since then, this small number clearly indicates that only a tiny proportion of Canadian humanitarian aid has a specific focus on gender equality. This lack of specific focus on gender equality is not unique to Canada—this is a worldwide phenomenon. However, a government with a feminist approach to international assistance should buck this trend.

Canada shouldn’t allow bureaucratic impediments to prevent it from being a leader in feminist humanitarian assistance. A solution to unlocking the potential of gender-transformative programming is for Canada to create a dedicated pool of stand-alone gender-transformative funding within its international assistance envelope. This pool should fund gender-transformative humanitarian programming and comprise at least 15% of humanitarian assistance. This pool could be used to provide more flexible and long-term funding that specifically aims to address gender inequality and meet the needs of women and girls.

A dedicated pool of funding for gender-transformative humanitarian programming would send a message that gender equality is a core part of humanitarian responses. It would also make it easier for Canada and its implementing partners to measure the effectiveness of such programming and share lessons learned. The current piecemeal approach, where gender-transformative activities must be inserted into existing project budgets, does not

result in consolidated and strategic gender-transformative programming.

Stand-alone gender-transformative funding would also allow Canada to support more local women’s rights actors, which is another key tenet of a feminist approach to humanitarian action. To understand why such support is important, it is helpful to unpack the shortfalls of the humanitarian system. Canada has made significant efforts to

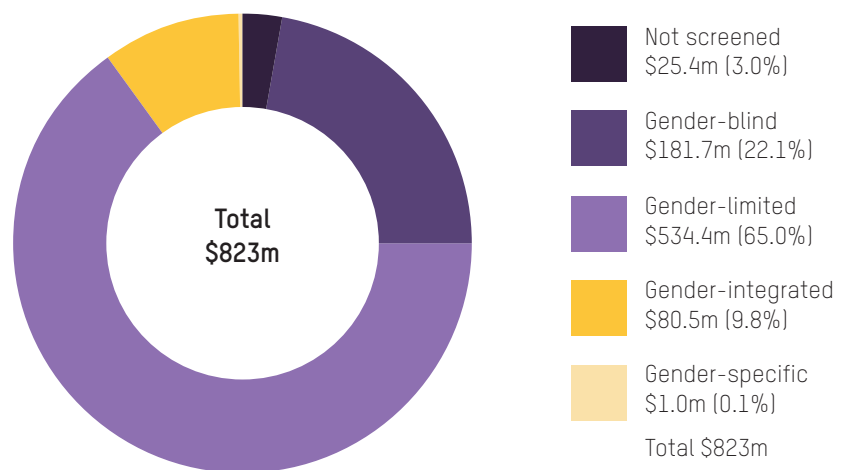


Figure 1: Canadian humanitarian assistance spending by Global Affairs Canada’s gender equality markers, as per the Historical Project Data Set, 2016

make the humanitarian system more gender-sensitive—by contributing funding towards a pool of gender experts who can be deployed to support humanitarian actors at the country level, for instance.<sup>33</sup> Still, much more needs to be done to truly shift power towards women in the humanitarian system.

### 3.3 LITTLE INVESTMENT IN LOCAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTORS

The humanitarian system has saved countless lives over the past 50 years. However, the system is overstretched and assistance is often insufficient, inappropriate and late. There is widespread acknowledgment that we are not saving as many lives as we could and not providing the best possible assistance.<sup>34</sup>

Globally, the large majority of humanitarian funds go to United Nations (UN) agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).<sup>35</sup> Local and national actors receive very little direct funding, despite being the first on the ground and having a permanent presence in communities. Moreover, the funding they receive tends to be short-term and tied to specific objectives and activities defined by international actors.

### IN 2016, LOCAL AND NATIONAL ACTORS DIRECTLY RECEIVED ONLY 2% OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE FROM DONORS.<sup>36</sup>

Local women's rights actors are often best suited to do work that changes gender norms and addresses women's needs and challenges. As established members of their communities, they can deliver assistance quickly and in culturally appropriate ways. They help move beyond 'one-size-fits-

all' interventions and tailor assistance to particular communities. For example, different cultures use different types of sanitary cloths for menstruation. A local women's rights actor would know this, while a large humanitarian organization that delivers standardized goods in various humanitarian emergencies might not.

When responses fail to involve local women's rights actors, crucial information can be missed and harmful gender norms can be reinforced inadvertently. For example, in eastern Sri Lanka, Muslim communities have matrilineal land rights. International actors and the national government were not aware of this information when they allocated resources and land after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, assuming deeds to new houses should go to male heads of households. As a result, they unintentionally upended traditional gender practices that had protected women.<sup>37</sup>

Donors, including Canada, have recognized that locally led humanitarian action—commonly known as localization—can overcome some of the challenges inherent in the current top-down humanitarian system (see Box 6).

Tracking global progress towards localization commitments has been complicated

given the lack of disaggregated funding data, and the wide variety of funding mechanisms that exist. The lack of transparency around money that flows through international NGOs and the UN as intermediaries also makes it difficult to track and analyze localization flows.

Canada recently provided guidelines to its implementing NGO partners to improve reporting on the funding that they transfer to local organizations.<sup>40</sup> For the time being, existing data only allows us to analyze direct funding to local organizations. This data shows us that only 0.2% of Canadian humanitarian assistance was channelled directly to local and national organizations in 2016.<sup>41</sup> Canada's direct funding to local women's rights actors involved in humanitarian action is therefore negligible.<sup>42</sup> There may be more support for local women's rights actors flowing through intermediaries, but it is not currently captured. The Canadian government should encourage Canadian NGOs to collect data on funding transferred specifically to women's rights actors and provide them with guidance on how to do so.

There are many reasons why women's rights actors are grossly underfunded. One reason is that donors usually treat development, humanitarian and peacebuilding work separately. Canadian policies and

#### BOX 6

### THE GRAND BARGAIN'S LOCALIZATION COMMITMENT

Canada and the world recognize the importance of strengthening local actors in humanitarian responses. In 2016, 30 donors and humanitarian aid providers signed the Grand Bargain,<sup>38</sup> an agreement that aims, among other things, to increase the leadership of local and national actors. Together, they committed to ensuring that 25% of global humanitarian assistance goes as directly as possible to local and national actors by 2020. Canada has committed to empowering women and girls within this localization agenda by 'increasing support for local women's groups to participate meaningfully in humanitarian action.'<sup>39</sup>

funding opportunities operate along these divides. For women’s rights actors, there are no clear distinctions between these areas—their work bridges them.

For instance, SOFEPADI (Solidarité féminine pour la paix et le développement integral), a coalition of 40 women’s rights organizations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, formed out of humanitarian necessity following decades of brutal war that had particularly detrimental impacts on women. The coalition set up a clinic to heal and support sexual violence survivors and then help them reintegrate into their communities. Its work did not stop there. It actively pursued peacebuilding activities by working with young men to expand their livelihood options and reduce their motivation to join militias. The coalition also undertook work to tackle gender inequality more broadly—understanding it as a root cause of conflict. This

work included, for instance, supporting women to stand as candidates in elections, since countries with more female legislators are less likely to relapse into conflict.<sup>43</sup>

Women’s rights actors like SOFEPADI are there before, during and after conflicts and thus have broad perspectives on how to respond to crises and prevent them from happening again. But because their work does not fit neatly into one area—humanitarian, development or peacebuilding—it is challenging for them to access funding

**ALMOST THREE-  
QUARTERS OF ALL  
HUMANITARIAN AID  
GOES TO PEOPLE WHO  
HAVE BEEN AFFECTED  
BY CRISES FOR EIGHT  
OR MORE YEARS.<sup>44</sup>**

opportunities. If Canada is serious about strengthening local women’s rights actors, it needs a more integrated approach that recognizes the overlap between these different areas.

In today’s complex and protracted crises, an approach that integrates humanitarian work with long-term, transformative objectives is crucial.

In such situations, there is no one point where people’s needs stop being humanitarian ones and start being development ones. The value of an approach that integrates humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work—sometimes referred to as the triple nexus—has been recognized globally. Donors like Canada must now operationalize this approach.

## BOX 7

### LOCAL EMBEDDEDNESS LEADS TO MAJOR IMPACTS IN UGANDA

A conversation with Ritah Nansereko, Executive Director of African Women and Youth Action for Development (AWYAD), a local women’s rights organization in Uganda, demonstrates the importance of involving organizations like hers in humanitarian action. AWYAD works with displaced women from South Sudan who are seeking refuge in Uganda, which is one of the top refugee-hosting countries in the world. It currently hosts an estimated 1.3 million refugees and most new arrivals are women and children.<sup>45</sup>

Since refugee-hosting districts in Uganda are underdeveloped, refugees put a strain on already limited resources, creating tensions with local communities. Most Ugandans are very welcoming and generous, though some feel that refugees get more support than they do and sometimes enjoy a better standard of living as a result. This situation fuels anger and resentment, which are sometimes expressed in the form of gender-based violence against refugee women.

Ritah explains that her organization’s ‘double lens’, as an organization that serves vulnerable refugee women but is

also part of the local community, makes it uniquely suited to understand and address these challenges before they spiral out of control and fuel new conflicts. This is one of the reasons AWYAD is advocating for more financial support for local communities that host refugees.

AWYAD also understands social norms and power dynamics. The organization has formed protection committees that consist of refugee women. These women serve as conduits of information to AWYAD. Women disclose incidents to protection committees, who listen without taking notes (culturally important for building trust) and then disclose cases to the organization. Through this structure, Ritah says, AWYAD receives approximately 10 times more disclosures than international NGOs.

As a part of the local community, AWYAD’s work does not begin and end with funding cycles. ‘Women call us every day. They don’t know or care whether we have funds,’ Ritah says. ‘They just need help and know that we are there. We don’t have the luxury of waiting for funds to do our work.’

Women’s rights organizations, especially those in the Global South, are chronically underfunded. Yet, they are on the front lines doing crucial work. AWYAD’s successes show us what is possible when important work is recognized and supported.

### 3.4 LOOKING FORWARD: A HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR WOMEN

A humanitarian system that works for women is within reach. To make this vision a reality, the Canadian government must continue to transform the way it delivers humanitarian assistance.

As a start, Global Affairs Canada should clearly outline its feminist approach to humanitarian assistance in a strategy or policy that promotes a comprehensive and gender-transformative approach to humanitarian assistance. This strategy or policy should give clear direction to both bilateral and multilateral funding recipients regarding what is expected of them to integrate a feminist approach in their programming. Such an approach must move beyond gender mainstreaming to tackle not only women and girls' immediate needs, but also structural root causes and inequality that hold women and girls back and leave them vulnerable. This approach must support women's leadership in decision making and reinforce the power of local women's rights actors.

Secondly, Canada can best deliver on its feminist ambition if it creates a dedicated pool of stand-alone gender-in-emergencies funding within its international assistance envelope to support stand-alone gender-transformative programming that spans the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. This pool should build on the work done by the department on supporting women's rights organizations and be designed to allow Canada to dramatically scale up support for local women's rights actors—propping up their leadership role in emergencies, while helping Canada achieve its Grand Bargain and localization commitments in a feminist way. Women's rights actors recognize and work on the inextricable links between gender inequality, fragility and conflict—and are the best investment

for achieving sustainable peace. When all these things come together, great things can be achieved (see Box 7).

In addition, Canada can exemplify a feminist approach by ensuring that sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and protection from gender-based violence—two issues that primarily affect women—are treated as priority interventions in humanitarian settings. These issues are often considered less urgent than food, water, sanitation and shelter, but they are, in fact, critical and in many cases life-saving.

Sex, pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections still occur during crises. The need for contraceptives and other reproductive services is also heightened as risks increase during times of instability.<sup>46</sup> Yet, there is a startling and well-documented

**LAST YEAR, OVER 500 WOMEN AND ADOLESCENT GIRLS DIED EVERY SINGLE DAY FROM PREGNANCY AND CHILD-BIRTH COMPLICATIONS.<sup>48</sup>**

dearth of sexual and reproductive health services for women displaced by conflict.<sup>47</sup> When these services are unavailable, millions of women are put at risk.

Globally, some components of the comprehensive SRHR agenda are supported in humanitarian settings, mostly through the health cluster. However other components are neglected worldwide. For example, safe abortion services are rarely provided in crisis settings. This is a big gap considering that rape is widely used as a weapon of war, and that 25% to 50% of maternal deaths in refugee settings are caused by unsafe

abortions and related complication.<sup>49</sup>

Given global gaps in neglected areas of SRHR such as safe abortion care, comprehensive sexuality education, and services for adolescents—and given funding gaps and barriers created by the Mexico City Policy and other conservative and religious movements—Canada's ongoing leadership is urgent. Canada can help change the story by increasing further its funding for a comprehensive package of sexual and reproductive health services in humanitarian settings. These must be coupled with initiatives that promote and uphold sexual and reproductive rights by addressing the stigma, discrimination, and violence that prevent people from using sexual and reproductive health services in humanitarian settings.

Canada also has an exciting opportunity to show feminist leadership on the issue of gender-based violence in emergencies. Canada recently assumed the leadership of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies,<sup>50</sup> a multi-stakeholder initiative that commits to ensuring that every humanitarian effort mitigates the risk of gender-based violence and provides safe and comprehensive services to those affected by it. At the helm of this initiative, Canada should take stock of the ways in which the gender equality commitments in the Call to Action are being met and determine how best to support these efforts in the next Call to Action Roadmap. Canada can make sure that a feminist perspective—one that recognizes the links between gender inequality and gender-based violence, remains central to these discussions.



# 4

## A FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY: A VISION FOR A GENDER EQUAL WORLD

**It is important, and historic, that we have a prime minister and a government proud to proclaim ourselves feminists. Women's rights are human rights. ...These rights are at the core of our foreign policy.**

—**Chrystia Freeland**, *Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs*<sup>51</sup>

### 4.1 ADDRESSING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN ALL FOREIGN POLICY AREAS

Making the humanitarian system work better for women is necessary, yet more is needed to truly put resources and power in the hands of women during war. Canada needs policy coherence across all foreign policy actions—aid, diplomacy, trade and defence. A feminist approach to aid can be undermined if efforts in other foreign policy areas do not strive towards the same feminist goals and uphold the same high standards on human rights and gender equality.

A feminist foreign policy should seek to address the root causes of gender inequality. Women's rights, which are human rights, should be the guiding thread for all decisions. Diplomatic interests, such as economic priorities, should never override women's irreversible human rights. All countries have a duty to promote and protect human rights, including women's rights, under international law and the Charter of the UN. Helping other countries meet their commitments, and holding them to account when they do not, should be a key part of a feminist foreign policy.

Canada recently exemplified a rights-based approach when it spoke out in support of imprisoned women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia, despite diplomatic and economic retaliation from the Saudi regime.<sup>52</sup> In this situation, Canada's uncompromising stand for human rights and bold leadership in walking the talk on women's rights were commendable.

There are some lasting inconsistencies in Canada's feminist agenda. Arms sales to countries that are actively engaged in conflicts with high numbers of civilian casualties are an obvious example. A Saudi-led coalition, supplied with weapons from Western countries including Canada, is engaged in a devastating war on Yemen. This conflict has led to the worst humanitarian situations in the world, with thousands of civilians killed and many thousands more injured with all parties to the conflict implicated in violations of International Humanitarian Law.<sup>53</sup>

Weapon sales and transfers undermine a feminist agenda in several ways. Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy lays the groundwork for conflict prevention by prioritizing gender equality, but its preventative efforts won't be effective if it simultaneously fuels wars that harm women. Furthermore, there are strong links between unregulated weapon sales and GBV (see Box 8).

To stem the global arms trade and prevent weapons from falling into the wrong hands, more than 60 countries signed the groundbreaking Arms Trade Treaty in 2013. The treaty prohibits the transfer of arms and ammunition to countries where they could be used for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND THE GLOBAL ARMS TRADE

Every day, millions of people suffer from the consequences of armed violence. This violence is fuelled by the global trade in arms and ammunition, which is largely unregulated and uncontrolled and thus enables weapons to fall into the hands of dictators, criminals, drug traffickers and terrorists.

The global arms trade has contributed to significant gender-based violence, among other things. During conflicts, such violence is often perpetrated by armed groups and combatants who use guns and weapons to humiliate, intimidate, displace and rape people. For instance, at the height of violent conflict in 2013,

the Democratic Republic of Congo became known as the world's rape capital, with an estimated 48 women raped by rebels and Congolese soldiers every hour.<sup>54</sup>

Statistics alone cannot describe the full effect of uncontrolled arms on gender-based violence in Africa. Personal stories reveal the socio-cultural and psychological impacts on victims and relatives. For example, in Mali, a 15-year-old girl was gun-raped and impregnated—she subsequently gave birth to twins. Since then, she has suffered from neglect, emotional and physical abuse and stigmatization by her family and community. She is uneducated and has no source of livelihood. She and her children receive no support from family or friends and are condemned to live in extreme poverty.<sup>55</sup>

After some long delays in signing, Canada is finally passing legislation to accede to the Arms Trade Treaty.<sup>56</sup> This is a huge step forward. However, loopholes remain in the legislation that would allow exports of arms, or parts and components of weapons systems via the United States, for example, to ultimately end up in the wrong hands. Canada considers the United States to be the end user, but that country is the biggest arms exporter in the world and has not ratified the Arms Trade Treaty.<sup>57</sup> It is important that the United States not be able to export Canadian weapons, parts or components to third parties without scrutiny.

Canada must also take specific action to ensure that the weapons it sells are not used to commit gender-based violence. Article 7.4 of the Arms Trade Treaty explicitly requires exporting countries to consider gender-based violence as part of their export assessments. The goal of this article is to help reduce the historical tendency to overlook such violence and to encourage exporters to consider which specific mitigation measures may be required with respect to it—as opposed to other more visible violations.

Canada should strictly apply the provisions of the Arms Trade Treaty, refusing exports to countries where gender-based violence is likely to occur and publicly stating that it is doing so for that reason. Canada could, for instance, declare that it will operate a presumption of denial of export licenses to destinations with a poor record on gender-based violence in situations of conflict and armed violence.

Canada's incoherence on weapons sales is an example of what happens when there is no official overarching foreign policy strategy. The Canadian government has referred to its foreign policy as 'feminist' on several occasions, yet has not articulated a high-level vision for a feminist foreign policy that provides clear directives to all its staff on how to operationalize this policy. This lack of clarity has paved the way for inconsistencies. In a world where women's rights are under threat, Canada's unwavering leadership is urgently needed. Saying the right things is important, but consistent action is what will truly make a difference.

Canada should formalize and deepen its commitment to women's rights and gender

equality by officially aligning all its actions and priorities under a feminist foreign policy. This policy should be gender-transformative and rights-based, aiming to reduce the inequalities, especially gender inequality, that drive conflict and violence. It would allow Canada to achieve greater impacts, break new ground in international affairs and challenge other countries to do the same.

### 4.2 SUPPORTING WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

While financial support for women's rights actors is crucial, a feminist foreign policy must also extend diplomatic protection to these actors—particularly individual human rights defenders who often have very little funding or protection. Women's movements and civil society groups have always been drivers of social and political progress and are key actors in advancing greater peace and security across the world. They are highly effective at identifying and advocating for the needs and rights of the individuals and communities with which they work.

But women human rights defenders frequently experience human rights

violations linked to their work and their status as women. These include forms of gender-based violence, threats, harassment, and defamation campaigns. These risks are compounded in conflict settings. They are also exacerbated for women whose ethnicity, race, religion, caste, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, nationality, indigenous identity, or disability exposes them to multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization. In many countries, conservative and nationalist political forces portray women's rights and LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex) rights as products of 'Western interference'.<sup>58</sup>

Women human rights actors are frequently targeted because their activism is seen as challenging traditional gender norms. Attacks are intended to silence them and restrict their work. For example, research by MamaCash found that women's rights groups in India have had to stop their visits to communities because of attacks from conservative groups that act with impunity.<sup>59</sup> In Yemen, female staff from women's rights organizations reported being stopped at checkpoints and having more difficulty moving around than their male counterparts.<sup>60</sup> In some cases, the situation gets so bad that women human

rights defenders must leave the country to ensure their safety. However, bureaucratic obstacles prevent many from relocating. As a result, they remain stuck in their countries under constant threat of violence.

Canada should always use its diplomatic influence to ensure that women's rights defenders are safe in their countries of origin and push for the recognition of civil society's work in hostile contexts. Canada has Guidelines on Recognizing and Supporting Human Rights Defenders, which offer practical advice to Canadian embassies on supporting the vital work of human rights defenders. The Canadian government committed to reviewing the guidelines in the near future to ensure that they accurately reflect the range of risks faced by human rights defenders. They should be reviewed with a specific eye towards the situation of women human rights defenders, particularly those in conflict settings, who are at higher risk of sexual assault and more often threatened by non-state actors.<sup>61</sup>

The guidelines should also include guidance on supporting women human rights defenders exiled in Canada. If recognized and supported, they can continue working towards improving their countries from afar, especially in this era of digital activism.

Recognition and support should begin at the earliest stages of their relocation to Canada. The Canadian government should create a special visa for women human rights defenders, giving them a window of time and the paperwork necessary to continue their work from Canada. This would allow Canada and Canadian organizations to better track and support them.

Temporary relocation mechanisms exist elsewhere and have been highly successful. In the Netherlands, for example, the government helped establish a network of 'shelter cities'. Dutch embassies around the world identify human rights defenders at risk and recommend their participation in the program. Those selected qualify for a stay in one of the Netherlands' 11 shelter cities. The government ensures that visas are issued quickly and provides funding to the human rights defenders for the duration of their stay.<sup>62</sup> Coming to a safe haven allows them to catch their breath, continue their work in safety and grow their networks of civil society and government contacts.<sup>63</sup> The Shelter City initiative has also welcomed international shelter cities into its network, such as San Jose in Costa Rica, which has provided a safe haven for human rights defenders from across Central and South America. This model

## BOX 9

### KHADIJA'S STORY

Mother of Khadija Sangour looks on at her home in Abs village in Hajah province, Yemen. Here Oxfam's AMAL programme works through partner organisations to enable women from poor communities to strengthen their confidence, knowledge of their rights and their campaigning and advocacy skills. The aim is for these women to become leaders who can work with their communities, reclaim their right to political and civic participation, and achieve long lasting positive change.

Photo: Hani Mohammed / Oxfam



## WOMEN IN PEACE EFFORTS IN SYRIA

A brutal war has been raging in Syria for over seven years. Over 400,000 people have been killed and 11 million—half of the country’s population—have fled their homes.<sup>69</sup> Women have been under-represented in formal Syrian peace negotiations thus far. Even so, they have made valuable contributions to peace and security.

Women succeeded in broadening the agenda within conflict resolution efforts, raising critical issues such as the release of detained family members and inquiries into disappearances.

They have worked across political divides, forming an advisory board with members from across the political spectrum to advise the UN special envoy for Syria.

They have negotiated local ceasefires to allow humanitarian aid to pass through. In 2015, a group of activists from the ‘I Am She’ campaign convinced armed actors to accept a 20-day ceasefire to allow food and medicine into a suburb of Damascus.

Women’s groups also founded the Violations Documentation Center in Syria, which documents detentions and human rights violations, providing critical information and evidence to international watch-dogs and countries supporting peace negotiations.<sup>70</sup>

makes it easier for women human rights defenders to continue to see and care for their families.

A special visa and temporary relocation mechanism for women human rights defenders would make a huge difference for the thousands of activists who are standing up for women’s rights and human rights in hostile environments. Doing this would exemplify a feminist approach—sending a strong message that women human rights defenders are valuable and helping to amplify their voices. Canada should develop these mechanisms in consultation with women human rights defenders themselves.

### 4.3 WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY: A ROADMAP TO PEACE

Evidence shows that women’s participation in peace processes significantly increases the likelihood of peace agreements being reached and implemented. When civil society groups, including women’s organizations, participate in peace agreements, they are 64% less likely to fail. Agreements are also 35% more likely to last for at least 15 years if women are included as witnesses, signatories, mediators or negotiators.<sup>64</sup>

One of the reasons that women’s participation in peace processes is so effective is that they often have the most sustainable visions of peace. Research has found that women and men living in crisis settings have very different perceptions of what peace looks like.<sup>65</sup> Men emphasize the absence of formal conflict and the establishment of formal governance and justice structures. Women, on the other hand, focus on the development and human rights issues underlying a conflict: education, individual rights and freedoms, domestic violence and food security. When women are included in peace negotiations, they tend to advocate for excluded groups.<sup>66</sup> All of these factors help societies build more lasting peace.

Despite the strong case for their inclusion, women continue to be left out of formal peace talks. This exclusion damages prospects for peacebuilding and reconciliation. Notably, most peace agreements signed since 1990 fail to reference women or address the things that affect them most during war, such as gender-based violence. An analysis of 1,187 peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2017 found that 81% of agreements did not mention women and 95% failed to mention gender-based violence.<sup>67</sup>

Yet, sexual and gender-based violence remains almost universal in modern conflicts. A 2016 UN report on conflict-related sexual violence exposed a horrifying level of sexual violence in 19 conflict-affected countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo and Syria, and in post-conflict settings such as Sri Lanka.<sup>68</sup> If peace agreements don’t ensure justice for sexual violence survivors, trauma, perceived shame and resentment fester within communities and breed more violence. Despite their importance, issues such as sexual violence are clearly not being raised by the male combatants and politicians who usually dominate peace processes.

Despite their low representation in formal processes, women’s organizations continue to work informally to build peace and security. They do not let formal exclusion hold them back from carving out spaces to make their voices heard (see Box 10).

Countries like Canada have a key role to play in ensuring that women get a seat at the table in peace negotiations around the world. Canada has a special action plan to promote this agenda called Canada’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. The plan is strong: it prioritizes the human rights of women and girls,

recognizes the critical link between gender equality and security and commits to supporting women's rights groups and gender-transformative programming.

The plan, however, needs dedicated and additional resources to ensure impact and success. Canada's new national defence policy, for instance, was announced with an investment of \$60bn.<sup>71</sup> Canada must make sure that its funding commitments match its rhetoric if it wants to be a credible global leader on gender equality and women, peace and security.

Canada's recent announcement that it will appoint an ambassador for women, peace and security was welcome news. The details of this role have yet to be announced, though with the right parameters, this high-level champion could play a critical role in ensuring that Canada's policy commitments are translated into outcomes. However, it will be essential to ensure that the position is adequately resourced and its mandate is developed in close consultation with civil society.

With its advanced understanding of the links between gender equality and security, Canada is also in a good position to support research and thought leadership on women, peace and security. It could do this by establishing and funding a research institute that fosters partnerships between universities, governments, the UN and civil society organizations to improve policy and practice in this crucial area.

Having committed to taking a feminist, holistic and intersectional approach to women, peace and security, Canada should also consider the needs of women and girls in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Indeed, women are not only peacemakers, but also, sometimes, combatants. After a conflict, preventing new violence depends on the willingness

of armed groups to lay down their weapons and return to normal life. Women must be involved in planning these processes, otherwise there can be negative consequences for women and whole communities.<sup>72</sup>

For example, after the 1991-2002 civil war in Sierra Leone, the specific needs of female combatants were ignored in order to push the country through a rapid demobilization, disarmament and reintegration process. Many of these female combatants were rape survivors, unable to return and reintegrate into their communities due to the social stigma attached to what had happened to them. Their circumstances and their need to earn livelihoods were initially not prioritized, despite their specific request to be moved to the capital city and supported to start small businesses. As a result, many had no choice but to remain in the areas where they had been demobilized and sell sex to UN peacekeepers.<sup>73</sup>

It is clear that including women in peacebuilding leads to more sustainable peace. But restrictive social norms and traditional gender roles make it difficult for women to participate in these processes. For example, research in Afghanistan—one of the most difficult places in the world for women<sup>74</sup>—revealed that restrictions imposed by male family members were among the greatest barriers to women's participation in peacebuilding.<sup>75</sup> This serves as a powerful reminder that gender inequality must be prioritized at all times—before, during and after crises.



# 5

## RECOMMENDATIONS

When he was elected in 2015, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that Canada was ‘back’ and promised to revitalize the country’s role on the global stage. Recent polling confirms that Canadians feel this is important. The majority of Canadians feel a moral obligation to help poor countries—72% believe that aid efforts ‘make them more proud to be Canadian’.<sup>76</sup>

The Canadian government also clearly signalled its ambition to be a leader on gender equality and feminist aid and foreign policy. Canada has demonstrated this through the launch of the Feminist International Assistance Policy, Canada’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security as well as other commitments on the global stage, such as the announcement of \$650m over three years for SRHR programming.<sup>77</sup>

Given the state of our world, the need for such leadership is urgent. Economic inequality has reached extreme levels, millions of people are on the move, climate change is threatening entire communities, and hard-won women’s rights gains are under threat by right-wing governments. These trends will only exacerbate conflict and insecurity. But leadership requires following through on policy commitments and being as bold with resources as with words. Currently, Canada’s international assistance funding is out of step with its ambition to be a world leader on gender equality and feminist aid and foreign policy.

The fact that Canada’s international assistance spending is at a near historical low, merely reaching 0.26% of gross national income (as compared to the UN aid target of 0.7%), undermines its credibility and leadership on the international stage. A non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council would greatly advance Canada’s power to advance gender equality globally. However, Canada’s low levels of official development assistance are a key impediment to securing a seat at the most powerful decision-making table.

Further shifts are clearly needed if Canada wants to build on its reputation as a world leader on gender equality and model a truly feminist approach. Given the deep links between gender inequality and conflict, a feminist approach must tackle gender inequality before, during and after conflicts to address the drivers of fragility and conflict. Canada’s approach, across all foreign policy areas, must be gender-transformative and must continue to put more resources and decision-making power in the hands of local women and their organizations.

Gender equality is the issue of our time—the issue by which future generations will judge us. To leave a feminist legacy and ensure that women in conflict are not just protected, but powerful, Canada must continue to make concrete and substantive investments that align with its feminist agenda.

Oxfam Canada is calling on the Canadian government to implement the following recommendations:

**Increase funding for official development assistance by**

- ***Developing a 10-year plan to achieve the United Nations aid target of 0.7% of gross national income.***

**Make the humanitarian system work for women by**

- ***Launching a feminist humanitarian policy and providing clear directives for the operationalization of such an approach.***

This policy should reflect a comprehensive approach to humanitarian assistance and commit to supporting local women's rights actors across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

- ***Establishing a dedicated pool of funding for gender-transformative programming in emergencies that comprises at least 15% of humanitarian assistance.*** The pool should provide long-term, flexible and sustainable funding, particularly for local women's rights actors and for a feminist monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanism that supports knowledge building around gender-transformative programming in emergencies.
- ***Fulfilling its contribution to the Grand Bargain localization commitment of allocating 25% of international humanitarian assistance to local humanitarian actors and ensuring one-quarter of its allocation goes to local women's rights actors.*** The percentage of Canadian funding transferred to local women's rights organizations by Canada's implementing partners should be regularly monitored and published to get a full picture of the proportion of funding flowing to local women's rights organizations.
- ***Ensuring that sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as well as protection from gender-based violence are treated as priority interventions in humanitarian settings.*** Specifically, leadership should be provided on

expanding access to neglected areas of SRHR and supporting signatories of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies in meeting their gender equality commitments.

**Promote a feminist foreign policy by**

- ***Publishing a feminist foreign policy that is gender-transformative, rights-based and coherent across all areas of foreign policy—aid, diplomacy, trade and defence—and aims to reduce gender inequality in order to prevent conflict and build sustainable peace.***
- ***Closing loopholes in legislation to accede to the Arms Trade Treaty*** to ensure that arms exports (including parts and components) to the United States, and weapon sales brokered by the Canadian Commercial Corporation, are not used to commit human rights violations against civilians. Arms export licenses should be denied to countries with poor records on gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict and violence.
- ***Publicly recognizing and supporting women human rights defenders.*** Canada's Guidelines on Recognizing and Supporting Human Rights Defenders should be reviewed to incorporate the unique challenges faced by women activists, including those living in exile. A special visa and temporary relocation mechanism to Canada for women human rights defenders should be developed in consultation with women human rights defenders themselves.
- ***Announcing dedicated and additional resources to ensure the impact and success of Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.*** The newly announced ambassador for women, peace and security should be well-resourced and have a strong mandate. A research institute on women, peace and security should be established in Canada and funded.

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