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# **Canada's Approach to Innovation in International Assistance**

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : *L'approche du Canada relative à l'innovation dans l'aide internationale*

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For more information, contact:

Global Affairs Canada  
125 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa ON K1A 0G2  
Canada

**Website:** [www.international.gc.ca](http://www.international.gc.ca)

**Email:** [info@international.gc.ca](mailto:info@international.gc.ca)


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**Cat. No.:** FR5-168/2019E-PDF

**ISBN:** 978-0-660-32503-3

# Purpose of the guidance note

This guidance note sets out Global Affairs Canada's approach to innovation in international assistance, which includes international development, humanitarian assistance, and peace and security initiatives. The guidance note contributes to the implementation of the 2017 [Feminist International Assistance Policy \(FIAP\)](#) and is a key part of Global Affairs Canada's commitment to innovation and experimentation. These efforts support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as the right thing to do and the smart way to reduce poverty and inequality.



The overall objective of this guidance note is to encourage and guide efforts to develop, test and integrate innovations in Canada's international assistance.

This note establishes the framework for the development of practical guidance and tools to empower staff and partners. It creates systems to track and measure the impact of innovation to generate learning and evidence in support of decision making that benefits the poorest and most vulnerable, including women and girls.

# Introduction



Canada committed to advancing “innovation, research and results” and “encouraging greater experimentation and scaling-up of new solutions to development challenges” in the [Feminist International Assistance Policy](#).

**This is a commitment consistent with:**

- Canada’s work to advance the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#); and
- the [Whistler Principles to Accelerate Innovation for Development Impact](#).

## It also requires ...

- bold and transformative action by the global community;
- building inclusive innovation approaches into international assistance programming;
- Global Affairs Canada to foster a culture of innovation, encourage learning across its sectors and streams, and share lessons on innovation with other governmental and non-governmental partners; and
- partners to ensure that women and girls are involved in the innovation process both as beneficiaries and as innovators in their own right.

# Case for action



The global ambition to eradicate extreme poverty as outlined in Agenda 2030 will not succeed with business-as-usual approaches. We need ground-breaking improvements to existing service delivery, products and policies. We also need new partnerships and funding modalities, including public-private cooperation, to deliver more efficient and effective international assistance at the scale required.

## Fast-paced social, political, economic and technological change

It is a commitment to innovation using evidence and experimentation to approach international development differently. Doing so is pivotal to reach sustained, scalable and practical solutions to the world's complex development problems.



## Positioning Global Affairs Canada for pioneering solutions

By building on aid effectiveness principles and encouraging collaboration across sectors, Global Affairs Canada will work to accelerate the pace of change to improve livelihoods for the poorest and most vulnerable

**Innovation can help  
transition successful  
international assistance  
programming by**



- creating partnerships to close resourcing gaps;
- facilitating experimentation and data collection to create strong evidence bases;
- identifying pathways to transition successful pilots to scale; and
- scaling tested solutions that challenge gender inequality and remove barriers to empowering women and girls.



## What is innovation in international assistance?



### Definition

For Global Affairs Canada, innovation in international assistance is a process and mindset. This means we will work to enable new or improved locally-driven solutions for better results and greater impact, which benefit and empower the poorest and most vulnerable, including women and girls. Innovative solutions can include business models, policy practices, approaches, partnerships, technologies, behavioural insights, and ways of delivering products and services.

These are key factors to consider when identifying development innovation:

1. What is the specific problem?
2. Is the solution locally-driven?
3. Is the solution new or improved in the local context?
4. Does the solution have the potential to address problem(s) more efficiently and/or effectively than existing practices?
5. Will the solution be tested/piloted and/or scaled?

# Global Affairs Canada's approach to innovation in international assistance



## Both how and what

The aim of innovation in international assistance is to find and adopt concrete solutions that address problems more effectively and efficiently than existing approaches. It also aims to address needs that have not yet been met, such as addressing power dynamics in local cultures that systematically disadvantage women and girls.

## New and improved

Innovation in international assistance can be either transformational (i.e. an entirely new solution to a problem) or incremental (i.e. an improvement to an existing solution to make it more effective and/or efficient).

## A dynamic and flexible process

The innovation process is supported by a methodology that can include, but is not limited to, ideation, research and development, experimentation, testing, adjusting, adapting to local context, building proof of concept, and transitioning to scale and scaling.

Not all international assistance initiatives need to be innovative as proven and existing solutions may often be the most effective intervention to bring about further impact. A commitment to experimentation and evaluation can help guide such choices, helping to identify where initiatives are reaching optimal levels of impact and where doing things differently might offer greater potential.

# Paths to effectiveness



Global Affairs Canada will focus its efforts on the following eight paths to effectiveness, which reflect and underpin the **G7 Whistler Principles** in practice:

## 1. Promote inclusive innovation

Feminist and gender-based-analysis-plus approaches are central to such efforts and can provide critical new entry points and orientations for both engagement and programming.

Women and girls should be engaged as both those who benefit from innovation and people to be supported with tools and resources as innovators themselves. In addition, promoting inclusive innovation includes these considerations:

- Support international assistance policies and programs that are grounded in a human rights-based approach that highlights equality, non-discrimination, participation, inclusion, intersectionality, transparency and accountability.
- Ensure inclusive innovation by taking into consideration various identity, social, economic and political factors that affect the outcomes of innovative solutions for particular populations, including women and girls.
- Ensure that marginalized groups are not excluded from the benefits of innovation or negatively affected by innovations.

### [Case study: Digital Opportunity Trust project profile – Digital livelihoods: youth and the future of work at scale](#)

In this project, the Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) sought to broach the endemic challenges of slow job creation, skills gaps, and inequality of opportunity and resource access for women and men in Africa and the Middle East.

The DOT strategy was to develop and deploy entrepreneurial and digital job skills programming in pilot countries that incorporates a comprehensive gender equality strategy, networks of mentors for women and girls, and the use of digital peer-to-peer platforms.

As a result, support has been delivered to over 46,000 young women and men, with more than a third of them launching or growing their own business.



# Paths to effectiveness



## 2. Invest in locally-driven solutions

Support and encourage local innovators and their partners in developing countries, including by sharing talent and resources from global networks with them.

In addition:

- Proactively identify and nurture local expertise and experience on development innovation, creating knowledge and best-practice synergies.
- Ensure that women and adolescent girls, including those with disabilities, and local organizations representing them, play a decisive role in the design, testing, learning and adoption of innovative solutions.

### Case study: Canada's support for the fight against sexual and gender-based violence

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is endemic in refugee camps and in protection sites in South Sudan, Somalia and Kenya.

Ujamaa Africa provides SGBV prevention training by using separate, gender-sensitive curriculums to train men and boys and women and girls in a six-week intensive course. For men and boys, the focus is on consent and how to stop SGBV if they witness it. The program, Empowerment and Self Defence, empowers women and girls by teaching them what to do if they are attacked.

The sexual violence prevention curriculum is being scaled up from a pilot in Dadaab, Kenya, and delivered in Kenya, South Sudan, and Somalia. Communities in which Ujamaa Africa facilitated its education program have reported a 50% decrease in sexual abuse.

# Paths to effectiveness



## 3. Take intelligent risks

Proceed by experimenting and using rigorous data. Ensure that we do no harm, and invest more boldly once initial steps yield stronger evidence of demonstrated impact and financial viability through proof of concept.

In addition:

- Enhance data collection to support intelligent risk-taking, ongoing learning and pivoting when necessary.
- Explore funding models to distribute and manage risk in ways that mobilize innovative partnership.
- Leverage new sources of funding, and offer pathways to scale, including through results-based payments and other mechanisms enabled by Global Affairs Canada's expanded terms and conditions for international assistance.



# Paths to effectiveness



## 4. Use evidence, including disaggregated data, to drive decision making

Use evidence to improve impact and cost-effectiveness by developing clear metrics early on. Measure progress against milestones on an ongoing basis to help identify the most-effective innovations and the remaining gaps.

In addition:

- Strive to identify data that international assistance actors may be overlooking and that may illuminate entry points to address underlying barriers to international assistance or challenges to new solutions.
- Address the challenges of measuring the impact and value of innovation and its results and share relevant knowledge with Canadian and international partners and stakeholders.

## 5. Seize opportunities to learn quickly, iterate and ensure the impact of promising innovations

Before scaling promising innovations, acknowledge failure and inefficiencies. Apply an innovation lens to proven practices to identify when they need adjustment.

In addition:

- Work with partners to integrate and support innovation throughout the project cycle (definition of the problem, analysis, engagement, assessment, consultation, design, testing, experimentation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting).
- Learn alongside partners, experts and beneficiaries to shape future experimentation and innovation.
- Adapt corporate and project-management systems to enable iteration and learning.

# Paths to effectiveness



## 6. Facilitate collaboration and co-creation across public, private and civil society sectors

Coordinate the application of scientific, technical, social and business innovations to leverage intellectual, financial and social resources from all and share data, standards, results and learning widely.

In addition:

- Encourage work across sectors and through new partnerships to disrupt silos, including among other Global Affairs Canada initiatives.
- Encourage the adoption of innovative approaches through multilateral, bilateral and multi-stakeholder engagement on international assistance and use new partnership and funding mechanisms to support these.

## 7. Identify scalable solutions, including technologies

These should demonstrate high potential to achieve and sustain significant impact and cost-effectiveness and open the potential to reach millions of people in need in developing countries.

In addition:

- Stay informed about emerging tools and approaches to understand how they might be relevant to Canada's international assistance work.
- Encourage and support multi-stakeholder collaboration to scale promising innovations with development, technology, finance, the private sector and research actors.

# Paths to effectiveness



## 8. Integrate proven innovations into programming to bring to scale

By removing barriers to using new programming solutions and by supporting the adoption of proven innovations across programming mechanisms. Global Affairs Canada can continue to building an enabling environment for innovation for staff. It can encourage innovation by partners in Canada and across the international assistance sector so that effective innovation for impact becomes everyone's business.

In addition:

- Ensure that Global Affairs Canada has the financial mechanisms and authorities to support innovation in its international assistance.
- Experiment with and learn from new or improved models for policy and programming work (this could include, but is not limited to, such models as human-centered and gender-inclusive design and co-creation).
- Recognize and establish internal pathways to transition to scale across programming channels for successful concepts and proven solutions.

### [Case study: Bringing affordable, eco-friendly menstrual health products to rural Rwanda](#)

In this project, Grand Challenges Canada sought to improve access to menstrual health products for women from rural and low-income households in East Africa.

The organization created the Sustainable Health Enterprises, which sought to empower women by providing small loans for materials (locally grown banana fibres) to produce menstrual products for sale in underserved areas. As a consequence, the project has created new ecosystems of business transactions while improving access to essential health products.

The project has been scaled to new regions in Rwanda, and there are plans to expand to Kenya, Nepal and Zimbabwe.





## Implementation and monitoring



Global Affairs Canada will develop practical implementation, monitoring and evaluation guidance tools for staff and partners. It will encourage and support staff members in fostering a culture of inclusive innovation throughout the department's development, humanitarian and peace and security programs.

Global Affairs Canada will systematically track, measure and disseminate results of innovative solutions in the delivery of international assistance to generate knowledge and learning to support evidence-based decision making, including through Partner Reporting Guidelines. Global Affairs Canada is collaborating with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee Secretariat and its members on the development of an innovation marker to track innovation across all programming projects. This, along with work on measuring impact, will enable mechanisms to track, report and disseminate results and learning on innovation.

# Conclusion



Innovations in international assistance enable proven solutions that address challenges and barriers to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls more effectively than existing practices and improve the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable.

For Global Affairs Canada, a commitment to innovation is pivotal to reach practical, sustained, and scalable solutions to the world's complex international assistance problems and to eliminate extreme poverty by 2030.

Consistent with the Feminist International Assistance Policy, such a commitment includes a specific recognition that unlocking the potential of women and adolescent girls as innovators can transform development.

Global Affairs Canada will continue to encourage its partners to seek inclusive and innovative solutions to build a more peaceful, inclusive and prosperous world.



## Additional resources

1. [Whistler Principles to Accelerate Innovation for Development Impact](#)
2. [Insights on Development Innovation](#) – International Development Innovation Alliance
3. [Daring to Take Risks and Fail](#) – Canadian Council for International Co-operation