Chapter 2. Policy vision and framework

Framework

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Peer review indicator: Clear policy vision aligned with the 2030 Agenda based on member's strengths

Canada's feminist international assistance policy draws on a strong track record of gender advocacy and has been universally welcomed. It is underpinned by a human rights-based and inclusive approach and a commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda. The policy articulates a vision which will help Canada to be coherent in the changes it is striving to make in its development co-operation.

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Canada's feminist approach is driving its development co-operation

The feminist international assistance policy, launched in June 2017, has been roundly welcomed within the global development community. It provides the overall framework for Canada's development co-operation, articulates a vision which will help Canada to be coherent in the changes it seeks for its development co-operation, and establishes synergies with foreign, trade, defence and security policies (GAC, 2017[1]; National Defence, 2017[2]) forming a whole of government strategy for Canada's international assistance. In addition, senior management of Global Affairs Canada share a strong commitment to implementing the policy across all of the department's work streams.

Canada's entry point for implementing the 2030 Agenda is SDG 5 – achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls – and this will drive progress towards achieving the other goals. Gender equality forms the first of six priority action areas outlined in the new policy and is critical to achieving each of the other five (Figure 2.1). Canada aims to build on its existing sectoral experience[1] and its long track record of gender mainstreaming.

The policy delivers on the International Development Minister's mandate to focus "on helping the poorest and most vulnerable, and supporting fragile states" (Prime Minister of Canada, 2015[3]). As such, it meets the first recommendation of the 2012 peer review (Annex A (OECD, 2012[4])). However, defining this new approach and objectives in measurable terms remains a work in progress (Chapter 6).

Canada's policy is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the World Humanitarian Summit, and meets its Official Development Assistance Accountability Act requirement that assistance be provided "with a central focus on poverty reduction and in a manner that is consistent with Canadian values" (Government of Canada, 2008[5]).

Figure 2.1. Priority action areas of Canada's international assistance policy

Source: Global Affairs Canada (2017), OECD Development Assistance Committee Peer Review of Canada 2018: Memorandum of Canada.

Canada's focus on the poorest and most vulnerable is underpinned by a human rights-based and inclusive approach

The feminist international assistance policy marks a welcome shift to focusing on the poorest and most vulnerable and responding to local needs and priorities. The policy also commits Canada to a human rights-based and inclusive approach to international assistance. This marks a significant departure from the focus of the previous government, which in the opinion of one commentator emphasised commercial gain over poverty reduction (Brown, 2015[6]).

The policy recognises the primary role of governments in establishing development priorities, and seeks to broaden the range of actors with which Canada will work. However, it is silent on how Canada will maintain its commitments to development effectiveness and how it will work with partners to achieve the SDGs (Chapter 5).

Canada has set itself an ambitious agenda given its current global footprint (Chapter 3). Canada will direct at least 50% of bilateral development assistance to sub-Saharan Africa by 2020-21. However, while assistance to least developed countries is to increase, no specific targets have been set for this group. (GAC, 2017[1]).

Principles and guidance

Peer review indicator: Policy guidance sets out a clear and comprehensive approach, including to poverty and fragility

Canada plans to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment throughout its international assistance. The new policy lists the actions it will take to achieve transformational change for the poorest and most vulnerable. However, implementation will require updated guidance and tools, some of which is underway. Canada takes cross-cutting issues seriously and has a coherent approach to fragile states. It plans to review its approach to risk to enable more responsive and timely assistance.

An integrated approach seeks to achieve transformational change

Canada is seeking to achieve transformational change for the poorest and most vulnerable, especially for women and girls. Strong connections exist between the policy's six action areas (Figure 2.1) and Canada plans to tackle them in an integrated manner. Canada's approach is comprehensive, covering the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

The policy provides clear direction to staff and partners on the activities Canada will support in each action area. For example, the core action area on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will focus on four key activities:

1. addressing sexual and gender-based violence
2. supporting local women's organisations and movements that advance women's rights
3. improving public-sector institutional capacity
4. helping to build a strong base of evidence to support gender equality actions (GAC, 2017[1]).

The policy also outlines how the other five priority action areas will contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment. Canada's intention is to be strategic and focused, transformative and activist, evidence-based and accountable (GAC, 2017[1]).

Policies are being developed for the six priority action areas and Global Affairs Canada plans to update existing guidelines and tools to assist staff and partners to implement the new feminist international assistance policy. Staff and partners have been waiting for this guidance, as the peer review team observed in Tanzania (Annex C). As other DAC members have found, successful roll-out of a new policy depends on swift provision of accompanying guidance and tools. Officials' estimate that work beginning in late 2017 would result in policies, guidelines and tools in March 2018 seems overly ambitious. Updated guidance is also needed on additional areas, including policy coherence for sustainable development (Chapter 1); taking responsible risks (Chapter 4); engagement with multilateral and private sector organisations (Chapter 5); and humanitarian assistance (Chapter 7), some of which is in the pipeline.

Guidance on cross-cutting issues needs to be updated in light of the new policy

Global Affairs Canada has clear guidance on addressing human rights (GAC, 2017[7]) and has prepared strategic papers on cross-cutting issues – gender equality (GAC, 2014[8]),

environmental sustainability (GAC, 2014[8]) and governance. It considers these to be integral to enhancing the sustainability and effectiveness of its development results and they form priority action areas under the new policy. Application of strategies on gender equality and environmental sustainability meets Canadian government expectations of the public service regarding environmental assessment and gender-based analysis. Nevertheless, updated guidance is needed in light of the new feminist international assistance policy.

Canada's approach to fragile states is coherent and risk-based

The new policy commits Canada to engaging more effectively with fragile states and countries in crisis. It aims to ensure that women and girls are at the centre of decision making, and that their specific needs and aspirations are taken into account. In fragile states and contexts, Canada is piloting conflict mapping and the use of integrated conflict analysis. Canada's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (GoC, 2017[9]) echoes this and specifies for each implementing partner the actions that will be tracked and reported upon regularly. The 2015-16 progress report on Canada's first *National Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security* was a comprehensive and very useful tool to measure progress and identify challenges (GoC, 2016[10]).

Basis for decision making

Peer review indicator: Policy provides sufficient guidance for decisions on channels and engagements

Staff and partners need clarity about Canada's new approach to engaging with partner countries. Development effectiveness principles should continue to underpin Canada's engagement with a broadened range of partnerships. Canada is a valued multilateral partner and places high value on the role of civil society in development. A strategy would help Canada to increase and diversify its private sector engagement.

Clarity needed as Canada shifts from its former "countries of focus" approach

The new policy directs international assistance to where Canadian support "can make the biggest difference". It moves away from Canada's previous approach of working in 25 "countries of focus" in an effort to respond better, and more nimbly, to local needs (Chapters 3 and 5).

As observed in Tanzania, staff and partners need greater clarity about the implications of this shift away from the former countries of focus approach (Chapter 5, Annex C).

Canada applies good practice in developing its rationale for engaging in countries. It draws on analysis of a range of indices that consider poverty levels (Multi-dimensional Poverty Index, OECD Fragility Framework, Fragile States Index, Global Peace Index and the Gender Equality Index), gender equality, fragility, and the financial and sectoral focus of other donors, as well as a gap analysis indicating where Canada can make the biggest difference.[2]

Development effectiveness principles need to be upheld while broadening partnerships

Canada recognises that partner country governments are responsible for establishing their development priorities and that they will remain its primary partners. At the same time it plans to broaden its work with other partners – local government, civil society, multilateral institutions, philanthropic organisations, the private sector and non-traditional donors (GAC, 2017[1]) and to work more in multi-stakeholder partnerships.[3]

Official development assistance (ODA) disbursed through partner government institutions and multilateral organisations declined in the period 2010-2016, while ODA channelled through civil society organisations (CSOs) increased (Figure 2.2; Chapters 3 and 5). Global Affairs Canada's attempts to improve the effectiveness of international assistance – by making it better-leveraged and more integrated, responsive, and accountable – would be enhanced by a clearer description of how development effectiveness principles underpin this approach. The need for this was observed in Tanzania, for example (Chapter 5, Annex C). For instance, Canada could explain how working through inclusive development partnerships with multilateral, non-government and private sector actors contributes to country ownership, a focus on results and mutual accountability.

Figure 2.2. Bilateral ODA by channel (2010-2016)

Constant 2015 USD million
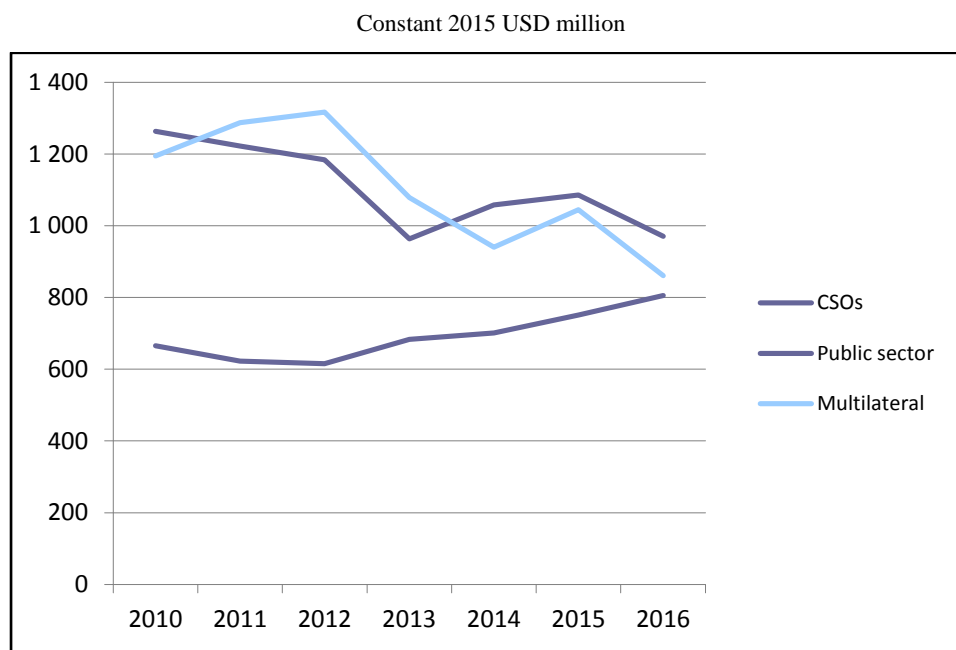
Source: OECD.Stat Creditor Reporting System.

Engagement with civil society could be more effective

The change of government has brought about a positive change in Canada's relationship with CSOs involved in international development. CSOs welcome Global Affairs Canada's greater openness to engagement and regular consultation. However, there is room for improvement.

Global Affairs Canada acted quickly to update its civil society policy following the release of its feminist international assistance policy. In the policy Canada affirms the critical role that civil society plays in development, as actors and advocates. It highlights the importance of fostering multi-stakeholder approaches to development and the need for a safe, enabling environment for civil society (Global Affairs Canada, 2017[11]). This is good practice.

Canada views Canadian CSOs as key partners in supporting local organisations, promoting global understanding and action amongst Canadians (Global Affairs Canada, 2017[11]), and implementing and supporting Canada's international assistance. While it also sees CSOs as agents of change and independent development actors in their own right, limited support is provided to CSOs to support and build capacity amongst their partners in developing countries in order to create the world that Canada seeks to achieve (Chapter 1). The current practice of encouraging the submission of projects implemented by a broad range of Canadian CSOs is very labour intensive for CSOs as well as for Global Affairs Canada (Chapter 5), as the peer review team observed in Tanzania (Annex C). Moreover, the current emphasis on project funding as opposed to programme or core funding tends to weaken rather than strengthen CSO ownership over programming. Whether the current approach is building the capacity of local CSOs and enhancing Canadians' global awareness is unclear (Chapter 1). An evaluation would clarify the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of Canada's engagement with Canadian, international and local CSOs.

A strategy is needed to guide engagement with the private sector

Canada has an ad hoc approach to engaging with the private sector (Kindornay, 2016[13]) and unlike other DAC members, has not established specific funding windows and mechanisms for this work (Kindornay, 2016[12]). It does, however, have experience related to blended finance (Chapter 3). A distinct strategy for engaging with the private sector, as recommended in the 2012 peer review (OECD, 2012[4]), would help staff and private sector partners achieve the new policy's intention to "increase and diversify the range of mechanisms for working with the private sector to support sustainable development" (GAC, 2017[1]) (Chapter 5).

Canada is a valuable, trusted and flexible multilateral partner

Multilateral organisations value Canada as a trusted and flexible partner. Its core support to multilateral institutions is predictable and supplemented with earmarked funding (Chapter 3). Canada also plays a valuable role in its engagement on governing boards where it has a long track record of advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment, and has shown leadership in increasing coherence between UN Funds and Programmes; improving reporting on results; optimising the balance sheets of multilateral and regional development banks; and promoting climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Canada makes extensive use of multilateral organisations within its country programmes (multi-bi) as observed in Tanzania, and particularly in fragile contexts (Chapter 3), and as a channel for humanitarian assistance (Chapter 7). However, multilateral partners note that this can lead to high transaction costs for individual organisations. Canada's relationship with, and use of, multilateral organisations would benefit from a clearly articulated strategy for multilateral engagement and regular, strategic dialogue with more individual institutions (Chapter 5).

Canada was a founding member of the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) and plays an active role in it. Canada has advocated strongly for including gender as a cross-cutting issue in assessments and, as chair of the Technical Working Group (2016-17), drove the finalisation of the MOPAN 3.0 assessment methodology. MOPAN reports are used to meet Canada's legal requirement for five yearly evaluation of programmes (Chapter 6). This is good practice.

Notes

[1] The former five priority areas for action were: stimulating sustainable economic growth; increasing food security; securing the future of children and youth; advancing democracy; and promoting stability and security. In addition Canada was a leader in improving maternal, new born and child health, and responding quickly and effectively to international humanitarian crises (GAC, 2015[21]).

[2] This draws on advice provided by GAC officials.

[3] For example, Canada is an active member of the Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Co-operation. The initiative was launched at the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation's 2016 High Level Meeting in Nairobi. The core group includes Mexico, Canada, Islamic Development Bank, Japan, the UN Office for South-South Cooperation and the OECD. See: http://www.expo.unsouthsouth.org/2017-antalya/programme/side-events/29-nov-d/.

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From:
OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Canada 2018

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264303560-en