

A call for G7 leaders to endorse a feminist aid agenda

GENDER INEQUALITY: THE OLDEST AND MOST PERVASIVE FORM OF INEQUALITY

Gender inequality persists through unequal power relations between women and men and through patriarchal norms and structures that shape society. It manifests itself in violence against women and girls and in restrictions on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, on their access to productive assets and land ownership, and on their ability to engage in political processes. Women continue to be concentrated in the lowest-paid jobs, where they have minimal job security and physical safety, and they shoulder a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work. These infringements on women's rights prevent many women from escaping poverty and determining their own destinies.

In addition to undermining women's rights, gender inequality imposes a huge social cost. Gender inequality in the economy costs women in developing countries \$9 trillion a year – a sum that would not only give new spending power to women and benefit their families and communities, but also provide a massive boost to the economy as a whole.¹ Countries with higher levels of gender equality tend to have higher incomes, and evidence from a number of regions and countries shows that closing the gender gap leads to a reduction in poverty.

202 YEARS According to the World Economic Forum, at the current rate of progress, it will take an estimated 202 years before gender economic parity is achieved.²

WHERE WE STAND: UNDERFUNDED, PIECEMEAL APPROACHES TO GENDER EQUALITY

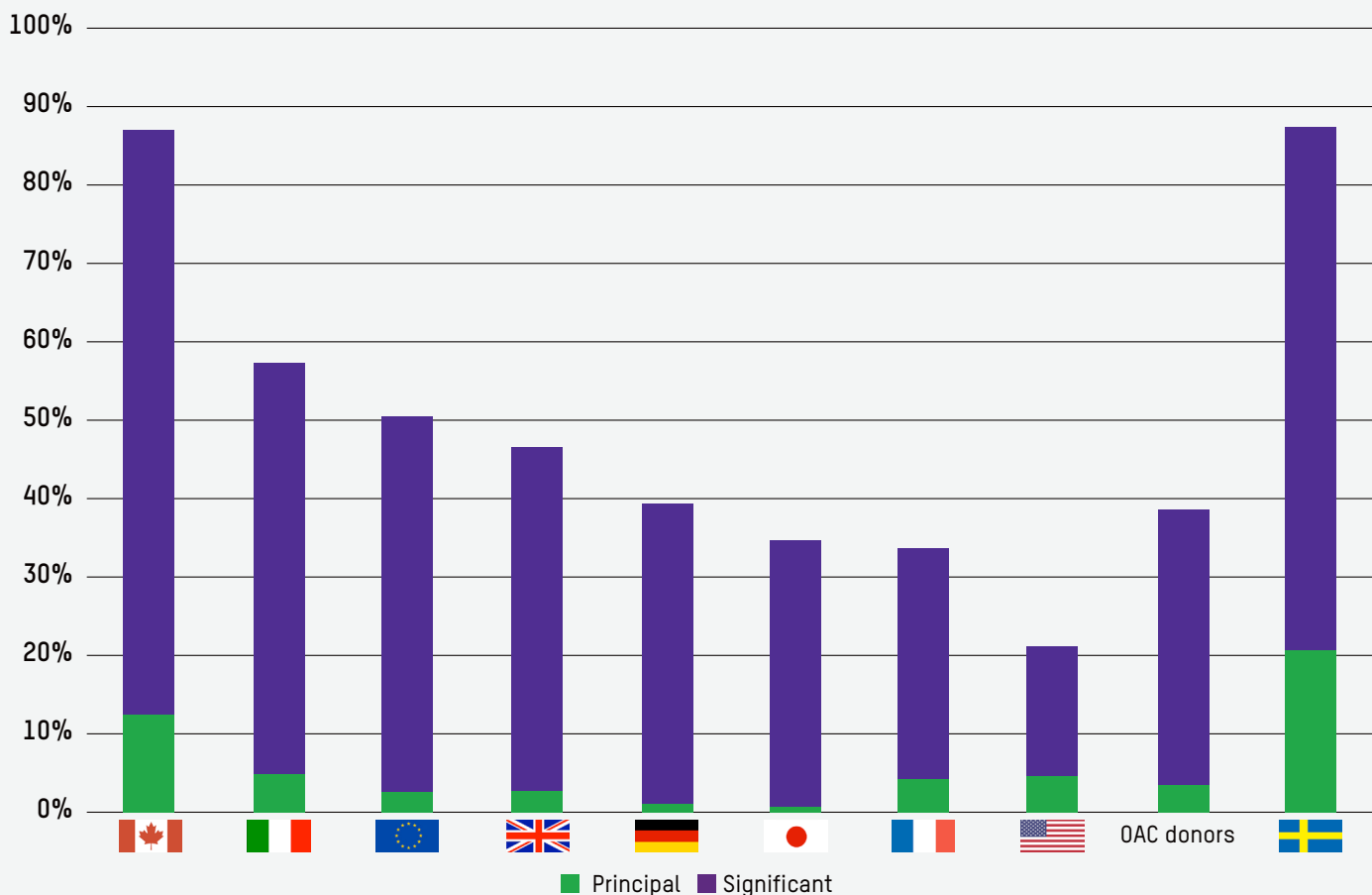
While advances have been made in mainstreaming gender considerations in policies, laws, programs and budgets, including within the aid sector, these initiatives are often done on the cheap, take a piecemeal approach to addressing gender inequality, and fail to address underlying power imbalances and discriminatory social norms.

Aid that targets gender equality as a principal objective remains consistently low. In 2017 it represented less than 4 percent of aid, and 62 percent of aid continues to be gender blind.³ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has injected a sense of urgency and renewed interest in a coordinated global effort to fight poverty and inequality. So far, however, the much-touted slogan of 'putting women and girls at the heart of sustainable development' has not translated into funding shifts and transformative approaches that would address the structural barriers women face.

0.12 PERCENT Only 0.12 percent of total aid was committed to non-governmental women's organizations, and only 0.02 per cent to women's organizations based in developing countries.⁴

The G7 has been increasingly addressing gender equality in its rhetoric and commitments. Canada made gender equality and the empowerment of women a stand-alone focus of its presidency in 2018 and created the first ever Gender Equality Advisory Council. France has signalled its ambition to build on Canada's momentum for its 2019 presidency and announced a reconstituted Gender Equality Advisory Council and a first-ever ministerial meeting of women and gender equality ministers.

Aid in support of gender equality and women’s empowerment – G7 donors performance 2017 [OECD Marker 1 and 2]



DEFINING A FEMINIST APPROACH TO AID

There is no singular definition of feminism or a feminist approach, and there are many schools of feminist thought with rich and varied perspectives. They all share, however, the objectives of breaking down inequalities based on gender and transforming systems of unequal power. To do this, it is necessary to see gender inequality as structural, systemic and socially constructed – in other words, transformation requires changes that go beyond the level of individuals and extend to institutions, norms and behaviours.

Feminist aid seeks to transform unequal power relations and structures and to increase women’s agency. Current economies and political systems – as well as the aid system – reproduce patriarchy and inequality because they are not designed to prioritize gender equality, and women have less decision-making power and agency to shape these systems.

In practice, a feminist approach must go hand in hand with a human rights-based approach to international assistance because both frameworks position rights holders (and their needs) at the centre. A feminist approach also means shifting from a supply-driven approach, which prioritizes service delivery, to a demand-driven approach that positions individuals’ needs and realities at the centre of all initiatives.

CORE FEMINIST PRINCIPLES

TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE: Feminist aid explicitly aims to redress the historical power imbalances between men and women. It challenges and shifts power relations and discriminatory social norms that devalue women and girls in all their diversity by working at multiple levels: within individuals, households, society and institutions.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Feminist aid is informed by an intersectional analysis, which refers to the multiple aspects of identity that play out in people’s lives (such as gender, class, age, race, sexuality or ethnicity) and that can compound and exacerbate oppression.

AGENCY: Feminist aid emphasizes the importance of agency, i.e. an individual or group’s ability to make choices and to transform those choices into desired outcomes. This requires moving beyond seeing women as participants or beneficiaries, and recognizing that women in all their diversity are experts on their own experience, agents of their own lives and actors in their community and society.

PROCESS: Feminist aid prioritizes not only results, but the process used to achieve them, and values integrity, contextualization, learning, collaboration, participation, inclusivity and responsiveness.

A feminist approach to aid is fundamentally new. It challenges us to rethink how we work and whom we work with. The current approach of ‘add women and stir’ – which operates on the logic that adding more women as beneficiaries will increase gender equality – is not working. Addressing the structural discrimination embedded in society depends on increasing women’s

agency. A feminist approach also challenges us to investigate how race, ethnicity, religion, class, caste and sexuality influence the way women experience inequality and discrimination and further compound and exacerbate oppression.

IMPLEMENTING A FEMINIST APPROACH TO AID

Experts agree that the most effective way to achieve gender equality is through a twin-track approach that combines dedicated resources for women’s rights with a robust system for mainstreaming gender across all sectors. Feminist aid combines this twin-track approach with a core strategy of incorporating the key feminist principles of transformative change, intersectionality, agency and process, essentially defining new ways to deliver aid, measure results and work with partners to truly transform gender and power relations.

A feminist approach requires bolstering the resources available to women’s rights organizations and feminist movements. Evidence confirms that such groups are fundamental in catalysing change towards gender equality. Although donors have recognized the importance of investing in women and girls, aid to women’s organizations remains low, at only about 0.4 percent of all aid investments. Women’s organizations, including feminist movements from the Global South, know their communities best and know what needs to be done to advance women’s rights and gender equality. What they need is support and resources to test their locally grounded solutions and learn from their setbacks.

A feminist approach requires an institutional and cultural shift in how donors and partners do business. Such a shift is doable. Many donors – such as Canada, Ireland and Sweden – are already well on their way to increasing gender equality programming in their foreign aid. Canada, for example, made waves in 2017 when it launched its Feminist International Assistance Policy, which commits to spending 15 percent of aid on programs that have gender equality as their principal focus, and has been funding major initiatives to support women’s movements.

Donors	Support to women's equality organisations and institutions (Million USD) 2017	As a % of aid
Canada	2,7m USD	0,1%
France	0,26m USD	0,002%
Germany	33,6m USD	0,13%
Italy	7m USD	0,2%
Japan	14m USD	0,07%
United Kingdom	35,5m USD	0,5%
United States of America	3,8m USD	0,01%
EU institutions	101m USD	0,4%
Sweden	43m USD	1,2%
DAC members average	299m USD	0,2%

2019 BIARRITZ SUMMIT: THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE G7 TO COMMIT TO A FEMINIST AID AGENDA

The Biarritz summit is the opportunity to bring this momentum into the aid arena and for the G7 to adopt a declaration committing to a feminist approach to their aid policies. In Biarritz, G7 leaders should commit to:

1. Make gender-based analysis mandatory across all aid strategies, frameworks, programming and monitoring, and ensure that all aid integrates gender equality with at least one well-resourced intermediate-level outcome that specifically addresses structural gender inequalities (i.e. scoring at least 1 on OECD gender markers).
2. Invest in stand-alone programming that addresses the structural causes of gender inequality, and increase significantly aid advancing gender equality as their principal focus (i.e. scoring 2 on OECD DAC gender markers).
3. Fund women's rights and feminist organizations, and ensure that funding mechanisms foster their agency and sustainability.
4. Ensure the implementation of aid programmes fosters women's agency and learning, and apply feminist principles to monitoring and evaluation.

NOTES:

1. ActionAid. (2015). Close the Gap! *The Cost of Inequality in Women's Work*. London. Retrieved 28 April 2019, from <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/close-the-gap-the-cost-of-inequality-in-womens-work>
2. World Economic Forum. (2018). The Global Gender Gap Report 2018. Geneva: World Economic Forum. Retrieved
3. OECD. (2019). *Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*. Retrieved 29 April 2019, from <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/aidinsupportofgenderequalityandwomensempowerment.htm>
4. OECD, CRS database. <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=crs1>