



## Implementation Plan: Civil Society Partnerships Policy – High Level Narrative Update 2022

### Introduction

The Government of Canada works with a broad range of partners, domestically and internationally, to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of Canada's international assistance. It recognizes the essential role of civil society organizations (CSOs) as development actors in their own right, and continues to advocate for safe and supportive environments in which civil society can thrive around the world. This engagement with CSOs is affirmed in Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). It is restated in [Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance – A Feminist Approach](#) ("the CSO Policy") and the [CSO Policy Implementation Plan](#), co-developed with the CSO Policy Advisory Group (CPAG), which is composed of senior-level Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and CSO representatives.

This Update captures key accomplishments, challenges, and opportunities in advancing the CSO Policy Implementation Plan, since its approval in 2019 to Spring 2022. The collaboration between CSO and GAC CPAG members, in support of the CSO Policy Implementation Plan, demonstrates the value of governmental-civil society collaboration in the development and implementation of policies and programs on international development issues. The many actions accomplished to advance the Implementation Plan reinforce the overarching purpose of the CSO Policy, that is to encourage effective cooperation of GAC with CSOs to maximize the impact and results of Canada's international assistance and foster a strong and vibrant civil society sector.

GAC and CSO collaboration has resulted in achievements across diverse policy and programming areas. GAC and CSOs advanced gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by supporting women's rights organizations and movements, as well as by strengthening capacity for using gender transformative approaches in programming. Through regular dialogue, GAC and CSOs made progress in the areas of streamlining processes, exploring innovative solutions, and improving transparency, accountability and results of international assistance.

Despite several important achievements, GAC and CSOs faced challenges, some of which were linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted CSOs implementation of projects but also spurred innovation and new ways of working – for CSOs and GAC. Opportunities for policy dialogue were also impacted by

the pandemic. Shifting to virtual interactions required adaptation, and equally presented an opportunity to engage a greater diversity of stakeholders and partners around the world.

Going forth, Canada will share lessons learned from the CSO Policy to support implementation of the [Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance](#), adopted on July 6, 2021 by Canada and other members from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC).



## Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance

A feminist approach

### Objective 1:

Empower women and girls, promote gender equality, and reach the poorest, most vulnerable and most marginalized as the most effective means to eradicate poverty.

### Achievements

The reporting period, year 3 of implementing Canada's landmark Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), represents one of the most active periods in recent years of GAC engagement with CSOs to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity. Throughout this period, GAC has worked extensively with its civil society partners to advance Canada's feminist international assistance priorities, which has resulted in significant achievements.

#### Programming

Canada contributed \$300 million to establish the Equality Fund, a first-of-its kind organization with an innovative financial and grant-making model that aims to provide core, flexible, and predictable funding in support of women's rights organizations (WROs) and sustainable feminist movements globally. In February 2019, Canada also announced its new \$30 million LGBTQ2+ international assistance program, including the launch of the participatory Act Together for Inclusion Fund (ACTIF), co-managed by Equitas and the Dignity Network. GAC also collaborated closely with CSO partners to implement the Women's Voice and Leadership Program (WVL) and funded a Care Canada - coordinated Community of Practice for WVL implementing partners. This innovative and groundbreaking program provides WROs and movements, as well as LBTQI+ groups in developing countries, with flexible funding and capacity-building support to advance gender equality. GAC also worked with the Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health (CanWaCH) to develop gender equality training modules for CSO members. Additionally, the GAC-funded Inspiring Action for Global Citizenship Initiative implemented by the Inter-Council Network helped deliver workshops, toolkits and webinars to many Canadian CSOs on key priorities for women's rights. For example, the Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI) via the Comité québécois femmes et développement (CQFD) produced a technical data sheet to demonstrate how climate change issues are linked to those of women's rights.

From the civil society perspective, a report produced by the Women's Rights Policy Group (WRPG) and Cooperation Canada entitled *An Analysis of CSO Experiences with WVL program*, contained some key recommendations about the need to establish widely accessible, open, transparent and inclusive application processes for CSOs, and about the importance of ensuring that contracting arrangements reflect the feminist approaches and intent of GAC programming. A study produced by NextGen with Sheila Rao, in collaboration with Cooperation Canada, the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development (CASID), the CQFD and WRPG, also provided data on what organizations

are doing to consult with women and girls. The results from the study on the impacts of the FIAP on CSO policy and practice revealed, among other highlights that “consultations with women’s organizations were noted by 76% of respondents when developing projects.”

### **Policy Engagement**

Leading up to the 2021 Generation Equality Forum (GEF), GAC, together with Women and Gender Equality Canada, regularly engaged with a wide range of CSOs, including the WRPG and the Canadian Beijing +25 Network, to inform its approach and commitments to the GEF, which culminated in significant financial (\$180M) and policy commitments by the Government of Canada. For example, Canada committed to working with WROs, women’s funds, and other governments to design a new and unprecedented Global Alliance for Sustainable Feminist Movements, which will foster ongoing political and financial support, and the exchange of best practices, for financing feminist movements and organizations.

To strengthen Canada’s Feminist Foreign Policy, GAC also held a productive dialogue with a wide range of domestic and international civil society partners. In total, more than 400 civil society, academic and Indigenous partners provided views and recommendations on Canada’s Feminist Foreign Policy through virtual roundtables, public webinars and written contributions.

### **Women, Peace and Security**

GAC continued to support local and regional women's organizations in a number of countries through multi-donor funds. GAC also co-chaired several meetings with CSOs in Canada through the Canadian National Action Plan Advisory Group. In 2020-21, Canada co-chaired with Uruguay, the Women Peace and Security (WPS) Focal Points Network. This included, Canada funding the Women Peace and Security Network-Canada to convene a special meeting of Canadian and international WPS CSOs in August 2020.

WPSN has produced reports that document the progress of Canada’s Women Peace and Security Action Plan, and these include an analysis against results.

## **Challenges**

The pandemic hindered GAC’s efforts to achieve Objective 1, significantly affecting some CSOs’ ability to engage in policy dialogue and revealed that continued support to build their capacity, including on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, was necessary.

In implementing its gender equality programming, GAC has learned implementing feminist project management and feminist monitoring, evaluation and learning requires more time, resources and flexibility than traditional project management approaches. The added requirements for implementing these new approaches are further compounded by the need to balance GAC’s due diligence and financial risk management protocols and processes with channeling funds to smaller WROs or organizations that have previously never worked with the Department. Despite these challenges, there is support for these new approaches at all levels.

## Opportunities

By continuing to champion and promote innovative ways of working with civil society and WROs, including through programs such as WVL, GAC and CSO partners have created valuable opportunities to share lessons, data and good practices. These lessons will help inform future programming together.

Continued collaboration with CSOs and networks, such as Cooperation Canada and the Women's Rights Policy Group (WRPG), will be key to advancing Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy. There is an opportunity to strengthen our policy and programming processes through engaging experts from the Global South and benefiting from their expertise relevant to the work of women's organizations in the context of international assistance.

Canada is committed to supporting and engaging with feminist and equality-seeking movements, especially those focussed on underrepresented groups, including Indigenous women, women with disabilities, members of LGBTQ2+ communities, and newcomer, racialized, and migrant women. Accurately integrating this broader inclusivity and diversity will help us improve our tools and approaches.

Disseminating learnings from GAC's flagship programs such as WVL, the Equality Fund, Actif and others through the wider gender equality community of practice and CSOs, as well as within GAC, will help us further our collaboration with CSOs and improve our programming overall. In 2021–22, five years into FIAP implementation and two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the time is ripe to take stock of our joint efforts to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity. There is an opportunity for CSOs, networks and governments to break down silos by working together, and thereby increase their learning on challenges faced as well as best practices.



# Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance

A feminist approach

## Objective 2:

Facilitate a safe and enabling environment for civil society.

### Achievements

Through multi-stakeholder approaches such as the Community of Democracies, Global Media Freedom Coalition and Equal Rights Coalition, GAC is building robust networks and employing diplomatic tools to effectively protect, support and advocate for human rights defenders and journalists. Moreover, GAC holds regular consultations with civil society partners to enable constructive dialogue on priority human rights issues and geographic areas of concern, and these exchanges can later inform bilateral meetings with government representatives, and discussions in multilateral forums, such as the G7 and G20. With like-minded partners, GAC continues to advance the issue of protecting civil society space and freedom of expression, and emphatically condemn all attacks on, threats to and harassment of human rights defenders, recognizing the specific risks faced by women, racial and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ2+ persons. In multilateral forums, such as the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly, GAC continues to engage with and be informed by the expertise and advice of CSOs on multilateral human rights resolutions, including those focusing on supporting human rights defenders, freedom of expression and gender equality.

In 2019, GAC launched the updated Voices at Risk Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders (the Guidelines). The Guidelines provide practical advice to Canadian diplomats on how to support human rights defenders. GAC's network of missions is implementing Voices at Risk in collaboration with international and local civil society partners. To ensure that human rights defenders are effective advocates, GAC will continue to facilitate safe and enabling spaces through actions such as reinforcing networks, building capacity and providing funding, engaging with local authorities, making public statements, and supporting emergency assistance needs. For example, in the Americas, representatives of Canadian missions regularly meet with human rights defenders and provide an inclusive space to share information and to recommend progressive action on initiatives that support human rights defenders. GAC missions in the Asia Pacific region, continue to support local organizations working on issues such as LGBTQ2+ inclusion, violence against women and girls, and democratic reform. GAC continues to build awareness among mission staff and at HQ on the Guidelines, including providing training in cooperation with CSO partners, to share best practices and discuss challenges as well as promote gender responsive approaches by forming communities of practice. Moreover, to integrate a gender responsive approach, GBA+ training is offered on a continuous basis at HQ and at missions.

To facilitate an enabling environment for civil society, GAC seeks feedback and receives updates on missions' activities through regular reporting on human rights; this includes analysis of priority human rights issues affecting civil society. For example, GAC has received reports of the increased and undue interference of CSO activity throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In several instances, governments have placed further restrictions on CSOs by conducting investigations leading to prosecution, limiting financial aid from foreign governments, enhancing surveillance and increasing Internet shutdowns. This is especially relevant to CSOs advocating on LGBTQ2+, women, minority rights, and freedom of expression.

## Challenges

The advice, knowledge and expertise of civil society is integral to identifying human rights priorities and issues, and key to implementing Canada's feminist foreign policy goals and objectives. GAC continues to have discussions on the potential mapping of existing consultation mechanisms, though this would be a large undertaking given the size of the network of Canadian missions abroad.

As civic space for human rights advocacy and free media has been restricted considerably in countries with authoritarian and illiberal regimes, Canada and its partners must reinforce and support CSOs and human rights defenders. The impact of COVID-19 on marginalized groups, and the exploitation of the pandemic by some governments to limit human rights and fundamental freedoms will require continued monitoring and effective responses. Canada will continue to navigate challenges and respond to divergent perspectives while advocating for human rights, gender equality, diversity, inclusion and media freedom. Coordination with civil society is vital in the face of opposition and pushback.

## Opportunities

Multilateral meetings such as the US-hosted Leaders' Summit for Democracy offer excellent opportunities to expand stakeholder engagement and strengthen support for CSOs and human rights defenders. Canada's feminist foreign policy objectives could be further advanced in multilateral institutions such as La Francophonie and the OAS. In addition, as Chair of the Community of Democracies' Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society, Canada will continue to work with members, including CSOs, to address situations where civic space is threatened as demonstrated by Canada's support for the approval of the OECD-DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance.

Additionally, in pursuing a newly integrated approach to the Indo-Pacific region, Canada will continue cooperation with regional partners on democratic values, governance and human rights, as well as respect for international law. Recently, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* received Royal Assent and immediately came into force in Canada. The *Act* creates a lasting framework to advance the implementation of the Declaration at the federal level.



## Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance

A feminist approach

### Objective 3:

Protect Human Life  
and Dignity.

### Achievements

The increase in armed conflicts, protracted crises and natural disasters has resulted in unprecedented humanitarian needs. In this context, CSOs remain an essential element of Canada's response to humanitarian crises, notably through collaboration in advocacy and the delivery of life-saving services. In 2019, GAC launched *A Feminist Approach: Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action*, to advance the protection of human dignity and further strengthen gender responsive humanitarian action. This policy framework has helped to guide key areas of collaboration between CSOs and GAC.

In 2019–2020, Canada was the global lead of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (CtA). Canada facilitated the collective advocacy of CtA's 89 members, including CSOs, on the prevention and response to SGBV in emergencies [1] and launched the Road Map 2021–2025, members' commitment to taking collective action to address GBV.

Canada has increased investments in sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and rights programming in humanitarian contexts from \$22.2 million to \$68.3 million between 2016 and 2020. Through investments to CSOs, 333,113 women and girls received SRH services, including access to contraception in 2019.

For GAC, multilateral organizations and CSOs play an important role by partnering with local actors, particularly women-led organizations, and by recognizing and supporting their capacity and empowering their leadership in humanitarian contexts. GAC now provides over half of its humanitarian assistance as multi-year funding—predictability that enhances CSOs ability to have more constructive partnerships with local actors.

To empower women and girls, Canada has supported Women's rights organizations (WROs) and networks, both locally and internationally, through for example, its support to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) country-based pooled funds. In 2020, Canada contributed over \$50 million to 16 UN Country-Based Pooled Funds—a significant source of funding for local CSOs.

Through multilateral and country-level engagement, Canada has sought to ensure parties to conflicts provide unimpeded humanitarian access and protect civilians, humanitarian and medical personnel, for example, in Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and Ethiopia's Tigray region.



## Challenges

COVID-19 has exacerbated challenges, engendered unprecedented levels of humanitarian need, and further stretched humanitarian system and humanitarian actors. In parallel, climate change is also increasing peoples' vulnerability, including through extreme weather events and natural disasters, and escalating food insecurity. The state of geopolitics and some actors' lack of compliance with international law continue to make conflicts more protracted and intense with adverse impacts for crisis-affected populations. Internal and cross-border displacement continues to grow, contributing to heightened protection needs, in situations of sexual and gender-based violence, food insecurity and decreased access to sexual and reproductive health services. Disease outbreaks are threatening to reverse gains made over the past 20 years, and mental health and psychosocial supports are unable to meet demand. Gender inequalities, exacerbated by COVID-19, have also led to increased rates of sexual and gender-based violence, and vulnerable populations continue to experience intersectional discrimination and barriers to accessing services.

## Opportunities

GAC will continue to proactively engage with Canadian CSOs in response to sector-specific trends. This includes engagement in the following areas.

- Diversity and inclusion, with the broader goal of ensuring that intersectional approaches are explored in policy and programming;
- Shifting power in local contexts to advance the localization agenda and work meaningfully with local actors, including women-led organizations; and
- Broader engagement on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse to encourage adherence to minimum standards and learning opportunities across the sector.

---

[1] Joint statements at the Global Refugee Forum, the Oslo Conference on Ending SGBV in Humanitarian Crises, COVID-19 and GBV and high-level events, including at UNGA and World Bank Spring meetings



## Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance

A feminist approach

### Objective 4:

Foster CSO  
leadership in  
innovation.

### Achievements

GAC collaborated with CSOs to prepare the guidance note on Canada's approach to innovation in international assistance, which was released in November 2019.

As indicated in objective 6, GAC is collaborating with CSOs and improving its processes to make them more flexible, make funding more predictable and reduce the administrative burden for its partners, allowing them to implement innovative solutions more easily.

GAC worked with CSOs to encourage the incubation of innovative ideas and the scaling up of promising initiatives, among other things. For example, GAC provided the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC) with funding to implement the Fund for Innovation and Transformation (FIT) under the Small and Medium Organizations (SMOs) for Impact and Innovation initiative. FIT provides funding to Canadian SMOs that, in partnership with local organizations, test innovative solutions to current development problems; these solutions will advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

GAC also worked with CSOs to better share knowledge about best practices and innovation processes. In that regard, 12 meetings of the Multi-Stakeholder Community of Practice on Development Innovation were held between June 2017 and December 2021 (roughly 3 times per year). These brought together CSOs and stakeholders active in development innovation to help build collective capacities through an exchange of knowledge on best practices, new approaches and tools related to development innovation. GAC serves as the secretariat and collaborates with members of this community of practice by co-chairing events and meetings on a rotational basis. Since the guidance note was released, the community of practice has turned its attention to a variety of subjects, such as gender equality and innovation; scenario planning for risk management and innovation (session co-chaired by Cooperation Canada); SMOs, innovation and the sustainable development goals (in collaboration with the MCIC and the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation); and evaluating impact (with the World Bank's Gender Innovation Lab).

GAC organized joint training activities for employees of the department and CSOs on scaling up promising innovations (January 31, 2019) and testing innovations in international assistance (December 10, 2019). In June 2021, GAC piloted training on development innovation (in collaboration with the Centre for Learning in Intercultural Effectiveness and the International Development

Research Centre) for partner organizations and Canadian CSOs operating in Bolivia. GAC helped write [Toward Bridging Gender Equality & Innovation](#) and [Innovating to Address Gender-Based Violence](#), guides that were published by the International Development Innovation Alliance, which the Department made available to CSOs in both official languages. In July 2021, GAC shared data with the OECD Development Assistance Committee on innovative projects that had received funding; in the fall of 2021, GAC posted the data on the Open Government Portal.

## Challenges

Despite this progress, GAC's expectations regarding innovation in project proposals are not always clear, and CSOs do not always understand them fully. CSOs feel that partners are not familiar enough with the innovative initiatives supported by GAC. While the community of practice is one of the mechanisms that GAC has used to collaborate with CSOs on innovation, the pandemic is limiting CSOs' ability to volunteer to co-chair meetings. CSOs recognize that, in general, they do not often share their experiences, knowledge and innovations with each other. In fact, CSOs sometimes hesitate to speak freely about their innovative solutions in this kind of forum; a trust relationship still needs to be established. Lastly, the fact that there are numerous forums poses a challenge: CSOs focus on a limited number of networks directly related to their main field of interest, and there is little or no sharing among the various networks.

## Opportunities

There are a number of possibilities that are currently being fleshed out, beginning with the more effective communication of the definitions and basic innovation tools that GAC has developed. This is a good time to promote the links between inclusion and innovation, in accordance with the Whistler Principles. More detailed and clearer instructions about defining and measuring innovation could be included in GAC documents, especially when it comes to submitting proposals and preparing reports.

In addition, providing more details about GAC-funded innovative solutions could foster learning and get CSOs to scale up the most promising solutions. Sharing information by theme would make it easier for CSOs to identify innovative solutions that could inspire their approaches.

GAC will explore the possibility of expanding participation in the Multi-Stakeholder Community of Practice or holding joint meetings between the community of practice and CSO groups working on certain themes (for example, Cooperation Canada groups that focus on the sustainable development goals).

GAC and CSO representatives jointly submitted this report to the community of practice on December 14, 2021, and we are now gathering additional suggestions from members of the community of practice regarding opportunities for promoting and supporting innovation in international assistance.



## Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance

A feminist approach

### Objective 5:

Integrate the role of CSOs as independent actors into international assistance programming.

## Achievements

### Consultation Mechanisms

Building on the comprehensive CSO engagement that took place during the International Assistance Review and the FIAP commitment to engage Canadian CSOs, GAC and the sector developed a set of mechanisms to facilitate regular dialogue on policy and programming issues.

GAC and the sector have convened dialogues focused on: geographic regions and countries; sectors; process streamlining; international development reporting; and on topics such as anti-racism, the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and the humanitarian-development-peace (triple) nexus. The "triple nexus" refers to the interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace actions, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. In the context of the pandemic, these consultations have transitioned online, facilitating the involvement of more organizations across Canada.

There are three overarching consultation groups with Canadian organizations.

- 1) The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Bureau holds bi-annual outreach events with the CFO partner community: the Spring CFO Roundtable and the Fall CFO Engagement, Dialogue and Exposition-a three day event- engaging more than 100 partner organizations. It also engages the CFO Working Group, led by Cooperation Canada, to consult on specific grants and contributions policy and due diligence renewal needs.
- 2) The Task Force for Improving Effectiveness (TaFIE) meets regularly. Results to date include the issuance of more detailed information about funding processes and the introduction of concept notes which lower the application burden. TaFIE recently initiated a review of the project budget approval process.
- 3) The Civil Society Policy Advisory Group has launched a review of progress related to the nine objectives of the CSO policy.

In response to the pandemic, GAC created three new groups: GAC/Sector Dialogue Group, Solutions Group, and Volunteer Cooperation Program Ginger Group. All three groups helped develop guidelines and flexibilities related to cost eligibilities to facilitate implementing partner project delivery during the pandemic. GAC published the guidance and flexibilities resulting from this collaboration on its website.

### **Diversifying Partnerships**

GAC has also taken measures to diversify its partnerships with Canadian CSOs. Under the Small and Medium Sized Organizations (SMOs) initiative, 40 projects have been approved to date, the majority led by organizations without current or previous GAC funding. These efforts include providing training to SMOs through Spur Change, a 5-year initiative to increase the capacity of SMOs to deliver international development projects.

In addition, GAC has hosted networking sessions as part of recent calls for proposals to encourage CSOs to share information and collaborate when submitting proposals and implementing projects, and is rolling out a collaborative learning agenda for recipients of the Education for Refugees Call for Proposals. Provincial and regional councils, Cooperation Canada, CAIDP and CanWaCH have also conducted networking and knowledge-sharing activities.

## **Challenges**

While engagement between GAC and CSOs has increased, it has been with organizations that already receive GAC funding, in particular large organizations, that are members of networks such as Cooperation Canada, the Inter-Council Network, CAIDP and CanWaCH. Consideration needs to be given as to how to engage with a greater range of existing GAC partners and Canadian CSOs that GAC does not fund. To achieve this with cultural effectiveness, the integration of Indigenous people and other underrepresented groups at all levels of our sector will need to be addressed. Canadian organizations working in international development should also consider how to more substantively engage with local organizations, including in the design and implementation of programming and how to motivate more proactive sharing of information between organizations. A recent evaluation of GAC's Partnerships for Development Innovation Branch also noted that engagement could be strengthened through the development of a strategic framework for public engagement around Canada's international assistance priorities, and that although the SMO initiative is a positive step, there is potential to further diversify partnerships.

## Opportunities

During the pandemic, GAC and CSOs shifted to virtual work, which has facilitated more consultations between Canadian CSOs and GAC. The availability of new collaboration platforms and the increased familiarity of governments and CSOs with these platforms has created opportunities to reach beyond our normal networks and engage a more diverse set of organizations, to identify and work with new sources of expertise, and to reach additional beneficiaries. There is an opportunity to continue to build on these new means of engagement both during and after the pandemic.

There is also an opportunity for GAC and Canada's international development sector to advance the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, and ensure that Canada's international assistance better recognizes, supports, integrates and values Indigenous organizations, leadership, voices and knowledge.



# Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance

A feminist approach

## Objective 6:

Establish more predictable, equitable, flexible, and transparent funding mechanisms.

### Achievements

A number of significant changes have been implemented and/or tested since 2018 to make funding mechanisms more flexible, equitable and transparent. GAC continues to fine-tune its funding application requirements and overall processes to better respond to partners' needs and to facilitate working with the Department. For example, the Department launched a pilot in 2020 to accept unsolicited concept notes that do not use a smart-form template, providing more flexibility to pitch project ideas.

In a recent Call for Proposals, GAC provided applicants an opportunity to meet and network, encouraging participants to further collaborate. For increased transparency, GAC published webcasts to share relevant information with applicants in another call. The use of concept notes in calls was introduced in 2019, a change informed by consultations with Canadian partners.

To increase the transparency and predictability of calls, GAC has published a 12-month rolling calendar of upcoming calls since July 2021. Consequent changes were made to the calls webpage and further development of the Partners@International portal is underway, in order to provide more information about applicants' progress in different calls.

To better engage with CSO organizations funded by GAC for multiple initiatives over several years, the Department implemented the CFO-to-CFO Partner Focal Point. Since December 2020, 17 partners have been included in the implementation of this function. The focal point function provides a streamlined framework for engaging with GAC on financial and fiduciary oversight and due diligence issues, that improves predictability, equitability, flexibility and transparency of funding. The implementation of the function will expand throughout 2022.

Since 2019, GAC has responded to sudden-onset events in 23 countries through the Canadian Humanitarian Assistance Fund (CHAF). The CHAF, which responds to small-and medium-scale, rapid-onset crises, enables Canada's Humanitarian Coalition member agencies comprised of CSOs to respond quickly to unmet humanitarian needs. As part of CHAF's design, members complete a gender analysis and provide sex- and age-disaggregated data in their final reporting to ensure that programming is gender responsive.

Demonstrating its commitment to the Grand Bargain and the Principles and Practices of Good Humanitarian Donorship, Canada continues to provide multi-year and flexible humanitarian funding. In 2020, Canada provided 58% of its humanitarian funding as multi-year and over 35% was in the form of flexible funding (unearmarked and softly earmarked), exceeding the Grand Bargain 30% target.

In 2020–2021, Canada continued to be an active member of the Pooled Fund Working Group, a body of key stakeholders that provides policy guidance to the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the use and impact of the UN Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs). Together with other donors, Canada continued to strongly advocate for the advancement of the localization agenda and gender equality considerations within CBPF operations.

## Challenges

Work continues to reduce the amount of information requested at various points of the funding process, while ensuring that enough information is provided to meet legislative and regulatory requirements for the funding process to run efficiently. The introduction of new information and analyses requirements without removing existing ones, has led to challenges in the Project Implementation Plan (PIP) approval process, causing delays to address questions where requirements are not equally understood by all stakeholders. It is normal and expected that projects must change sometimes to achieve expected results; however, with the exception of changes due to the pandemic, CSOs have faced some challenges in getting support for changes during project implementation. The introduction of the standard minimum cost share of 5% has caused a challenge to establishing equitable access to funding, as CSOs based solely in Canada do not have the same access to sources of funds as to those able to obtain matching funds from non-Canadian affiliates. While changes such as those described here are meant to improve funding processes, they can sometimes create new challenges to ongoing work on standardization, predictability and equitability.

## Opportunities

GAC streamlined and simplified many approval processes during the pandemic. Work continues to evaluate the process changes put in place for COVID-19 projects to help implement the lessons learned in the programming process generally. The increased popularity of virtual conferencing solutions in recent years makes it easier to have real-time discussions, consultations and information sessions with partners around the world. Development continues on a new system to track and manage transfer payment programming fiduciary risks, which will replace the current, outdated and inefficient tool. Early-stage engagement with partners to identify issues and develop solutions for the project budget process occurred in spring and summer 2021. Development work continues as part of GAC's broader transformation initiative (known as Game Changers) to improve international assistance programming effectiveness and efficiency. GAC will continue to engage the CSO community through various mechanisms.





## Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance

A feminist approach

### Objective 7:

Foster multi-stakeholder approaches to international assistance.

### Achievements

GAC is working with CSOs and other partners to facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships that build on and mobilize the comparative strengths of each actor in pursuit of a common goal.

Launched in February 2021, GAC's Departmental Strategy for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG) aims for all business lines to adopt a sustainable development perspective, making the Department more coherent, effective and impactful. Fostering broad and inclusive partnerships in support of sustainable development is one of the main objectives of the Strategy. The Strategy aligns with and contributes to the national strategy (*Moving forward together: Canada's 2030 Agenda National Strategy*), which emphasizes a whole-of-society approach to implementing the SDGs.

In high-level political forums, GAC has been intentional and proactive about consulting and including the CSO sector. For example, GAC's annual participation in the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the primary follow-up and review mechanism for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, incorporated a multi-stakeholder approach that included consultations with Indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector, academia and youth, as well as with provincial/territorial and municipal representatives.

Canada has continued to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in international forums, and informed its position through CSO consultations. In collaboration with Women and Gender Equality Canada, Canada submitted its candidacy to lead the Feminist Movements and Leadership Action Coalition for the Generation Equality Forum, presenting the opportunity to work with a diversity of stakeholders and foster inclusive, intersectional and intergenerational dialogue to deliver on commitments to target the most persistent gender equality challenges. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, GAC facilitated the participation of youth, practitioners, and global health experts in the Development Ministers' Contact Group. GAC also continued to engage with established multilateral CSO groups, including the Y7 and Y20 to incorporate diverse views in the outcome documents of the G7 and G20 processes. To inform its participation in the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), Canada consults with CSOs, trade unions and philanthropies' stakeholders on the effectiveness of all efforts to achieve the SDGs, including through means beyond traditional ODA.

GAC directly collaborates with CSOs and also encourages collaboration between stakeholders. As such, GAC recently launched a Private Sector Engagement for Sustainable Development Strategy, which presents an approach to broaden and deepen our partnerships with the private sector to increase investment in support of the SDGs. In particular, the Strategy seeks to systematically apply the private sector's unique expertise in the delivery of international assistance and accelerate the mobilization of private capital to facilitate inclusive economic growth. One example of a successful multi-stakeholder partnership is Grand Challenges Canada, which leverages innovative solutions from a range of actors to address global health challenges. As one of the largest impact-first investors in Canada, Grand Challenges Canada has supported a pipeline of over 1,300 innovations in 106 countries. The partnership between Canada and the Equality Fund is another great example of collaboration, bringing together CSOs, philanthropies, private sector, government and local women's organizations to strengthen the global feminist funding ecosystem and better drive sustainable behaviour change for gender equality. The goal of this new and unique global platform is to pool and leverage resources to attract new partners and create more opportunities to close gender gaps and eliminate barriers to gender equality. Finally, through Canada's leadership of the GPEDC's Action Area on triangular cooperation, a wide array of stakeholders is working together to test and improve the practical implementation of the 2019 voluntary guidelines on triangular cooperation and promote this modality.

## Challenges

The pandemic has delayed further engagement on bilateral donor relations. However, GAC is committed to finding opportunities to further collaboration with CSOs and multi-stakeholder partners. The pandemic has also shifted large events, such as the HLPF, online, requiring adaptation in terms of the engagement of diverse stakeholders, including local partners.

While GAC made an intentional and consistent effort to consult CSOs, some civil society actors feel that consultations have tended to focus on the same large umbrella organizations, which do not always represent diverse perspectives from people and communities across the country. GAC will re-evaluate how to conduct consultations in a more inclusive manner.

## Opportunities

Broad and inclusive partnerships are central to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, thus the CSO Policy and the SDG strategies could be mutually reinforcing. The international community recognizes the 2030 Agenda as the global roadmap for pandemic recovery and building back better. There are significant opportunities to use this to build momentum for multi-stakeholder partnerships.

In terms of specific relations between GAC and the CSO sector, the civil society sector reported that many small and medium-sized organizations struggle to see the relevance of their contributions or how their recommendations are implemented. They proposed implementing an adaptation of "Hill Days," so that representatives of GAC directorates can interact and identify common interests with a broader range of civil society groups. Moreover, the civil society sector believes that for GAC to become truly inclusive, it must bridge the information and capacity gaps that make it difficult for smaller CSOs to engage fully.



## Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance

A feminist approach

### Objective 8:

Engaging Canadians  
as global citizens in  
international  
assistance.

### Achievements

Through 2019–2021, GAC continued to support the engagement of Canadians as global citizens in international assistance through partnerships with Canadian organizations. GAC's approach to public engagement, implemented in partnership with CSOs, includes efforts to broaden Canadians' understanding of international development and learning through global citizenship education.

This approach has been advanced in part through GAC's strategic investments in the public engagement activities of Canadian CSOs, such as the Inspiring Action for Global Citizenship initiative led by the Inter-Council Network. This initiative, supported by an investment of over \$18 million (2019–2023), aims to increase awareness and engage Canadians as global citizens in support of Canada's international development objectives and the SDGs.

GAC's Volunteer Cooperation Program (\$420 million, 2020–2027) also provides opportunities for Canadians to give their time and use their skills and expertise to support communities in developing countries. This way, volunteers directly contribute to advancing the FIAP. Volunteers also play a key role in engaging Canadians in international development by sharing their international experiences, thereby increasing the number of Canadians who are aware of and engage in Canada's international development efforts. Another example of GAC's support for the public-engagement activities of CSOs is the \$14 million (2016–2021) investment in the CanWaCH initiative, which facilitates knowledge exchange among Canadian CSOs and engages Canadians on global health issues.

Advanced in partnership with Canadian CSOs, GAC's approach to public engagement encourages broad engagement of Canadians and key groups such as youth. For instance, in February 2020, GAC launched the Together for Learning Campaign, which contributes to the Government of Canada's response to COVID-19 and aligns with a 2019 ministerial commitment to lead an international campaign to ensure that all refugee and displaced children can get the education they need and deserve. This campaign includes a public education module for Canadian classrooms to build relationships between Canadian children and refugee youth.

GAC has deepened its collaboration with CSOs through dialogue, and the sharing of knowledge and tools on public engagement. In September 2020, GAC established an External Advisory Council on Engaging Canadians as Global Citizens, made of up of thought leaders from Canadian CSOs, private sector and government. In July 2021, GAC also launched the [Virtual Engagement Resource Centre for All](#). Developed in collaboration with CSOs, the Centre is a readily accessible online platform replete with public engagement tools and resources.

## Challenges

Preliminary analysis of the current state of public engagement initiatives within the Department identified some challenges. One of the challenges is how to reach Canadians not currently engaged in international assistance. Global issues are complex, and it is important that Canadians understand that investment in international assistance helps reduce poverty, fosters gender equality around the world and contributes to our own safety and prosperity. While initiatives like the Inter-Council Network and Volunteer Cooperation Program effectively engage interested Canadians, more work is needed to build awareness and understanding among those not already engaged on global issues.

Another challenge is the lack of common understanding of public engagement objectives, outcomes and measures that exists, within the Canadian international assistance sector. As such, it is not easy to tell a compelling story of what public engagement achieves. GAC is working to develop a results framework, with a view to helping partners better measure public engagement efforts.

## Opportunities

Opportunities exist to strengthen GAC's approach to public engagement.

Reports and consultations have suggested that the best way for GAC to help enhance the outcomes and impact of public engagement efforts would be through the development and implementation of an overarching strategy and results framework. GAC is advancing efforts to this end within the Department and will consult broadly with the sector to build a common understanding of public engagement and its best practices.

There is also an opportunity to engage a greater diversity of Canadians in the implementation of the FIAP and pursuit of the SDGs, taking an intersectional and more inclusive approach to public engagement. This could be achieved by increasing engagement with a range of stakeholders to ensure that diverse voices and strengths from across Canada are incorporated.



## Canada's Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance

A feminist approach

### Objective 9:

Promote sustainability, transparency, accountability and results.

### Achievements

Open access to comprehensive, timely information about international cooperation facilitates the coordination, monitoring and accountability necessary to achieve sustainable results. GAC has taken steps to improve the transparency and accountability of the International Assistance Envelope and to enhance its reporting through the Department's Project Browser and the *Report to Parliament on the Government of Canada's International Assistance*, which includes FIAP Key Performance Indicator data, and the *Statistical Report on International Assistance*.

Improvements, informed by user testing and research on tools deployed by other donor agencies, are also underway to enhance the usability of the Project Browser. Changes include improved search functionality, clearer display of search results, data export and the ability to share groups of projects. GAC's open aid data also continues to improve, as confirmed by the score of 80.9% achieved in the *Aid Transparency Index 2020* (up from 79.63% in 2018).

GAC has published a rolling 12-month schedule of upcoming calls on its website since July 2021. The schedule, along with ongoing pilots using a concept note in call and unsolicited proposal processes, respond to recommendations from the Task Force on Improving Effectiveness (TaFIE) Solution Team. A GAC-CSO collaboration, the TaFIE examines ways to simplify and streamline programming processes. Inter-Council Network, Cooperation Canada and regional councils helped maintain momentum on implementing the recommendations of the TaFIE that contribute to increase transparency in call for proposal processes, by sharing information with the sector through websites and newsletters. TAFIE paused during 2020, when GAC convened COVID-specific discussion tables.

GAC reached out to a number of government agencies, universities and CSOs to discuss common challenges and share best practices related to results, performance measurement and data management. GAC recruited data-literate co-op students, and by so doing, built ties with Canadian universities and enhanced the Department's knowledge, while helping managers learn to hire, manage and retain employees with data literacy skills. GAC presented the departmental Data Strategy and the Results & Delivery Approach at the Evidence for Policymakers international conference organized by Universiteit Leiden and ScienceWorks.

As part of OECD-DAC Results Community, GAC contributed to think pieces by sharing its Architecture for Results of International Assistance approach, and participated in workshops that promote multi-stakeholder partnerships to facilitate learning in the area of results-based management.

In June 2021, GAC and the Global Evaluation Initiative (a partnership co-led by the World Bank and UNDP) co-organized an online learning event for gLOCAL Evaluation Week, focusing on GAC's feminist evaluation principles and practices evidenced in recent evaluations in Colombia, the Middle East and the Maghreb, and the Women's Voice and Leadership Program. Of the 154 participants (85% female) from 46 countries, 57% reported perceived increases in technical knowledge, 43% reported increased capacity to support monitoring and evaluation, and 38% reported increased awareness.

The ongoing Formative Evaluation of the Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL) Program is guided by a reference group consisting of GAC staff, implementing partners involved in the WVL program, and women's rights organizations supported by the Program. These diverse stakeholders from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe, ensure that the evaluation is guided by a participatory feminist approach.

## Challenges

The Department's capacity to improve the presentation of international assistance information, including in more interactive ways, is constrained by the complexity of integrated information management systems.

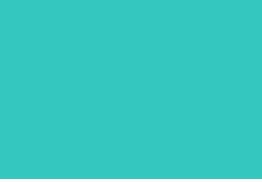
As such, for the WVL evaluation, the logistics of coordinating a large, global reference group is challenging due to the management of multiple languages, time zones, levels of experience and varying levels of engagement among members. An additional challenge has been for WROs that already have demanding workloads, participating in yet another initiative has limited appeal. Despite these participation challenges, both WROs and implementing partners have expressed an interest in participating in the evaluation and the learning opportunity that this represents for them.

More sensitization about the scope of the TaFIE and how it engages with CSOs, was constrained by the limited resources CSOs have at their disposal for this type of work.

## Opportunities

The Department continues to enhance the Project Browser, improving map functionality and the integration of information about various project components (e.g. partners, sectors).

The reference group of the WVL evaluation provided input into the design of the WVL program evaluation, particularly on evaluation questions, sampling of case study countries, and the knowledge sharing and learning plan for the evaluation. Reference group members will be key partners in operationalizing this plan through various activities to engage internal and external stakeholders. For the GAC evaluation team, this provides an opportunity to shape the evaluation in a way that is useful and relevant for intended users, and to include in the evaluation processes voices that are not usually heard.



Given its success in 2021, the gLocal Evaluation Week is expanding its reach, providing more opportunities to share the information and knowledge derived from GAC’s evaluations. These events can make the Department’s learning available to new audiences with insight into innovative evaluation tools, points of view, and areas of expertise, and can assist the Department in identifying important local interlocutors.