

Analysis of Global Affairs Canada's
What We Heard Summary of Canada's
International Assistance Review



Canadian Council for International Co-operation

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OVERVIEW

The Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) welcomes the release of Global Affairs Canada's (GAC) *What We Heard* – a summary document of the outcomes of the International Assistance Review (IAR). The release of such a summary document represents a significant undertaking and is in keeping with good consultation practice.

In general, CCIC supports the main highlights and key messages in the summary. It is broadly in line with the Council's own discourse analysis (*In Our Own Words*) of 80 submissions from civil society organizations (CSOs). That said, there are also a number of points of divergence – both rhetorical and substantive.

This analysis identifies areas where CCIC feels the summary document makes important and welcome advances from the discussion paper, and areas where – from the Council's perspective – it still falls short (including in relation to the findings of *In Our Own Words*). CCIC hopes that GAC will give these points appropriate consideration in developing its final International Assistance Policy (IAP).

MAIN HIGHLIGHTS

While the main highlights signal that participants supported GAC to pursue the Discussion Priorities in principle, it is not clear that this is entirely true. The consultations for the International Assistance Review were structured according to the parameters of the GAC-set priorities; naturally, many participants responded in their submissions by nuancing what was presented. Even so, numerous organizations – including CCIC – did underscore different priorities, or different emphasis on sectors within those priorities. The continued focus on specifying thematic priorities also sits at cross-purposes with the emphasis on effective delivery. Effective development is not about Canadian priorities, but rather aligning what Canada and Canadians do with the development priorities owned by partner countries, partner CSOs and other development actors.

CCIC is pleased that the summary strongly affirmed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the overarching framework for a future international assistance policy. This will require an approach that focuses on the three pillars of sustainable development, and that is more holistic and integrated across and within sectors – offering a basket of interventions (not siloed priorities) in response to locally-identified needs. This idea of an integrated approach emerged in *In Our Own Words*, but seems much less present in the content and structure of the summary (except around the themes of water and women). GAC should consider how to both maintain clear priorities and reflect the ambitions of an integrated 2030 Agenda.

CCIC is also pleased that the summary affirmed that the IAP should be guided by a feminist and human rights-based approach that intends to be transformative. While the original discussion paper seemed clear on the former, it was uncertain about the latter – it is encouraging to see both affirmed.

The GAC discussion paper, *What We Heard*, and *In Our Own Words* all strongly affirmed the importance of focusing on the poorest and most marginalized people – and establishing the necessary tools to do this, like collecting gender-disaggregated data. This is positive. Moving forward, the Council would suggest that GAC (as well as Canadian civil society) needs to shift from a focus on “the poorest and most marginalized” to an emphasis on the agency of all people and groups, and the intersectionality of multiple factors that serve to compound how people are marginalized, or influence how they are not. This is more congruent with the feminist ambitions of GAC. The summary section on Health and Rights of Women and Children better reflects this approach. Looking forward, GAC will need to clearly lay out how human rights principles and a gendered lens will be at the foundation of everything it does.

The summary's increased focus on effectiveness and improving delivery is welcome. The discussion paper said

little on aid effectiveness and nothing on development effectiveness. The summary addresses elements of a locally- and needs-driven agenda, and touches on ownership, transparency, accountability and results. It also identifies a range of elements and mechanisms to ensure more flexible, diverse, timely, responsive and predictable delivery. However, several core elements of the aid and development effectiveness agenda – like democratic ownership, alignment with developing country priorities, harmonization among donor countries, and mutual accountability between donors, partner countries and their citizens – are much less present. This is exacerbated by a tension throughout the summary – which is even more prominent in the discussion paper – between what is offered (Canada’s priorities and value-added) and what is needed (partner priorities and demands). CCIC and others emphasized concerns around the absence of aid and development effectiveness principles in their submissions, and it is surprising not to see these better reflected in the summary. GAC should be mindful in its final IAP to balance the directive nature of its ambitions with responsiveness to partner needs, identify where and how the two may meet.

Furthermore, effectiveness is not just about improving technical delivery of services – which does need improvement. It is also about outcomes, impact and sustainability – which the discussion paper underplayed, but which the summary acknowledges in places. As noted in the summary (and *In Our Own Words*), effectiveness requires the progressive realization of all human rights, as well as gender equality, women’s empowerment and gender transformative change, tackling root causes, and focusing on impact and outcomes. These can only occur over longer-term time horizons. The summary rightly acknowledges that GAC has much work to do to get the internal mechanics right and deliver on this agenda.

The summary rightly notes that none of the above can occur without policy coherence; but given the overarching framework of the 2030 Agenda, it must be *policy coherence for sustainable development* – including a gendered approach. The importance of these interconnections is

emphasized in the summary. Attention to these elements must not be lost in the IAP. There needs to be some indication in the IAP as to what mechanisms and processes will ensure a whole-of-government implementation of the policy, and how technologies, resources, and approaches will be shared between departments. Furthermore, policy coherence cannot occur without policies. While CCIC and many others underscored the need for a suite of policies to help give life to the IAP, the summary only makes explicit reference to developing two policies: on humanitarian assistance and on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The summary rightfully emphasized local engagement and action. This focus was underplayed in the original discussion paper, but was a very salient feature in submissions. It includes connecting local action with national and regional support – especially delivery mechanisms and partnerships.

The reference to 0.7 percent of Gross National Income is encouraging. Canadians, including parliamentarians, have repeatedly reiterated support for the 0.7 target. Canada can take some positive directions in its global cooperation policy by acting on the above issues, but progress also depends on the level of funding available.

Finally, GAC should ensure that the main highlights noted in the summary, such as the connection to the SDGs and the human rights-based and feminist approaches, are integrated throughout all thematic areas and actions in the IAP.

What follows are some key points from the thematic and implementation sections of *What We Heard*.

A. HEALTH AND RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

It is good to see reflected in the summary that participants felt GAC must go beyond a focus on health in this section to include the full spectrum of rights women have and exercise throughout their life cycle (as newborns, infants, girls, adolescents and women). The summary recognizes the

importance of promoting access, quality and equity, health-systems strengthening, empowerment, non-discrimination and participation, the elimination of violence, health and nutrition, the full range of sexual reproductive health and rights, and education and skills development. This is consistent with a human rights-based approach.

The summary also affirmed submissions' strong support for using a feminist lens, and underscored the need for gender equality as a stand-alone and cross-cutting priority for Canada's international assistance. As noted, it also recognized the multiple and intersecting dimensions of discrimination, marginalization and violence that are compounded by factors such as gender, race, disability and sexual orientation. And it recognized the importance of addressing the root causes of gender inequality, including institutional and systems strengthening – policies, laws and structures that may perpetuate gender discrimination – and bold funding investments in gender equality. These are all important steps in moving a feminist agenda forward and will represent important foundations for any future IAP.

B. CLEAN ECONOMIC GROWTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE

CCIC welcomes the acknowledgement of the strong call from civil society to make climate change both a stand-alone and cross-cutting priority for Canada's international assistance. As noted, issues of the environment and climate must be integrated across GAC's approach to reflect the third pillar of Agenda 2030. On climate, the summary (and *In Our Own Words*) reflects the need for focus and investment in adaptation, particularly in developing countries where climate change has disproportionate impacts. There is, however, a surprising degree of focus on mitigation and clean technology solutions, out of proportion with the content of *In Our Own Words*. The IAP (and Canada's climate financing and programming) must correct this imbalance, and dedicate more focus and resources to adaptation.

It is also good to see increased attention in the summary

(compared with the discussion paper) to education, skills training, and agriculture as key areas for economic growth in least developed countries, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable people. References to pro-poor growth, economic empowerment, financial inclusion, and local private sector actors and markets are also welcome.

C. GOVERNANCE, PLURALISM, DIVERSITY, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

CCIC is pleased that the summary recognizes support for a human rights-based approach to Canada's international assistance, which would tackle inequality and discrimination, and promote and protect the full spectrum of rights. This should be consistent and coherent across all policy areas and departments.

This section is the only place in the summary document where CSOs, including women's and youth organizations, are explicitly and substantively mentioned as active and necessary participants and facilitators in development. CCIC welcomes this reference, including to the importance of civic space. Civil society is an active contributor to, and an essential element of, good governance and the realization of human rights. CCIC would encourage a more widespread recognition of the role of CSOs as independent development actors in the final Policy Statement.

Although the summary later refers to the need to develop a policy to help countries transition away from donor support, the absence of any reference to addressing capital flight from developing countries and strengthening tax administration is regrettable, as this was a focus of some submissions to the IAR. It would be helpful for the IAP to address this shortcoming.

D. PEACE AND SECURITY

The summary acknowledges the importance of context in addressing and preventing conflict and fragility, and the opportunity that exists for Canada to play a leading role in global peace and security efforts. CCIC hopes that the final

Policy Statement will build on this by committing to deliver innovative and targeted programming across the spectrum of conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution.

The summary suggests there is support for integrated and comprehensive conflict prevention, humanitarian and stabilization efforts, supported by development and trade tools. This approach could be positive, if it contributes to more holistic and long-term programming and development outcomes. However, integration also presents a serious risk of conflating security, development and humanitarian efforts. This can undermine apolitical humanitarian action. Humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law must never be subsumed or undermined by supposedly comprehensive responses to crises. The summary also implies that trade tools always contribute positively to stabilization efforts, which is not always the case; in some cases, trade may exacerbate local peace and stability. The IAP must approach issues of integration across the conflict, development, diplomacy, and humanitarian realms with extreme care.

Finally, the summary recognizes that respondents to the IAR called for increased support for and attention to women, peace and security agenda and tackling gender-based violence. The final IAP should reflect that this focus is an essential element of any long-term peacebuilding strategy.

E. RESPONDING TO HUMANITARIAN CRISES AND THE NEEDS OF DISPLACED POPULATIONS

The Council welcomes the summary's general acknowledgement of some key recommendations of the humanitarian sector, including: a multi-year approach to addressing protracted crises; increased support for local actors; a recognition that numerous social and economic inequalities and intersectionalities affect humanitarian need (e.g. for women, children, people living with disabilities); and a general defence of humanitarian principles, IHL, and humanitarian space. There are also welcome references to the importance of investments in preparedness and prevention, including through implementation of the Sendai

Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The summary represents, to our knowledge, the first public acknowledgment by the government of a longstanding call from Canadian humanitarian organizations for an international humanitarian-assistance policy that affirms Canada's commitment to principled humanitarian action.

References to a more systematic and coordinated approach to the humanitarian-development nexus are welcome. However, as noted above, references to more "comprehensive" approaches – particularly where these including peacebuilding efforts – raise the risk of conflation and securitization. These concerns should be addressed explicitly in the IAP through a direct and unambiguous reaffirmation of the humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.

Despite the presence of "displaced populations" in the title for this section, there is no clear focus on displacement beyond a single line on comprehensive approaches and relations with host communities. The IAP should clearly indicate whether and how this focus will be maintained and asserted.

F. I) IMPROVING EFFECTIVENESS AND TRANSPARENCY

This section refers to respondents' support for aid-effectiveness frameworks – an important point. CCIC welcomes this. However, as noted, the Council feels it does not go far enough, particularly as the summary makes no reference to the Busan Principles for Effective Development Cooperation. Further, it is disappointing that there is no explicit reference to, much less a reaffirmation of, the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act.

The summary refers to timely and transparent data publication for both GAC and implementing partners, including some specific changes, previously proposed by CSOs, that would help avoid double reporting and increase

the transparency of funding decision-making. This is positive and should be reaffirmed in the IAP. That said, while improving transparency is a priority for CSOs, it is not clear from the 80 submissions collected for *In Our Own Words* that adopting the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) was a clear priority for more than one or two groups. Yet the summary affirms the need for CSOs to adopt IATI. IATI is one option among several reporting mechanisms, and not necessarily the best-suited to all Canadian CSOs.

CCIC welcomes the summary's references to the localization of Canada's development and humanitarian programming, including decentralized decision-making to the field and engagement of new and varied partners – which the IAP should make clear must include local CSOs.

The section's reference to focusing on our comparative advantage is ambiguous, and so is very difficult to assess at this stage. As noted earlier, the government must determine Canada's "comparative advantage" in a manner that respects aid and development effectiveness principles, as well as the government's commitment to a feminist and human rights-based approach.

II) INNOVATION

There are positive references here to an enabling environment – the only ones in the summary. There is a clear emphasis on increasing risk tolerance to facilitate innovation by partners (including CSOs).

The section refers to linking domestic and international agendas to leverage Canadian expertise, knowledge and experience across international assistance. While this proposal is interesting, in that it could reinforce the universal spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by breaking down silos between the domestic and international, it must be done in such a way as to respect aid and development effectiveness principles, including democratic ownership of development priorities.

The summary indicates that respondents suggested that results-based management (RBM) should be re-examined to promote rather than stifle innovation. An RBM framework (which is linear) is not necessarily conducive to promoting innovation (which is not), nor to the government's ambition for longer-term outcomes and structural change. In finalizing the IAP, GAC should give this consideration.

There are good references to several financing and delivery innovations, including: long-term and flexible funding; smaller funds to pilot smaller-scale projects; support for testing and scaling-up successful innovation pilots; and innovative delivery of humanitarian assistance through mechanisms such as cash-based programming, digital platforms and mobile devices for financial transactions. A successful roll-out of the IAP will require getting the mechanics right.

The section contains some language on the private sector, including references to enabling Canadian for-profit companies to deliver Canadian programs, public-private partnerships, technical assistance, the extractive sector, and adopting new financing mechanisms, such as blended finance. The government must ensure that any engagement of the private sector in development adheres to development effectiveness principles, guarantees development and financial additionality, ensures full transparency to monitor this additionality, and does not lead to a return to tied aid.

III) PARTNERSHIPS

This section acknowledges private sector accountability, working with diverse groups (e.g. diaspora, Indigenous communities, researchers, youth and small organizations), and public engagement (including the development of a strategy) as key areas for partnership growth. The reference to public engagement is particularly positive, as it was absent from the discussion paper, and is essential for the IAP.

IV) DELIVERY MECHANISMS

As noted, this section has positive references to substantive changes to delivery mechanisms, including: predictable and longer-term project funding; simpler and streamlined project selection and funding mechanisms, including a graduated application process; and shifting to a program approach that builds connections across thematic sectors, including across the humanitarian-development divide.

This section of the summary acknowledges the strong call from Canadian CSOs for the government to maintain its focus on poorest and most vulnerable, including those in fragile states and areas not favoured by other donors, as well as greater transparency regarding country selection and a long-term commitment to countries chosen. This consensus should be reflected in the IAP.

CONCLUSION

The *What We Heard* summary represents an important step forward in the IAR. It marks the end of the time-bound consultation process leading to a new Policy Statement. CCIC hopes that the summary also forms part of a new, ongoing process of consultation around policy development and implementation, in which the government works in partnership with other stakeholders, and each stakeholder shares what it hears, expects, and has to offer. The government has heard from stakeholders, including Canadian CSOs who have deep experience and knowledge around implementing programs, working with people to help them realize their rights, and generating long-term sustainable outcomes in different countries and contexts around the world. These respondents brought forward innovative ideas grounded in significant expertise. This will enhance Canada's contribution to transforming our world in line with the SDGs.

As the government advances its new policy and funding framework, these ideas will help make Canada's policies and programs more inclusive and effective. At the same time, the government must also uphold both the letter and

the spirit of such fundamental practices and principles as the Busan Principles, the humanitarian principles, international conventions and law, the Istanbul Principles and the ODAAA.

CCIC remains confident that Canada can play a leadership role in building a fairer, more sustainable and safer world. The Council looks forward to continuing to work with Global Affairs Canada, CSOs across Canada and in partner countries, and other stakeholders to make that vision a reality.



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