

Concept note: OCIC Gender Equality Hub
October 2019

Background

In 2017 Canada's first [Feminist International Assistance Policy \(FIAP\)](#) was adopted. This policy firmly places gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the centre of sustainable development and positioned Canada at the forefront of this global effort. While such recent policy developments are certainly promising there are many challenges ahead for achieving gender equality at the local, sub-national, national and international levels. These challenges require us to bring critical and creative thinking to the table; diverse ways of knowing and being; transformative approaches; cross and multi-sectoral dialogue, knowledge exchange and mobilization, and collaborative advocacy and policy-making efforts.

The Ontario Council for International Cooperation's (OCIC) new Capacity-Building and Learning program seeks to help strengthen the organizational capacity of Canadian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to design, implement, monitor and evaluate projects that advance gender equality in support of Canada's [Feminist International Assistance Policy \(FIAP\)](#) and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Our programmatic focus is aligned with OCIC's gender transformative and intersectional approach as described in our [Women's Rights and Gender Equality Policy](#), as well as the two major intermediate outcomes of our four-year Global Affairs Canada (GAC)-funded project (2019-2023), *Inspiring Action for Global Citizenship Initiative*. FIAP takes an integrated approach to development: the core area for FIAP - gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls - is integrated across all other action areas. Similarly, OCIC sees gender equality and *intersectionality* as cross-cutting principles and themes throughout all of our work.

Overview: Gender Equality Hub

As part of OCIC's Capacity-Building and Learning program (2019-2023)'s focus on a *gender transformative* and *intersectional* approach OCIC is convening and will support a Gender Equality Hub to actively examine how a gender transformative and intersectional approach to development can shape our work as a sector; identify the current gaps and challenges, and mobilize around current opportunities. We envision this Hub becoming an influential and inspiring community of learning and practice across Ontario that will enable multi-sectoral dialogue, knowledge exchange and mobilization to advance gender equality. OCIC will support the Hub in establishing its Terms of Reference and goals; convening regular virtual (online) and in-person gatherings.

Approach

The Hub will be launched in the Fall of 2019 with a core group of diverse representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs) actively working on gender equality issues amongst the Council's members and others within the international cooperation community across Ontario, as well as a few representatives from other sectors, for example, local community groups and organizations; policy institutes; Education (K-12 and post-secondary), the Arts, Media and the private sector (Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Social Enterprise). OCIC will support the Gender Equality Hub in establishing its Terms of Reference and goals, and convening regular virtual (online) and in-person gatherings and the hub's other activities. Once formed the Hub will establish operational guidelines, including the length, frequency, and timing of its meetings, for e.g. every 6-8 weeks over an 18-month period. We assume

that the meetings will take place in-person and online to facilitate participation across Ontario. Once formed the Hub will identify priorities, key moments and activities, which could include:

- collecting and sharing resources, learnings and practices with regards to advancing gender equality in support of the FIAP action areas and SDGs with Canadian CSOs, including small and medium organizations (SMOs);
- developing joint position papers and other resources on timely and priority issues to influence and inspire gender transformative change, and
- advising OCIC on its own policies, practices and programs.

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles of the Gender Equality Hub will be determined by the members of the Hub, once formed. These principles may draw from Canada's [Feminist International Assistance Policy \(FIAP\)](#); OCIC's own policies on [Women's Rights and Gender Equality Policy](#), [anti-oppression](#) principles and intersectional approach, as well as principles of effective Communities of Practice (CoP)-if the CoP is a model that the forum wishes to adopt.

Definitions:

Anti-oppression is the work of actively challenging and removing oppression perpetuated by power inequalities in society, both systemic oppression and individual expressions of oppression" (OCIC's [anti-oppression](#) policy).

Capacity building: is any activities that help to fulfill an organization's mission as well as the "organization's structure, policies, processes, and assets (leadership, management, physical and financial) dedicated to the delivery of its services and/or products." We refer to Letts, Ryan and Grossman's (1999) widely accepted typology to describe the different kinds of organizational capacities, which include program delivery, program expansion, and ability to adapt to change.

Learning refers to the educational aspect of OCIC's community engagement, communications and capacity building initiatives.

Gender equality: The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, girls and boys, and gender non-binary people. Equality does not mean that people of all genders will become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born (or assigned at birth) as male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men, including members of racialized and LGBTQ+ communities. Gender equality is not a women's issue, but should concern and fully engage men, as well as women and people of all genders. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development. [Source: Adapted from Concepts and definitions, UN Women,]" ([OCIC's Women's Rights and Gender Equality Policy](#)).

Gender transformative: In contrast to gender sensitive (addressing current needs), gender transformative seeks to completely overhaul existing systems of power and privilege that result in and perpetuate gender unequal outcomes. Gender transformative approaches address root causes of gender inequality through an intersectional power analysis ([OCIC's Women's Rights and Gender Equality Policy](#)).

Intersectionality: a framework that recognizes the multiple aspects of social categorization and identity that combine, overlap and intersect in our lives and experiences, such as class, race and gender, and that compound and exacerbate oppression and marginalization of an individual or a group. It also challenges us to expand our understanding of gender beyond binaries (woman/man, femininity/masculinity). Adopting an intersectional approach allows us to identify and address complex contexts and formulate strategies to best meet the needs of those intended to benefit from initiatives. [Adapted from the definition of intersectionality in A Feminist Approach to Canada’s International Assistance, Inter Pares, 2 Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights and Oxfam Canada, July 2016.]” ([OCIC’s Women’s Rights and Gender Equality Policy](#))