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### Feature Piece: A Canadian Approach to Women's Economic Empowerment

**By The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of  
International Development and La Francophonie**

Between 1990 and 2013, the world experienced a phenomenal drop in the number of people living in extreme poverty. Thanks to economic growth and the contribution of international development assistance, one billion people were lifted out of poverty. The proportion of the global population living on less than USD 1.90 a day went from 35% to 11%. This is encouraging, but still unacceptably high and far from the objective of leaving no one behind adopted by all member countries of the United Nations as part of [Agenda 2030](#), the UN plan of action to eliminate poverty.

There are also new challenges. Much of what worked in the past to create opportunities for those left behind to benefit from growth now needs to be adapted to new realities. Most people who live below the poverty line are increasingly hard to reach, since they either live in remote or conflict-affected areas, or they continue to be excluded from economic growth on the basis of their sex, race, ethnicity, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender

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identity, age, ability, or migrant or refugee status. Moreover, the most recent growth that lifted millions out of poverty has also been accompanied by increased income inequality. Women and girls continue to be left behind, as they are economically and socially discriminated against in several ways. This forces us to rethink our approach. This is what we have done in [\*Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy\*](#), which was released in June.

The new Policy aims to reduce extreme poverty and build a more peaceful, inclusive and prosperous world. It is based on the premise, backed by evidence, that the most effective approach to achieve this goal is by promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. For instance, we know that women spend a greater portion of their incomes on their families. As women gain economic independence, they raise healthier and better-educated children, with multiple beneficial effects on their communities. This new policy represents a turning point in Global Affairs Canada's approach to international assistance. To achieve growth that works for everyone, particularly for women and girls, we need to enhance and adapt our focus, expand our toolbox, and improve our effectiveness.

Guided by our feminist approach, Canada will focus on reaching the poorest and most vulnerable people to address the constraints they face in realizing their potential in a holistic way. This includes addressing violence, gender-based discrimination and harmful practices that disadvantage all, and especially women and girls; giving them control over their own sexual and reproductive health choices so that they can decide if, when and with whom to start a family, or grow their families; using technologies to promote the social, economic, political and cultural empowerment of women; and upholding women's right to participate in economic activities. This calls for a transformative approach—one that challenges unequal power relations, systemic discrimination that also exist along intersectional lines, and harmful norms and practices by engaging a broad range of stakeholders, including men and boys, in change processes. The issues of unpaid care work and lack of support for women's collective action are also

challenges that need to be tackled in order to challenge the structural causes of women's economic inequality.

Canada, through our Feminist International Assistance Policy, commits to promote women's economic empowerment; to promote women's leadership in decision-making; to improve social protection, and to increase women's resilience, particularly through financial inclusion and climate-smart agriculture.

Technical and vocational training; basic literacy and numeracy; supporting women entrepreneurs through increasing access to capital, markets, digital technology, and business development services; and supporting women-led agricultural businesses, for example, are all priorities going forward. But we know that raising women's productivity is only one part of the story. Some women are too disadvantaged to have economic opportunities. Many continue to be denied their basic rights. And many live in a situation fraught with risks to their livelihoods that constantly threaten to undo any gains.

As we adjust and expand our programming to better serve women and girls in developing countries, we must also improve our effectiveness as a donor. The new Policy lists several new ways of doing development differently that Canada will adopt to improve the impact of every dollar of its international development assistance towards making growth work for everyone. For example, we will build innovation and encourage experimentation into our assistance programs by adopting new business models, technologies and ways of delivering products and services.

Global Affairs is also seeking out innovative funding partnerships and closer collaboration with IDRC, Canadian universities and other research institutions. This will enable us to increase our focus on innovation, research, and results. For instance, Canada has committed to help address unpaid work and the disproportionate burden of care shouldered by women. Research supported by Canada's International Development Research Centre



(IDRC) on the [care economy](#) will be invaluable in shaping our support. In this respect, IDRC's [Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women](#) (GrOW) program and McGill University's [GrOW Research Series](#) bring a wealth of practical policy and programming insights that will help inform the delivery of Global Affairs Canada's development assistance—including approaches to reduce women's double burden and increase the success of women entrepreneurs.

Finally, through the new Policy, we have committed that at least 95 percent of Canada's bilateral international development assistance will either target or integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by 2021-22. Through these investments, Canada will help address the gender equality gaps for women's economic empowerment and help break the cycle of poverty to benefit everyone and help build an inclusive world in which no one is left behind.



*The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau is Canada's Minister of International Development and La Francophonie.*

## The Challenge of Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment

**By Sonia Laszlo and Kate Grantham**

The question of how to define and measure women's economic empowerment (WEE) has been the subject of much discussion and debate in international development. The lack of clear consensus on both may limit widespread efforts to design and evaluate programs and policies aimed at improving women's well-being.

In our recent [working paper](#), we set out a proposed classification and conceptual framework for measuring WEE in international development research. We propose a distinction between direct measures, indirect measures, and constraints on women's empowerment. Findings from a review of IDRC's Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) program are then presented to demonstrate the diversity of approaches that exist to measure WEE.

In conclusion, we recommend that researchers avoid using outcomes (such as labour market outcomes) as measures of WEE, and provide an explicit definition of WEE and a mapping or explanation of how their conceptual framework informs their chosen measurement approach. Researchers must also carefully balance the trade-off between the specificity of the measure (to account for specific contexts) and the generalizability of the measure (for cross-regional or time comparisons).

Read the full working paper and others on the GrOW Research Series [website](#) today!

# Q&A with Corinne Mason, Author of *Manufacturing Urgency*

## Interview by Kate Grantham

I spoke with author Corinne Mason about the motivation and process behind her book, [\*Manufacturing Urgency: The Development Industry and Violence Against Women\*](#) (2017). The book investigates anti-violence policies in international development. Through careful consideration of three prominent international anti-violence initiatives, Mason shows how these projects are technocratic, depoliticized, and executed in a manner that serves the interest of neoliberal economic growth and security concerns, at the expense of a more holistic, effective, and accountable approach.

**Q: Tell me about the inspiration behind this book. What was your motivation for writing it?**

The inspiration for the book came out of two separate, but ultimately connected, spaces. The first was my work with the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women, where I was engaging in conversations about how violence against women has to be made intelligible to funding bodies. I became curious about the fact that quantitative data and simplistic renderings of gendered violence was essential to attracting attention of funders, but also the public's attention. The other inspiration for this work was engaging with Yasmin Jiwani's conceptualization of "[worthy victims](#)" which led me to think about how victimization is discursively and affectively structured.

**Q: In the book, you argue that the issue of violence against women has received more "urgent" attention from the development industry as of late, compared to past decades.**

**What do you think is the reason for this increased attention?**

My book starts from exactly this question. In it, I attempt to provide a historical context for each organization or actor included in my three case studies to try to map and tease out what lead to violence against women becoming the priority issue.

What I came up with, and what ended up being the main argument of the book, is that violence against women becomes the priority issue as it is tethered to other development objectives, including already established mandates of organizations, or through a repackaging of existing development agendas. This happens through feminist engagements inside and outside of development; "femocrats" on the inside use the language of institutions to make violence against women a priority and feminist critics and watchdog groups on the outside push organizations to be responsive to gender issues through a "slap" or "clap" approach.

**Q: To make your case in the book, you consider three major case studies of contemporary anti-violence initiatives – the World Bank's *The Cost of Violence*, the United Nation's *UNiTE To End Violence Against Women*, and *The Hillary Doctrine*. How did you land on these three initiatives? What interested you about them over others?**

I landed on these initiatives in a few ways. I chose the World Bank because of my prior research on the organization, and my interest in a sustained and critical study of their gender work. More than just a bank, the World Bank produces an incredible amount of research and I wanted to better understand how they were using an economic and business approach to the question of gendered violence.

In terms of how I landed on Hillary Clinton, I can only say that she was everywhere at the time I





was writing. I say everywhere because she is the most well-traveled Secretary of State in the history of the US, and she was receiving considerable popular attention for her work on global women's rights. I became increasingly interested in US foreign policy, and the connections between development and defense spending, throughout her tenure. Finally, I was really interested in the UNiTE campaign as media and cultural studies scholar because of its online and social media presence, and that fact that this was the first major high-level anti-violence campaign at the UN. This research could have focused on many different organizations and campaigns, but ultimately, I chose these three because of their respective positions as knowledge-makers (World Bank), agenda-setters (UN), and influencers (Hillary Clinton/US foreign policy).

**Q: I know that you've been busy traveling recently to promote the book. What has come out of this experience for you? What type of reception has the book received?**

Travelling to promote this book has been incredible. The connections I am building with academics, but also practitioners in development organizations and civil society-at-large, has been tremendously influential on my thinking about the position of feminists in the industry. I've been thinking about how academics play the role of a sledgehammer for insiders who have to use a chisel in their work. We all have different roles to play, and different tools at our disposal.

Overall, I am so pleased with the response that this book has received, and I look forward to deepening these conversations and connections moving forward.

**Q: What new research or projects are you working on now?**

Right now, I am working on a few things. I developed an interest in thinking about the inclusion paradigms in development discourses. A piece of this large project will focus on the development of the LGBTI Inclusion Index (UNDP

and World Bank). Another piece of this project, which is getting larger and larger every day as I conduct research interviews, is thinking about the how questions of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) are taken up in Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy. Finally, I'm writing about the transnational politics of pride in Winnipeg (where I live) focusing on conversations happening in the 2SLGBTQIA\* community about police presence and its effects on newcomers experiences of pride.



*Dr. Corinne L. Mason is an Associate Professor in Gender and Women's Studies and Sociology at Brandon University in Manitoba.*

## ISID'S 2018 Annual Conference: Unpacking Women's Empowerment

Since the 1970s governments and civil society actors at international and domestic levels have engaged in legal, political, economic and social efforts to advance diverse visions of women's empowerment. Yet, more work is needed to clarify what constitutes women's empowerment in contemporary circumstances, and how to evaluate



various policies or practices that seek to promote women's empowerment. These tasks are complicated by the diversity of development contexts, as well as the multidimensional nature of factors affecting women's empowerment. They are also especially policy relevant given Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy aimed at promoting gender equality in aid programming.

ISID's annual conference on March 15-16, 2018 will "unpack" the agenda of women's empowerment in global development, with an interdisciplinary group of experts who will discuss contemporary challenges and opportunities for research, policy and practice, as well as examine some of the recent evidence on empowerment initiatives in resource-poor settings.

The conference will focus on various challenges that confront scholars and policy makers seeking to promote women's autonomy, voice, and/or well-being in the household, civil society, and national politics. Some of these challenges include the difficulties associated with how to measure and benchmark progress toward achieving women's empowerment in diverse contexts, and concerns that the design and implementation of women's empowerment policies obscure their politically contested nature. Other challenges have to do with how to incorporate evidence of social and political backlash when assessing the impact and success of various policies.

For more information and to register for the conference visit:

<https://www.mcgill.ca/isid/events-0/unpacking-womens-empowerment>

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***The GrOW Research Series** brings together scholarly research on women's economic empowerment and growth in low-income countries, and provides a conceptual and empirical basis for policy-making. It is also the official research platform for the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) program. This series is housed at the Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID) at McGill University in Montreal.*

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