



Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy and Africa trade and development cooperation

*Prepared by Rosemina Z. Nathoo, Senior Associate and Trade Law Adviser, Centre for Trade Policy and Law, Ottawa, Canada
For the African Trade Policy Centre of the Economic Commission for Africa, December 2017*

Purpose

The purpose of the present policy brief is to analyse Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy in the context of trade and development cooperation with Africa and explore the areas in which policy and programming synergies may offer opportunities for increased African-Canadian engagement.

Introduction

On 9 June 2017, Canada's Minister of International Development and La Francophonie announced the federal Government's new Feminist International Assistance Policy¹, which is the product of a comprehensive public consultation process throughout Canada and in 65 countries. The policy, which represents the international development component of Canada's foreign policy statement,² provides an outline of Canada's overall goals and principles of engagement with the developing world under the Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau.

1 The full policy document is available on the Global Affairs Canada website. Available from: http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang?lang=eng&lang=eng.

2 See www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/address_by_ministerfreelandoncanadasforeignpolicypriorities.html.

The primary focus of Canada's international development assistance programming will be on "gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls". Within this overall programming objective, Canada will "challenge poverty and inequality" by focusing its development assistance on five themes: human dignity; growth that works for everyone; environment and climate action; inclusive governance; and peace and security.

In the coming five years, the new Feminist International Assistance Policy will be aimed at having no less than 95 per cent of its budget focused on closing gender equality gaps. The policy includes clear targets for focusing future Canadian aid on gender equality and the empowerment of women. To achieve this, the Government foresees a significant shift in resources and focus to increase programming on gender equality and the empowerment of women from 2 per cent of Canada's development assistance envelope to 15 per cent by 2021.

Under this overall framework, Canada expects to strengthen its commitment to poverty reduction, which includes ensuring that at least 50 per cent of Canada's bilateral assistance is directed at the poorest of African countries. The new Feminist International Assistance Policy also codifies the country's

commitment, made at the 2015 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, to invest \$2.65 billion over five years to help developing countries to combat climate change.³

What Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy means for Africa

While the new Feminist International Assistance Policy contains an outline of the general principles that will guide current and future development assistance programming, it provides few details on what it will mean in practice. Implementation remains a work in progress. Salient points relevant to Africa-Canada development cooperation include the following:

- **A clear shift in policy.** Gender equality has been a priority and cross-cutting theme in Canadian development assistance programming since even before the Government's 1999 gender equality policy. Successive Governments emphasized the empowerment of women and girls during their terms. While the focus is therefore not new, the emphasis has changed. The previous Conservative Government had made maternal health, an important component of gender equality programming, a signature feature of its tenure. The new Feminist International Assistance Policy goes further, in that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are a priority focus, in which these priorities are to be fully integrated into all programming. The key message to partners, such as Africa, is that Canada wants its development cooperation recognized and assessed on the basis of its contribution to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
- **No new money.** The most recent federal budget saw no new increase to the aid envelope.⁴ The implication is that the ambitious goal to step

³ See Rosemary Barton, "Government announces \$2.65B to help developing countries fight climate change", CBC News, 27 November 2015. Available from: www.cbc.ca/news/politics/funding-for-climate-change-chogm-1.3339907.

⁴ See Canadian Press, "Bill Morneau defends foreign aid budget: Canada must do more with less", 27 March 2017. Available from: <https://globalnews.ca/news/3337749/bill-morneau-defends-foreign-aid-budget-canada-will-do-more-with-less>.

up programming to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a percentage of overall programming will mean less money for other priorities, including implementation.

- **Focus on programming priorities.** Canadian development assistance policies have traditionally tried to limit programming to a relatively short list of focus countries. There are no focus countries under the new Feminist International Assistance Policy. Instead, programming will be guided by criteria under the umbrella of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
- **A continuing focus on the poorest of the poor in Africa.** During the public consultations leading up to the development of the new Feminist International Assistance Policy, the need for a continued focus on helping the poorest of the poor and on poverty reduction, in general, was strongly emphasized. Africa has the highest concentration of least-developed countries, and poverty remains the main development challenge on the continent. This implies that Africa will remain a development priority for Canada and a geographic area of concentration for programming.
- **Effect on existing and new programming.** The international development side of Global Affairs Canada is re-evaluating its programming and taking steps to rebalance its relevant portfolios to meet the new Feminist International Assistance Policy targets. As part of the 2017 project review process of Global Affairs Canada, the directors of existing projects are being asked to redesign aspects of their workplans to provide for intermediary and future outcomes that will reflect these new priorities.

What does this mean for trade and development cooperation in Africa?

The new Feminist International Assistance Policy does not have an explicit focus on trade and development cooperation, but it does identify a number of entry points under the overall framework of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Under the “growth that works for everyone” programming objective, for example, there is an emphasis on the “full and equal participation of women as economic actors”, with the suggestion of increasing women’s economic leadership as a practical entry point. To illustrate putting the programming objective “inclusive governance” into practice, the new Feminist International Assistance Policy also uses leadership as an example, with the suggestion of projects that “help [to] advance women’s leadership and decision-making in governance and public sector management at all levels”.

There is also an emphasis on the domestic economic regulatory framework in the context of support for private sector development. As an example of support for the private sector, it is stated in the new Feminist International Assistance Policy that “Canada will support developing countries in their efforts to create stable regulatory systems that can attract investment and help businesses to thrive”. It is well recognized within the trade and development literature that domestic regulatory reform is a key element in the promotion of an improved national trade policy regime that encourages economic growth and development through increased trade.

The new Feminist International Assistance Policy is tethered to Canada’s progressive trade agenda, which is intended to ensure that all segments of society can take advantage of and otherwise benefit from the opportunities that flow from trade and investment. There is a recognition in the policy that “better integration of development and other objectives, such as trade, can have positive economic effects for developing countries – and for Canada”. For Canada, this means that the focus of attention is on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, including those owned by women, to help them to reach their full potential. This objective will be paramount to any consideration of trade and development pursuits in Africa.

Under previous policies, Canada’s commitment to trade and development in Africa had included bilateral support. Canada had also supported Africa’s trade and development objectives through multi-year financial commitments to the Aid for Trade agenda of the World Trade Organization and regional multi-donor initiatives such as TradeMark East Africa.

The implications for existing and future trade and development support from Canada in Africa include the following:

- **A clear focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.** Programming priorities suggest opportunities to support the empowerment of women and girls in Africa through an increased voice and participation in national trade and development strategies; trade-related employment for women and girls in country-identified priority sectors of growth; and an opportunity for bilateral collaboration to leverage Canadian and African leadership and expertise on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
- **Greater focus on national priorities.** The new Feminist International Assistance Policy programming priority of “growth that works for everyone” is a clear entry point for future trade and development programming. As indicated above, there is the suggestion in the policy statement that Canada may support programming that promotes “the full participation of women as economic actors in economic decision-making and leadership”. The programming priority also suggests that Canada may support projects that increase the employment of women in better jobs in growing sectors of the economy. The implication for Africa is less of a focus on international and regional trade and more of a focus on the national priorities of African countries with respect to inclusive growth and the empowerment of women at all levels of society. Canada would likely be receptive to initiatives that help to mitigate some of the negative effects of trade liberalization, especially given that they affect the employment of women and the quality and working conditions of their jobs. Support for domestic regulatory reform to promote private sector development is also cited in the policy as an example of a project that could be supported by Canada.
- **Greater focus on governance as a priority.** The Feminist International Assistance Policy programming priority of “inclusive governance” could also serve as an entry point for Canada for future trade and development programming in Africa. Under this priority, the policy statement

suggests that Canada may invest in projects that support the increased participation of women at all levels in the design, negotiation and implementation of national trade and development strategies. Projects are likely also to be supported that promote bilateral collaboration to leverage Canadian and African leadership and expertise on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at all levels of society.

- **Rebalancing of Canada's African portfolio.** With these new priorities in Canada's international assistance policy statement, there is reason to expect some rebalancing of the trade and development programming within Canada's overall African development assistance portfolio.

Conclusion

Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy represents a clear shift in emphasis for existing and future development assistance programming in Africa and in the developing world as a whole. The implications for trade and development cooperation will become more precise as Canada finalizes its implementation plan for the policy. What is nevertheless clear now is that changes in emphasis will be required. Current projects are already seeing some of their plans modified to meet the policy guidelines, and development partners should be prepared to show flexible thinking and broader scope to meet the objectives of the policy.

Without new money to fund its implementation, the Government of Canada will be looking at strategic solutions and innovative financing to test the application of the new Feminist International Assistance Policy. The advantage for Africa is the emphasis on innovation in the policy, in addition to the deliberate attempt to bring in new voices and perspectives into Canadian development assistance programming. There is therefore clear space for Africa to promote its own progressive and inclusive trade agenda through a partnership with Canada.