



Issue No. 7 / August 2018



Why Beneficiary Accountability Should be Integral to Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy

By Fredrik Galtung

#MeToo and what some have called #AidToo, hit the humanitarian and development sectors in early 2018. Dozens of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations agencies were called out. Some large international NGOs had to withdraw from bidding on United Kingdom (UK) government funding. Thousands of individual donors cancelled their regular contributions to Oxfam GB. A [noted humanitarian](#), who was awarded the Order of Canada in 2016 for his decades long work with street children, was arrested in Nepal in May, accused of grooming and of having sex with young boys.

If organizations that will be implementing Canada's visionary Feminist International Assistance Policy are themselves accused of harbouring individuals who have abused co-workers, beneficiaries, and women and children in the communities where they work, how might the government respond and demonstrate leadership?

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The UK's Secretary of State for International Development, Penny Mordaunt, has referred to these reports as "a wake-up call for the entire international development sector." Mordaunt announced in March that an international conference will take place on October 18, 2018, with, among others, Canadian government participation. The proposals put forward so far include:

- An international safeguarding centre to support organizations to implement best practices on safeguarding and maximize transparency in the sector
- New vetting and referencing standards to ensure that no offender can fall through the cracks
- New whistle-blowing provisions so individuals feel able to report offences
- Mandatory inductions on safeguarding for all staff so any issues are identified and acted upon
- Clear guidelines for referring incidents

I am concerned that despite best intentions, what is being discussed and tabled so far is inadequate and risks falling well short of what could make real difference. These proposals are the cutting edge of compliance-based reform when it comes to sexual malpractice. But this edifice of reforms will only work if survivors speak up and come forward and if those listening are committed both to proactive and consequence-driven change. Many large aid organizations, such as the World Bank and the Global Fund to Fight Aids, TB and Malaria, already run whistle-blower hotlines. Yet it is almost unheard of for reports of sexual abuse to be made through these hotlines. The Global Fund's human rights complaints line did not generate [a single complaint](#) in three years despite "[an extensive awareness-raising effort](#)".

American film producer, Harvey Weinstein, [stands accused](#) of raping women as early as the 1980s.

Some of his survivors were among the highest-paid and most empowered women in the world and yet they did not feel safe to come forward until recently. The victims of Bill Cosby [go back fifty years](#). And when multiple allegations of sexual abuse were made against Bill O'Reilly, Fox News' star anchor, in his defence the company stated that [no one had ever used the anonymous complaints hotline](#) to raise any issues about him.

In the UK, [over 1,500 children were sexually exploited](#) in the town of Rotherham over a sixteen-year period. In a country with the rule of law and functioning institutions, of social workers, police, a free press, and a widely-known independent [hotline for children](#), it was possible for sexual predators to go almost completely unchecked in this small town from 1997 to 2013 because of what has been described as a "[toxic mix](#)" of factors.

A system of compliance that failed to safeguard far too many women and children in the rich, democratic West will not deliver deep change in the humanitarian and development sectors. It will fail. A bottom-up rethinking of how we safeguard some of the world's most vulnerable people is therefore needed. Effective safeguarding policies and practices are only likely to succeed if beneficiaries are proactive agents of change.

I invite the Government of Canada to consider that where funding is tied to concrete beneficiaries, these people, or their closest advocates, must have the capacity and the right to do three simple things: i) know what is committed to them, ii) assess whether they are receiving it, and iii) secure redress where these commitments are not met. Such a Beneficiary Accountability requirement would give credence to donors' and NGOs' commitments to ensure that grievances are taken seriously. It would help to ensure that the voices of the weakest and most marginalized people are heard just as loudly as any other voices.



As an example, a project I initiated in Nepal in 2017 enabled beneficiaries of a house reconstruction project following the 2015 earthquakes that devastated large parts of the country to hold the implementer to account. Community monitors found 1,304 problems in 784 homes monitored, with only 49 homes without a problem. The good news is that after six months they were able to ensure that 67% of the problems had been resolved. The men did a good job, but the most effective and diligent monitors were young women (read more [here](#)).

To be transformative, Beneficiary Accountability must follow some agreed upon core principles. These can be summarized as the "TEA" principles:

- **Transparency** so that top-line results are accessible to all
- **Effectiveness** by reporting the rate at which problems are redressed
- **Autonomy** in that the redress mechanisms are run independently of the direct service providers or contractors

All efforts must fulfill the minimum TEA principles. But other principles are highly desirable, such as being **locally-led**, **verifiable** (evidence-based, auditable), **inclusive** (no one is without a voice), timely (real-time is best) and **systematic** (full scope and project cycle). Beneficiary Accountability should also be **feminist**: all efforts should be informed by principles of equity and equality, and at least half of local beneficiary accountability mechanisms should be headed and staffed by women.

A new beneficiary accountability norm along the lines I have indicated is likely to deter and reduce sexual assault. Moreover, when survivors experience that some among their peers have gained the confidence, competence and leadership ability to hold decision-makers, aid workers, and contractors to account, survivors will know whom they can turn to and trust. She will be one of their own.

Beneficiary Accountability will have the added benefit of making development policy better. Canada foresees major investments in projects to promote women's economic empowerment, leadership, decision-making, entrepreneurship, access to capital markets, innovative farming, and digital technology. In all these cases, Beneficiary Accountability is both feasible and desirable. It will generate valuable data on what works and will produce real-time transparency at the level of outcomes and impact, which is largely absent from aid-funded projects at present.

Canada launched a bold and visionary Feminist International Assistance Policy last year. I now invite the Canadian Government to take leadership in being among a small group of donors to make Beneficiary Accountability a new funding requirement in humanitarian assistance and international development and for this to be gradually rolled out as a new requirement across its portfolio by 2021.



Fredrik Galtung has over 25 years of experience working with communities, NGOs, governments and businesses in more than 40 countries to find practical solutions for building integrity and trust, and curbing corruption. Galtung is the co-founder of [Integrity Action](#), a London-based international NGO helping communities fix public projects and services.



Adopting a Feminist Approach to Women's Economic Empowerment

By Tiffany Barnes-Huggins

Feminist principles are not directly inherent to women's economic empowerment (WEE). The two can actually run counter to each other when women's rights and gender equality are overlooked in the pursuit of economic growth. These parallel concepts have taken center stage in international development debates and are rising in prominence across the Canadian domestic and foreign policy landscape.

Through its Feminist International Assistance Policy, Canada seeks to eradicate global poverty by targeting aid toward initiatives that address the barriers to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. This ambitious policy involves a concerted focus on several [supportive action areas](#) including a [growth pillar](#), which seeks to address women's livelihoods and economic potential. To operationalize this policy and develop instruments and channels for implementation it is necessary to ask: "What do we mean by feminist?" and "What do we mean by women's economic empowerment?". Only from this common ground, can we work towards defining a transformational feminist approach to WEE.

In order to develop a shared understanding of these concepts and identify opportunities for scaled action by the Canadian government, Oxfam Canada and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), with the support of Global Affairs Canada, held a two day collaborative workshop – *A Feminist Approach to Women's Economic Empowerment*.

The workshop brought together more than fifty Canadian and international participants from the research community, civil society, government, philanthropic community, private sector, and multilateral organizations.



Photo credit: Anne Toralles Leite



Photo credit: Anne Toralles Leite

Rukia Cornelius, WEE Lead, Oxfam South Africa, delivers panel presentation.



Photo credit: Anne Toralles Leite

Jeni Klugman, Managing Director, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security delivers panel presentation.



From June 21-22, 2018, participants and panelists unpacked research, policy and programming initiatives around several crosscutting themes, including: the care economy, economic rights, decent work, social norms and gender-based violence, among others. These themes were chosen in part based on evidence from IDRC's [Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women \(GrOW\)](#) program, a 5-year, \$18 million initiative that supported research to fill critical knowledge gaps around WEE in low-income countries. Panelists also examined Canadian and global engagement on WEE by identifying gaps and emerging areas of international assistance, research and programming.

On the final day of the workshop, participants delivered a presentation to Global Affairs Canada officials with lessons learned from the event and recommendations on how to operationalize a feminist approach to WEE. The recommendations centered around three key themes:

Project design: We need greater flexibility in the design and evaluation of projects; sex-disaggregated data and intersectional indicators; gender analysis and gender mainstreaming across programming; and involvement by diverse stakeholders including economists, rights-based thinkers and beneficiaries, among others. Greater participation by men and boys in programming is also crucial.

Funding: Funding time-frames for programs and projects of this nature need to be longer, and there needs to be an emphasis on core funding and other diverse funding models (i.e. solidarity funding and consortium grants).

Collectivism: The organization and representation of diverse groups of women can be strengthened through the funding and support for grassroots women's organizations and movements.

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New Documentary Series from IDRC: 'Portraits of Empowerment'

By Tiffany Barnes-Huggins

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and its partners are pleased to announce the release of a new documentary series on the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) program: ["Portraits of Empowerment: Women's Stories from the GrOW Program."](#) This documentary series was led by Senior Program Officer, Alejandra Vargas Garcia, in collaboration with filmmakers from Adjacent Possibilities in Toronto.

'Portraits of Empowerment' offers viewers a vivid, on-the-ground perspective of women's daily lives in low income contexts, illustrating not only the complexity of women's economic empowerment but also the resilience, strength and ingenuity that women bring to the challenges they face.



Photo credit: IDRC/Adjacent Possibilities

A still from the documentary 'Portraits of Empowerment' in Kenya.



The documentary is split into three videos depicting stories from three GrOW projects in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kenya. In [Kenya](#), the series is focused on women living in the Korogocho slum in Nairobi and their childcare responsibilities and barriers to employment opportunities. In [Pakistan](#), the series highlights the challenges to women's mobility and skills training in and around their villages. In [Bangladesh](#), the series profiles the story of a child bride who faces great stigma and constraints to educational attainment and economic participation.

The stories, captured through video, are accompanied by interviews with researchers who conducted field work in the communities where these women reside. They include:

- Dr. Ali Cheema from the Center for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP) and Lead Researcher on the GrOW project [Understanding the Effect of Skills Training on Women's Economic Opportunities in Pakistan](#).
- Milka Njeri and Justina Munyiva from the African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) and researchers on the GrOW project [Improving Child Care Options to Create Better Economic Opportunities for Women in Nairobi Slums](#).
- Dr. Shahana Nazneen from Innovations for Poverty Action Bangladesh (IPA) and Lead Researcher on the GrOW project [Addressing the Barriers to Young Women's Economic Empowerment in Bangladesh](#).

Together, these videos provide a snapshot of the innovative work of the GrOW program and gives voice to key beneficiaries that are affected by the research in the program.

For more information on the documentary series, please email: grow@idrc.ca.

Produced with support from McGill University and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The observations and views expressed in this issue are the sole responsibility of the author(s).

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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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