



Advocating for Grandmothers, Vulnerable Children and Youth in Africa

SUBMISSION TO

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Introduction

At a time of extreme economic and political volatility and unanticipated global challenges, it is crucial that Canada embrace a global world view that engages Canadians and articulates our values of peace, security, and sustainable development. The Grandmothers Advocacy Network (GRAN) urges our government to seriously consider and take into account the following points in crafting Canada's approach to international development and implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Poorest and Most Vulnerable

The Sustainable Development Goals and the five policy themes set out by Global Affairs in its consultation paper highlight the necessity of focusing Canada's international development on an interconnected approach to assisting the poorest and most vulnerable. Canada is committed to an inclusive approach that "leaves no-one behind". The 2030 Agenda report identifies "the special challenges facing the most vulnerable countries and, in particular, African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries..." If we are to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty, we must return to a strong focus on Africa, and specifically sub-Saharan Africa, where 49% of the population lives on less than \$1.25 per day, and 70% on less than \$2.00 per day. Most fragile and conflict-affected states are located in sub-Saharan Africa. Among the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable are women in sub-Saharan Africa. And among those women are the unrecognized, uncounted, and frequently unpaid, older women and grandmothers who are caring for the next generation of African youth, sustaining their communities, and raising millions of children with little or no support and assistance. Recognizing and supporting older women in sub-Saharan Africa as caregivers and contributors is essential to global sustainable development. They need to be engaged and empowered. They are not victims; they are agents of change.

A Feminist Foreign Policy that Includes Older Women

The Grandmothers Advocacy Network is encouraged that the Government of Canada has mandated a feminist foreign policy and directed that development must be seen through a

feminist lens, but that feminist lens must include older women. Violence and abuse are not age-restricted. Like younger women, older women in sub-Saharan Africa encounter gender-based violence, abuse and neglect. They are subject to double victimization. Of particular horror are the many accounts of the rape and torture of older women in conflict zones. Too often, the girl of today, abused in a forced, early marriage faces a huge statistical probability of receiving little education, of living in poverty, and of a widowhood accompanied by violence and abuse.

Yet there are very little data on older women's experience of violence, and international conventions and national policies rarely mention or address these concerns. Older women's experiences are almost totally absent in the SDG targets. Very little, if any, data are collected on HIV status or on violence for women after age 49. In other cases, data are extremely limited and/or not disaggregated by age and sex. Older women are denied basic services and protection of their rights in part because they are absent from official records and are therefore invisible to policy-makers and organizations providing development assistance.

What role can Canada play?

- Canada should take an intergenerational, lifecourse approach to development assistance that considers major transitions at all stages of life, that recognizes the important roles that older women play in sustainable development, and that leads the data revolution needed to ensure that no-one is left behind.
- Canada should uphold the universal rights of girls and women at all ages to health and well-being; quality, safe and equitable education and lifelong learning; decent work and sustainable development activities that generate income; social protection and other mechanisms to eliminate poverty; and freedom from violence.
- Canada should provide maximum diplomatic pressure and support for the creation of a UN convention on the rights of older persons with an emphasis on older women, including robust data collection mechanisms.

Ending Violence against Women

- One of the most significant steps Canada can take is to increase its support of grassroots women's organizations in Africa that are working to end gender-based violence, including Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM). These are the organizations that are doing leading-edge work, yet they are consistently under-funded, under-resourced and excluded from key discussions. These organizations need consistent, significant, and reliable core funding in order to carry out their crucial work.
- Canada should continue to advocate internationally for states' accountability to follow through on the commitments made to end gender based violence and to implement and enforce the laws to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Canada has supported work to ensure that the perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence are held to account and that measures are put in place to prevent these crimes from happening. This work should continue and be expanded.
- Canada should continue to support conditions that encourage peace and stability. For example, the government should press for presidential elections to be held in the

Democratic Republic of Congo this year as required by their constitution. If an election is not held, violence is likely to erupt and women and children will be on the front line of that violence.

Making Education a Core Theme

- Canada should make education a core theme in the new development framework, recognizing that education has a major impact on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. To do this, Canada should increase its investment in education both in commitment and financially by integrating education across all sectors of development in its new foreign aid policy.
- Canada's work on education development should focus on multiple literacies including health, women's equality, climate, peace, water, sustainability. Examples of ways to achieve such literacies are professional development for teachers and enhanced curriculum and resource development. Canada should support the inclusion of teacher organizations at the grassroots level in decision making.

Providing Access to Health

- Canada should support the health and rights of women and children by maintaining the principle of health as a basic human right and that access to medicines is a fundamental element of the right to health. The upcoming Replenishment Meeting in Montreal is an excellent opportunity to communicate that message.
- Canada should develop a coherent approach at every level and within every department of government that the right to health and access to affordable medicines cannot be negotiated away or traded or jeopardized in investment treaties.
- Canada should use its leadership to bring greater worldwide commitment to ensuring that SDG #3.3 is met (to end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria by 2030). To achieve this, women (including older women) and girls who are particularly vulnerable to these diseases must be included in all development programs and policies to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS and care for those who have been infected or affected by HIV/AIDS.

Funding

Funding must target the needs of the most vulnerable groups, so funding needs to be increased to sub-Saharan Africa and especially to women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa.