

Canadian Food Security Policy Group

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Aga Khan Foundation Canada

*Canadian Council for
International Co-operation*

Canadian Feed The Children

Canadian Foodgrains Bank

Canadian Lutheran World Relief

*Canadian Physicians for Aid
and Relief*

CARE Canada

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World Vision Canada

Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau

Minister of International Development and La Francophonie
House of Commons, Ottawa, K1A 0A6

30 June 2017

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Food Security Policy Group, we welcome Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy. As a coalition of 28 Canadian organizations with extensive experience in global food security, the Food Security Policy Group (FSPG) has been looking forward to this new framework, and is eager to work with you to implement its goals.

From decades of experience by our members and their partners in developing countries, we know that one of the most effective ways to empower women is through investment in smallholder agriculture. Seventy-nine percent of working women in developing countries make their living in agriculture. With equal rights to productive assets and resources (land, seeds, livestock and natural resources) and access to credit and training, they can feed their families, nourish their communities, and take their rightful place in society.

It is hard to imagine a feminist policy without a focus on agriculture, for this is where women are. A 2017 FAO report highlighted the feminization of agriculture, noting that "the female share of agricultural employment has increased significantly in recent decades, and women have become the majority of those employed in the sector." Investing in smallholder agriculture is investing in women.

The "What We Heard" report highlighted the strong potential for agriculture to empower women. We were disappointed to find that this role is not clearly articulated in the new Policy. Agriculture is mentioned in "Barriers to Success" and in several examples of initiatives that contribute to the action areas. The fact that it is not highlighted in the Core Action Area (Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls) raises questions about the Policy's focus and cohesion.

The Food Security Policy Group is a coalition of Canadian international development and civil society organizations seeking to promote policies and actions that protect and enhance food security in developing countries, based on decades of working in these sectors with partners in developing countries.

We were pleased to see agriculture named as an important pathway to achieve Action Areas 3 (Growth that works for everyone) and 4 (Environment and climate action). We have seen strong evidence that investing in smallholder agriculture can drive inclusive growth, enable climate change adaptation, reduce the risk and impact of disasters and contribute to more resilient ecosystems and communities. Most of the Sustainable Development Goals are linked to agriculture; significant attention to agriculture and food security is necessary to achieve Agenda 2030.

Smallholder farmers are at greatest risk from climate change, but these risks can be reduced by investments in soil, water and biodiversity conservation, and management practices including agroecological approaches and integration of livestock & crops. Low-carbon, diversified agricultural practices reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen local capacity to protect agricultural livelihoods and assets from climate-induced hazards. These can provide a pathway to resilience, by linking emergency response to long-term development.

As you pointed out in your op-ed on Earth Day, agricultural practices that combat desertification can also be effective in reducing the number of climate refugees. Given that women are overrepresented in the millions of people who lose their lives following climate disasters or that face violence because of climate migrations, strong agricultural livelihoods would reduce the risk of upheaval, and enable them to bounce back from catastrophic events.

The new Policy highlights the importance of nutrition as a contributor to overall health, including sexual and reproductive health. Recognizing the importance of agriculture for women in developing countries, we feel it is important to focus on biodiverse, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, before supplements, as a pathway to improved nutrition in the long term.

When you met with a delegation from the Food Security Policy Group in early May, we discussed the Aid4Ag roadmap, and you noted that “all the leaves of the flower are represented in the Policy”. Now that the Policy is public, some of the leaves are clear, including connections to climate change, inclusive growth and women’s organizations. However, connections to other leaves are not well-articulated in the Policy.

We would like to meet with you to discuss implementation of the Policy, including the role of agriculture in supporting feminist development outcomes, and how best to work with smallholder women farmers to achieve goals in all actions areas. We welcome the opportunity to contribute our expertise as you set targets and develop plans to achieve those targets.

During our May meeting, we also discussed the need to improve our collective capacity to implement this ambitious new Policy. It is unclear how the goals of the new Policy will be achieved without additional funding. When we meet, we’d like to learn more about the innovative funding mechanism mentioned in the Policy, and discuss how we, as civil society organizations, might leverage additional resources.

Finally, we wish to note that we (Food Security Policy Group members) are working closely with staff in Global Affairs Canada to plan a workshop in September on the role of

agriculture in the new Policy. The workshop will bring experts from around the world to discuss how investments in agriculture and food systems can achieve the Policy's priorities. We are pleased with the healthy spirit of collaboration between the department and civil society organizations, and are looking forward to fruitful dialogue at the workshop.

Sincerely,



Pierre Kadet, Co-chair
Care Canada



Paul Hagerman, Co-chair
Canadian Foodgrains Bank

With the endorsement of the following organizations:

Canadian Feed The Children

Canadian Foodgrains Bank

Canadian Lutheran World Relief

Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief (CPAR)

Care Canada

Farm Radio International

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