

OCIC GENDER EQUALITY POLICY

Approved by the Board of Directors June 2018; last revised September 2021

Preamble

The Ontario Council for International Cooperation's ('OCIC' or the 'Council') work, both internally and as a collective of members, is grounded in our shared vision of global social justice, human dignity and participation for all. Our policies are designed to meet OCIC's internal needs as an organization, however they are guided by ideals about anti-oppression, human rights, international cooperation, and the appropriate meeting of human needs articulated in a multitude of places by multilateral bodies, states, and civil society groups.

All OCIC policies and activities are informed by our Vision, Mission, Mandate, and Strategic Directions. Mindfulness of the spirit and letter of these documents is central to the integrity of the Council, as is compliance with the Cooperation Canada (formerly Canadian Council for International Co-operation) Code of Ethics, the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness and OCIC's Anti-Oppression Policy and Gender Equality Policy.

1. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, key terms include:

Agency: An individual or group's ability to make choices, and to transform those choices into desired outcomes. Feminist agency includes principles of autonomy, choice, empowerment and meaningful engagement. Agency allows us to recognize that individuals are experts and knowledge holders in their own right. [Source: *A Feminist Approach to Canada's International Assistance*, Inter Pares, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights and Oxfam Canada, July 2016.]

Feminism and feminist: Feminism is ultimately the belief that the full realization of the rights of women and gender minorities is the pre-condition for equality between the sexes. A feminist approach must seek to address the root causes of structural and systemic inequalities and transform systems of power, many of which are grounded in social constructions of gender and patriarchal attempts to control women's bodies and choices. Central to the implementation of a feminist approach are: intersectionality, agency and process. In the latter case, feminist process implies integrity, contextualization, learning, collaboration, participation, inclusivity and responsiveness. [Source: Adapted from *A Feminist Approach to Canada's International Assistance*, Inter Pares, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights and Oxfam Canada, July 2016.]

Gender: Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of all people, including definitions that limit gender identities. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes, sexual orientation, and likely behaviours of people of all genders (including traditional notions of femininity and masculinity). These roles and expectations exist on a spectrum and are learned, changeable over time, and variable within and between cultures. Gender analysis has increasingly revealed how women's subordination, as well as the subordination of people who do not conform to a gender binary and gender minorities, is socially constructed, and therefore able to change, as opposed to being biologically predetermined and therefore static. [Source: Adapted from the CIDA Gender Policy]

Gender analysis: Gender analysis is the systematic attempt to identify key issues contributing to gender inequalities so that they can be properly addressed. Gender analysis provides the basis for mainstreaming gender equality and can be described as the study of differences in the conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources and development, control of assets, decision-making powers, etc., between people in their assigned gender roles. This involves a critical examination of how differences in gender roles, activities, needs, opportunities and rights/entitlements affect women, men, girls, boys, and gender minorities in a given policy area, situation or context [Adapted from: [European Institute for Gender Equality](#), 2021]

Gender balance: Equilibrium in numbers and power between people of all genders taking part in an activity, a structure or organization. Achieving gender balance generally requires a “rebalancing” of power, attitudes and authority to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent people of all genders from otherwise operating as equals, while being mindful that individual gender identity may be consistent or fluid across an individual’s lifetime. [Based on/adapted from: [Glossary, EuropeAid](#)]

Gender equality: The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of people of all genders. Equality does not mean that people of all genders will become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on their gender expression, gender identity, sex, or sex assigned at birth. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of all people, irrespective of gender identity, are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of people, including members of Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Colour (BIPOC) and 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Gender equality action is not only an issue concerning women and gender minorities, but should also concern and fully engage men who are also negatively impacted by gender issues. Equality between people of all genders 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](#)]

Gender equity: A means for achieving gender equality. Gender equity means being fair to women, men, non-binary, transgender or gender fluid individuals and all gender identities. To ensure fairness, unique and contextualized measures are often needed to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent people of all genders from otherwise operating as equals. [Source: [Canada’s Policy on Gender Equality](#)]

Gender-sensitive: This tends to refer to more general analysis which takes gender issues into account. For example, in the analysis of a specific trade policy, if the analysis incorporates gender issues into the general analysis, then the analysis could be considered to be “gender-sensitive”. Gender-sensitive tends to focus on the current different needs of people of all genders, without a focus on changing deep social norms and power dynamics. This also involves considering gender issues as ‘cross-cutting’ and relevant to a variety of disciplines and areas of work, and not as a siloed or separate area of focus.

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 and impact the position and power of women and gender minorities.

Intersectionality: Coined by the Black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw, this is a framework that recognizes the multiple aspects of social categorization and identity that combine, overlap and intersect in our lives and experiences, such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation and disability, and that compound and exacerbate oppression and marginalization of an individual or a group. Intersectionality is not an ‘additive’ model of identity; rather, it interrogates the ways that different identities combine and interact uniquely to create an experience of marginalization that cannot be addressed by simply removing the discrimination facing any one identity. 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, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights and Oxfam Canada, July 2016.]

Women’s Rights: Women’s rights refer to the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled, and which are enshrined in international conventions and covenants beginning with the [International Bill of Human Rights](#), which consists of several documents: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols. The obligation to eliminate sex and gender-based discrimination against women to achieve gender equality is an essential piece of the international human rights framework. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) reinforces the commitment to women’s rights, providing specific guidance on the range of actions that must be taken to achieve gender equality. OCIC acknowledges the lack of recognition for the oppression of gender minorities and strives to apply principles of gender equality to all gender minorities in addition to women. [Source: *10-Point Agenda*].

2. Review

As per OCIC’s 3-year review policy, this policy is to be reviewed and/or updated by the Governance Committee by June 2024.

3. Policy Principle

The responsibility to advance the rights of women and gender minorities and gender equality is the responsibility of all. This policy applies both to OCIC’s role as both an employer and as a non-profit organization, and to its mission, which includes supporting its members. As such, this Policy applies to all OCIC staff, Board and volunteers, and to the programming and policy work of the organization. It also applies to OCIC members, partners, funders, contracted parties and representatives, when they are interacting with, engaged by, or working with or for OCIC. All are expected to be aware of this Policy and Code of Conduct and to comply fully.

4. Context

OCIC and its members accept and promote the basic principles found in the Cooperation Canada Code of Ethics, including that development should “foster and promote the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms” and “should reflect the concerns, perspectives, and experience of women...”. Within this vision, the realization of gender equality and the rights of women and gender minorities are not only goals in and of themselves, they are also crucial for the achievement of other development objectives. Achieving gender equality has cross-cutting implications that reaches far beyond gender-specific initiatives and programming, and underscores the importance of achieving gender equality as a priority as well as alongside other areas of focus.

Furthermore, in the United Nations' Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, gender equality is acknowledged as central to sustainable development. This is clearly demonstrated by Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality and the targets that cut across all 17 goals.

A commitment to gender equality and to challenging all kinds of systemic oppression, grounded in a feminist, human rights and intersectional approach, is integral to realizing sustainable and people-centred development. This is particularly true in the current global context. There is a tremendous opportunity for Canada to advance such a commitment to gender equality, especially in line with the [Feminist International Assistance Policy](#)'s thematic areas of impact. Yet this is also a time of backlash and organized resistance against feminism and gender equality, and shrinking space globally for civil society, including the rights of women and gender minorities and feminist organizations and movements.

Internationally, concepts, approaches and practices towards realizing equality for women, gender minorities and historically oppressed peoples have evolved. Feminist approaches now bring an intersectional perspective: deconstructing established hierarchies; drawing attention to multiple forms of discrimination; recognizing that the experience of women and gender minorities varies differently based on the intersection of multiple identities; and avoiding simplistic or inaccurate gender binaries and dichotomies. The inherent rights of women and gender minorities, gender equality organizations, and feminist activists continue to articulate a positive vision for the future. They push for change, hold governments accountable for their international commitments and build the capacities of civil society organizations and social movements to work towards equality and justice. They work to build movements for the independent and inclusive rights of women and gender minorities, and advocate for gender equality and rights within other global movements. And they bring gender equality issues and analysis to discussions of development, humanitarian assistance, trade, debt, the environment and peace and security.

As stated in our Anti-Oppression Policy, OCIC recognizes that gender inequalities are intersectional, complex and interwoven with various other systems of power and oppression. Work on this issue is inherently and unavoidably political as well as personal, socioeconomic, and programmatic. An organization's approach to the rights of women and gender minorities and gender equality must include attention to issues of diversity and power across all forms of identities, acknowledging that identities coexist and intersect. We value these perspectives and work to ensure that these lived experiences inform our policies, recognize the value of the emotional labour involved, and arrange fair compensation where appropriate for undertaking this work and sharing experiences.

5. Strategy

OCIC will incorporate a gender and feminist analysis into its governance, programming and organizational practices, and will work to ensure gender analysis is integrated into these elements, including through developing and implementing explicit and ambitious measures concerning the Council's commitment to gender equality the rights of women and gender minorities. The Council will make efforts to mobilize appropriate resources to help put this policy into practice.

OCIC will also support members' efforts to advance the rights of women and gender minorities and gender equality globally, through mutual collaboration, amplifying the voices of members, partnering with like-minded networks, and offering or sharing training on gender equality, policy analysis, advocacy and research, in order to empower them to integrate these considerations in the services and

programmes which members implement globally. In order to embed gender equality in all aspects of its work, OCIC will focus on the following:

a) Governance

OCIC will ensure that its governance structures facilitate and reflect its commitment to gender equality and the rights of women and gender minorities. In support of this objective, OCIC will strive to:

- Promote gender equity in Board membership, including with respect to the selection of the President and Vice-President.
- Identify and strive to remove or reduce barriers that prevent or discourage the participation of people on the basis of gender in OCIC's Board and staff.
- Encourage a governance culture that honours, includes and facilitates a diversity of voices and ways of participating for all genders. This includes ensuring that decision-making processes enable a range of styles of participation that are suited to the issue at hand, and to the diversity of perspectives and styles of all Board and staff members, regardless of gender, orientation or cultural background, with particular attention to the perspectives of women and gender minorities of colour, Indigenous women and gender minorities (including 2 Spirit Indigenous people), members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and others who have not been traditionally included in decision-making processes.
- Build the capacity of Board members and staff to ensure that they demonstrate and work towards gender-sensitive, and even gender-transformative, attitudes and behaviours.
- Ensure that gender equity dimensions and consequences of governance discussions and decisions are given due consideration.

b) Programming

OCIC will strengthen its internal capacities and work to strengthen those of its members to carry out gender and feminist analysis in policy and programming processes and activities, and to advance gender equality and gender transformative outcomes. In support of this objective, OCIC will strive to:

- Provide training for OCIC staff to enable them to bring deeper gender-transformative analysis to their work, and to integrate findings into effective programming and policy work.
- Network with women and gender minorities' rights and gender equality experts in Canada to help inform OCIC's work and realize the objectives of this policy.
- Analyse members' needs and recommend resources, in particular in the context of the [Feminist International Assistance Policy](#).
- Strengthen gender analysis to incorporate on-going and explicit attention to the rights of women and gender minorities and intersectional perspectives, and to realize gender transformative outcomes in the programmatic work of OCIC, its members and the broader sector. This should include ensuring that goals, objectives and activities for all programmatic work explicitly demonstrate at a minimum a gender-sensitive approach, and ultimately a gender-transformative one.
- Support organizational practices among its members that promote the rights of women and gender minorities, support the creation of ally networks, and contribute to greater gender equality,
- Support organizational practices related to the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment, and other forms of sexual misconduct and gender-based violence, as per [OCIC's Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy](#).

- Hold the Canadian government accountable to addressing gender inequalities across all international initiatives in diplomacy, aid, trade and defence, as well as the implementation of its Feminist International Assistance Policy.
- Support members in strengthening their capacity with respect to feminist, intersectional and gender transformative analysis in policy, advocacy and programming. This includes developing capacity to ensure that programming respects and considers lived experiences, is informed by people who are directly impacted, and implements appropriate measures to address systemic barriers to participation.

c) **Organizational Practices**

OCIC will ensure a supportive, equitable and inclusive work culture through appropriate organizational decision-making and human resources policies and practices. In support of this objective, OCIC will strive to:

- Pursue an organizational environment and decision-making processes that include and value varied perspectives, voices and priorities.
- Ensure that a positive work environment, free of all forms of harassment, abuse and discrimination, is upheld by all management, staff and volunteers. This will include reinforcing existing mechanisms in [OCIC's Personnel Policy](#) as well as [OCIC's Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy and OCIC Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Code of Conduct](#), which enable and encourage those who experience or witness misconduct to come forward, and to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and prevented from causing any further harm.
- Ensure that staffing and human resources management decisions related to hiring, training, and promotions are grounded in a concern for gender equity, as well as other systemic workplace inequalities.
- Ensure that OCIC's policies and practices are responsive to and reflect OCIC's priority to promote a healthy work/life balance and a family-friendly work environment for all, including in relation to physical, emotional and mental health.
- Ensure that any and all OCIC-led activities strive for gender equity in terms of presenters, partners and participants.

6. Accountability

The following responsibilities and reporting requirements apply to this policy:

- The Board of Directors and Executive Director are ultimately responsible for the implementation of this policy and for ensuring that staff have the time, knowledge, capacity and resources to fulfil this mandate. The Board should review the policy at least every three years, or sooner when there are significant changes in the organization and/or the sector.
- The Board Chair is responsible for ensuring a climate conducive to upholding this policy during Board meetings and as part of overall governance.
- All staff have a responsibility to work towards the realization of the goal and objectives outlined in this policy.
- The Executive Director will communicate with the Board on the implementation of the Policy, and dedicate time for Board-Staff reflection and review on achievements, gaps, challenges and lessons-learned. This reflection may lead to further recommendations and changes to the Policy.
- Where possible, relevant data collected as part of accountability provisions in this policy should be gender-disaggregated and consider additional disaggregated indicators.