

## Submission to “Request for Feedback” on Government of Canada’s Priorities for Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda

*by the*

**Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC)**

*May 2015*

### **I. General Comments on the process and priorities**

#### *a) This is a welcome opportunity to provide feedback and to gain clarity on Canada’s priorities*

The Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) welcomes the opportunity afforded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) to provide our perspectives on the government’s priorities for the post-2015 sustainable development framework and the financing for development outcome. Although this request for feedback comes very late in the process, we appreciate that DFATD has provided Canadians with an opportunity to provide input. For such an important framework as this, which will shape the global agenda around sustainable development for the next 15 years, including in Canada, garnering feedback from Canadian stakeholders is extremely important. In this vein, we would welcome earlier, more timely and more frequent endeavours such as this in the future.

We also welcome the publication of the principles and core and cross-cutting priorities that are guiding the government’s work. Few countries, that we are aware of, have done this and we congratulate Canada on this initiative. To date, we have only been able to surmise Canadian positions from periodic public statements, communiqués and meetings with DFATD officials. This document gives much greater clarity on what the government is advocating, and what we can expect from it in the future with respect to this framework. We would similarly welcome the earlier and more frequent release of timely public statements clearly articulating Canadian government positions on key international issues in the future.

#### *b) The inclusion of some new areas of focus is a positive sign*

We also welcome within these priorities an increased focus on the empowerment of women and girls, in particular Canada’s position to advocate for a “stand-alone goal, as well as cross-cutting targets and indicators focused on eliminating the structural drivers for gender inequality.” As will be noted later, this must advance the full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all women and girls. We also appreciate the increased reference to targeting the poorest and most vulnerable people, to child protection among Canada’s cross-cutting priorities, as well as “to addressing the underlying causes of instability and insecurity, with a particular focus on women, peace and security.”

## **II. Canadian priorities seem to exist independent of the post-2015 process**

### **a) The post-2015 agenda goes far beyond the MDGs**

The post-2015 agenda is notably different from its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

For all states, any future framework represents an opportunity to merge the two streams of environment and development, historically separate since Rio in 1992. In practice, this means a single sustainable development framework, grounded in the three pillars of economy, society and environment. As the UN Secretary General (UNSG) notes, it must be people-centred and planet-sensitive, and with safe, peaceful and inclusive societies, effective institutions, and protected ecosystems as the ultimate outcomes.

It means a universal set of goals for all countries, including Canada, implemented according to national contexts and needs. And the sustainable development goals (SDGs) have the ambition to leave no one behind – for civil society organizations (CSOs) this means that no target will be considered met unless it is met for all social and economic groups.

Finally, looking ahead, any future framework must build on the progress made by the MDGs.

But it must also fill new gaps that have emerged since. And there are many. Accordingly, any future framework must be truly transformative.

And on all these fronts, Canada must follow suit.

Yet in the Canadian priorities that were disclosed, there is very little that is different relative to the government's existing priorities, and nothing that directly reflects this new transformative agenda for sustainable development. The Canadian priorities also do not reference the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act. It reads as a summary of ongoing work and not the foundations for a transformative new framework.

### **b) The SDGs require a more holistic approach to sustainable development**

Although not perfect, the current sustainable development goals and targets are an explicit effort to build on the MDGs and develop an agenda for the future that takes a more complex, integrated and holistic approach to sustainable development. Such a vision is noticeably absent from the government's approach.

For example, while Canada is looking to build on the leadership it has demonstrated around maternal newborn and child health (MNCH), there is no reference to strengthening sexual and reproductive health and rights for all women, strengthening health systems in countries, or connecting the health and well-being of all women (and not just pregnant women) to the other roles they play in society. Women still represent 70% of the world's poor. Around the world, unequal power relations relegate women to the lowest paying and most precarious jobs, and women's unpaid labour goes unrecognized and undervalued, especially with respect to child and family care. Furthermore, women continue to experience social, political and economic exclusion, and have limited voice, influence and decision-making power both inside and outside the home. Globally, women 15 to 24 years of age are at particular risk of HIV infection, early unintended pregnancy, and violence. While "tackling the structural drivers of gender inequality" is a welcome commitment, it must be reflected as a core priority of DFATD, not simply a cross-cutting theme.

Canada can build on its leadership around MNCH and its historic work on pioneering gender equality by doing the following: advocate for a more holistic approach to protecting and promoting all women's rights and freedoms, including reaffirming its comprehensive support for the full range of sexual and reproductive rights; call on the international community to fill critical funding gaps on women's rights and gender equality, and follow suit in our own commitments; and support universal public services in developing countries, which help level the playing field and reduce inequalities. In the post-2015 era, Canada can make gender equality and women's empowerment a core strategy to achieving a world free from injustice and poverty.

*c) The Environment is at the heart of sustainable development*

Similarly, the current government priorities make scant reference to sustainability and environmental issues, and where they do, this is only in the context of growth – where the focus is more around sustained, rather than sustainable growth. Climate change is not mentioned once. Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, the degradation of our natural environment, biodiversity and ecosystems, and the impacts of climate change put our collective well-being at risk. In addition, both climate change and environmental degradation exacerbate existing social, political and economic stresses, with women and girls bearing the brunt, and those most vulnerable to the resulting impacts have the least resources to adapt.

To meet the challenges of 2015, environmental sustainability must be a central tenet of the work that DFATD does and supports – addressing issues of responsible natural resource management, sustainable energy use, promoting healthy ecosystems and good biodiversity, agro and aqua -ecological farming and fishing practices, and limiting environmental degradation, including climate change. And very importantly, all this must be integrated coherently across the social and economic development elements of DFATD's programs.

*d) Any approach to growth must tackle inequality*

Finally, evidence shows us that private sector-led growth and job creation do not necessarily lead to poverty reduction nor to growth that from a social, economic or environmental perspective is necessarily sustainable. Following decades of unfettered market, financial and private sector-led growth, facilitated by policies that promoted the liberalization of economies and trade and that downplayed the importance of strong and effective governments and robust civil societies, we are faced with growing global inequalities both among and between all states and among and between all peoples. Rising income inequality poses a substantial threat to progress around the world. Tax evasion and avoidance is increasing the gap between haves and have-nots. Multiple dimensions of inequality – social, economic, environmental - deepen these gaps. And inequality often goes hand-in-hand with other kinds of injustice. Inequality is both a cause and an effect of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, race, caste, religion, disability and age. An approach that promotes growth, without considering human rights and environmental implications, is no longer tenable.

Furthermore, the International Monetary Fund has noted that lower net inequality is “robustly correlated with faster and more durable growth.” According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), growth falls as inequality rises, a relationship that can undermine a country's long-term economic potential and stability. Furthermore, tackling inequality can help lower crime rates and the incidence of violence, build stronger trust, social stability and cohesion, and improve

personal well-being through improved health and education outcomes. In response, the OECD has recognized that public services (health care, education, social housing, child care and elderly care) provide huge value to low-income households with higher risks of poverty. Such in-kind income is a substantial supplement to often meagre wages. In Argentina and Uruguay, large-scale cash-transfer schemes and in-kind transfers in education and healthcare services have done more to reduce inequality than even progressive income taxes. In summary, it will in fact be the ability of countries to address inequality that will be a key driver of poverty reduction and sustainable growth.

Looking forward, DFATD needs to address the multiple dimensions of inequality and the structures that perpetuate them. The Government of Canada must encourage progressive fiscal, wage and social protection policies that prioritize investments in the most marginalized groups. To narrow the inequality gap, we must close international tax loopholes that facilitate tax evasion, increase aid spending on the public delivery of universal essential services, and strengthen the capacity of developing country governments to mobilize their own resources to do so. We must also focus predominantly on the poorest and most vulnerable, in particular women of all ages, children, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced populations. With rights in hand, people can gain greater control of their own lives and the systems in which they participate.

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To conclude, the DFATD priorities are fine *per se*. But looking forward, DFATD must change its approach to global development cooperation to keep pace with the transformative ambitions of the post-2015 agenda, and ensure it is more comprehensive and holistic, genuinely integrates the environment into all its work, and focuses on the structural drivers of inequality to ensure that no one is left behind.

### **///. This is a universal agenda**

#### **a) Universality has implications for the Canadian government at home and overseas**

Unlike the MDGs, which largely applied to developing countries, the SDGs are universal. UNSG Ban Ki-moon has argued that we need a universal agenda because: 1) global challenges, such as climate change, financial stability and health pandemics, transcend borders; and 2) national sustainable development challenges, such as destitution and exclusion, unemployment, gender inequality and the need to protect the environment, are shared by all countries.

In this regard, the SDGs have at least three universal aspects, which have important implications for the monitoring and review of their implementation.

#### **b) Canada must leave no one behind**

First, universality means the SDGs apply to all people, regardless of where they were born, and they must leave no one behind, be it at home or overseas. Pockets of poverty exist in all societies – high, middle and low –income.

For its part, this means that Canada must domestically, as well as internationally, focus its efforts on, and prioritize the needs of, the poorest and most marginalized populations. This will require enhancing the capacity of all governments, including Canada's, to collect disaggregated data that identifies individuals and groups that are at risk of being left behind.

*c) Canada has a role to play in contributing to global public goods*

Second, universality means addressing challenges that transcend national borders. The SDGs offer a shared vision to address *universal* challenges related to global public goods, such as ensuring global financial stability and combating climate change. The SDGs include provisions to address systemic issues in areas such as finance, technology transfer and trade, as well as to improve global energy efficiency, address the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets, ensure more sustainable consumption and production patterns, combat climate change and its impacts, preserve ecosystems, and reduce illicit financial and arms flows.

For its part, Canada can take concrete action, for example, on climate change, growing global inequality, migration, trade, and peace and stability, and support greater global cooperation around these issues. It can also support more meaningful developing country and civil society participation in global governance.

*d) Canada should support developing countries to realize the SDGs.*

Thirdly, universality is about the collective actions needed to ensure that sustainable development outcomes are achieved for everyone, everywhere. National progress will depend on global efforts in areas such as aid, capacity development and technology transfer. Yet, the ambitions of the SDGs will not be achieved for all people everywhere without additional support from the international community in countries where internal capacity – both human and financial – is weak.

For its part, Canada should support developing countries to realize the SDGs and will need to review its approach to international development cooperation in light of new commitments related to the SDGs. In particular, Canada can accelerate commitments to long-term, predictable and increased official development assistance financing; develop an action plan that implements the commitments made at the recent High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF) and the High Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation; offer preferential treatment and access to its markets to low-income countries; and explore other means of providing technological transfer and capacity development.

#### **IV. Universality applies to Canada**

*a) Canada will be responsible for implementing the SDGs*

Because the SDGs are universal, the UNSG has noted that all countries will be expected to adopt, implement, monitor, and report back on domestic sustainable development outcomes. Countries have the flexibility to implement the SDGs in accordance with national sustainable development priorities.

Canada has endorsed the universal nature of the SDG agenda. The provinces and territories, however, have jurisdiction over key aspects of the international agenda, such as social sectors and infrastructure. And, although the Canadian government has launched this “request for feedback,” the extent of the federal government’s consultations with other levels of government remains unclear.

*b) Canada must develop an action plan for how it will implement the SDGs domestically and internationally*

The challenges of the SDG agenda resonate with Canada’s own domestic challenges – to leave no one behind (notably First Nations populations), and to address growing income inequality, improve gender

equality outcomes and combat climate change. The three levels of government and non-state actors (civil society and the private sector) have made significant efforts to identify and address Canada's sustainable development challenges.

Looking forward, and building on this foundation, it is incumbent on the federal government to bring all stakeholders to the table, and obtain political buy-in from provincial and territorial governments, which will play a key role in implementing the SDG agenda. This should be the basis for a strategy and action plan to realize the SDGs in Canada.

Canada should also work through DFATD to develop an action plan for how it will promote the SDG framework internationally. This will require ensuring greater coherence between Canadian trade, investment, foreign affairs, environment, natural resource, international development policies and the new SDG framework, as well as with other relevant departments.

*c) Success will require all Canadian development actors*

At the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011, governments acknowledged that to implement, monitor and review such an ambitious agenda, and to respond appropriately to the global challenges set before us, it will require the active participation of all development actors, including the three levels of government, elected officials, civil society, the private sector and citizens. The SDG framework is not a government agenda. It is a global agenda that must put people and the planet front and centre, and engage all development actors in outcomes that promote positive and sustainable development outcomes.

For his part and in the context of the SDGs, the UNSG has highlighted the need for “a truly participatory, responsive and transformational course of action” in which civil society organizations (CSOs) have the capacity and space to perform its critical and independent roles. In his words, “empowered civil society actors [...] must rally to the cause, and contribute to a sustainable, equitable and prosperous future.”

Looking forward, the Canadian government must work with all development actors to promote sustainable development. And building on International Development Minister Christian Paradis' April statement on protecting and promoting the fundamental rights and freedoms of CSOs internationally, and the government's new [Civil Society Partnership Policy](#), Canada could play a more specific leadership role advocating for an enabling environment for civil society globally, and ensure that CSOs are able to effectively contribute to achieving the SDGs, and meaningfully engage in their monitoring and review.

*d) Accountability will require both a strong global monitoring framework, and a domestic one*

The SDGs will require a strong, robust monitoring and accountability framework at the global level to ensure progress on implementing the SDGs – including their targets and the means of implementation. Accountability must be multi-directional – both by countries to their own populations and stakeholders, and between countries as they cooperate to achieve the SDGs. The framework should not just be monitored by governments, but by people themselves. There must also be coherence between the SDG framework and other global agendas.

For example, to ensure the universal nature of the SDG agenda, an accountability framework will require reliable and disaggregated data at the country level to ensure no one is left behind. It will require Canada to monitor, and be held to account, for how it implements the SDGs domestically. And it will need to monitor if countries like Canada have lived up to their international responsibilities to help other countries implement the SDG agenda and to support the global community to make progress in addressing global public goods.

Looking forward, the government must ensure that any action plan to help implement the SDGs fully integrates these issues of accountability.

## **V. Financing the SDGs – aid plus**

### ***a) Aid is still an essential resource for development***

As mentioned previously, implementing the SDGs will require Canada to support through financial and non-financial means the capacity of countries to realize the SDGs. This will require both using official development assistance (ODA) and other sources of finance.

At this critical juncture, Canada's commitment to ODA must not wane, as it serves as an essential, and the most immediate, resource for fighting poverty reduction. In this vein, Canada must reverse recent funding cuts and get back on track towards setting a multi-year timetable to realizing the 0.7 percent target of Gross National Income. At a time when commitments to realizing a new set of sustainable development goals need to accelerate, it is an affront to the global community that Canada abandon this commitment, and it does serious harm to our credibility when trying to show leadership in promoting other kinds of financial and non-financial resources.

### ***b) Other sources of finance MUST contribute to sustainable development***

And while other sources and flows of finance have grown in size and scope, neither the amount nor its direct impact on sustainable development should be overstated. In The State of Finance for Developing Countries, Eurodad's 2014 report notes that "losses of financial resources by developing countries have been more than double the inflows of new financial resources since the financial crisis." Canada and other countries must do more to stem this outflow, including by closing international tax loopholes that facilitate tax evasion from countries and supporting the establishment of a UN Tax Committee to develop a set of global rules around this issue.

In terms of blended finance and the recently announced Development Finance Initiative, Canada needs to quickly establish clear criteria for private sector partners that go beyond technical requirements (minimum years incorporated, audited financial statements) to address the track records of these partners in delivering positive development outcomes (in this case, positive social, development, economic, and environmental impacts, particularly for poor and marginalized populations). Canada also needs to establish clear public criteria for monitoring and assessing the financial and development additionality of such projects.

To achieve financial additionality, Canada should establish a set of indicators that assess financial need, promote investment in risk-averse markets, gauge the leverage potential of such an investment, favour the domestic private sector in developing countries, and assess the opportunity costs of resources used

against other development priorities. This framework should also assess the extent to which investments have actually leveraged additional finance. In terms of development additionality, Canada needs to clearly articulate intended development and poverty reduction outcomes for their investments by establishing publicly available qualitative and quantitative indicators for measuring gender equality (including measures for the economic, social, and political inclusion and empowerment of women), governance (including the effectiveness and capacities of institutions), and environmental sustainability (particularly climate change). Such indicators need to be accompanied by a monitoring framework to ensure that these investments have positive development impacts which build on best practices among donors.

Finally, remittances are a growing source of finance and an important private source of income for many families in low-income countries. But migration is a strategy adopted by individual households to diversify their source of income, and comes at great costs to the family members left at home and to communities. Remittances are not an international development assistance program nor strategy. And the best Canada can do would be to help drive down the user fees paid by individuals to send remittances home.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Over the past fifteen years, the MDGs have helped mobilize public and political attention and support for initiatives on a range of issues related to extreme poverty, hunger, primary education, gender equality, maternal, newborn and child health, HIV-AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and environmental sustainability, among other areas. The MDGs have met with some progress in terms of increased school enrollment, lower child and maternal mortality rates, substantial drops in the incidence of malaria and tuberculosis, and less people living in extreme poverty, but the majority of developing countries have been severely challenged in meeting these goals. Recent years have witnessed global fuel, food, finance, and climate crises, increasing in breadth, scope and incidence, and rising global inequality, striking all countries indiscriminately, and disproportionately affecting those who are the least able to respond to them, be they in Canada or Cameroon.

In 2015, the world needs real action to develop a new sustainable development framework for the next fifteen years. And Canada has an opportunity to demonstrate real leadership in promoting a new agenda of global interdependence that puts our shared interests in advancing these issues at the fore. The price of acting may be high. But the cost of inaction will be even higher.