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Ambassador O'Neill in Khartoum at a workshop on the drafting of Sudan's National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security in December 2019.

Women, Peace, and Security: Canada's New Ambassador on Why It Matters

By Jacqueline O'Neill, Canada's Ambassador for Women, Peace, and Security

Like many who work in international relations, I have always had jobs that are tricky to explain. Over many years, I have become well accustomed to confused looks from people at social events, customs officers, and even family members, when attempting to respond to their simple question, "What do you do?"

Being appointed last summer as Canada's first Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security was an incredible honour. It is my dream job. And, its title is not exactly self-explanatory.

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Most ambassadors are to a place, not for a concept. Most live abroad, whereas Canada is my home base. It is a unique role that I am determined to ensure makes a positive impact at home and around the world – and I am grateful for this opportunity to explain what it involves.

First, what is “women, peace, and security?” It is rooted in the concept that the most just and effective policies result when those most directly affected are meaningfully involved in shaping them. Decisions related to peace and security are more relevant, informed, and sustainable when we take into account the experiences of over 50 percent of the population.

For too long, women have been a crucial community excluded from official processes to prevent, end, and rebuild after violent conflict. An [analysis of major peace processes](#) from 1992 to 2018 found that women constituted just 13 per cent of negotiators, 4 percent of signatories, and 3 per cent of mediators. Within United Nations peacekeeping missions, women comprise [less than 5 percent of military personnel](#).

Women have long advocated for greater inclusion, and in the last two decades have gained notable traction in terms of changing policy. In 1995, women gathered from all parts of the world at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, including thousands from countries experiencing war. They shared experiences of playing instrumental roles sustaining communities, preventing, ending, and fighting in war, but being shut out of official processes dealing with those very issues. Though they came from vastly different regions and cultural contexts, their experiences were remarkably similar.

For five years after that conference, women activists around the world, primarily from within civil society, advocated for the highest security-focused body in the world, the UN Security Council, to take action. In 2000, under the leadership of Chair Namibia, and with support from Bangladesh, Canada, and Jamaica, the

Council passed UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on “women, peace, and security.” The Resolution affirmed the important roles that women play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction. It calls for their full involvement in all efforts.

Why does women’s involvement matter? There is mounting evidence that when women’s voices are taken seriously and their rights respected, entire communities benefit. Peace agreements, for example, are [35% more likely to endure](#) at least 15 years if women participate meaningfully in their creation. This is in part because evidence shows that women tend to broaden the issues discussed beyond who gets to run which ministry and where borders are set.

They often raise root causes of conflict and introduce priorities that lay a foundation for a stronger state in the long term. In Guatemala, for example, women ensured that talks addressed police power. In Darfur, women spoke about food security. In Northern Ireland, they raised integrated education. In Colombia, they spoke of the community’s role in reintegrating those who took up arms and now need jobs. In each context, these issues were crucial to address to ensure that peace could endure.

Women’s meaningful inclusion is key to addressing the most pressing security issues of our time. These include climate change, artificial intelligence and cyber security, migration, and many more. It is clear that women’s inclusion is both a rights agenda and a national and international security imperative.

To realize the goals of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and its nine “sister resolutions” adopted subsequently, 84 countries have now adopted “national action plans”.

Under the leadership of the Conservative Party,



Canada launched its first, five-year national action plan in 2011. In 2017, under a Liberal government, Canada launched its second.

In summer 2019, Prime Minister Trudeau appointed me to a three-year term as Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security, with a mandate to advise the government on delivering on our national action plan, and demonstrating global leadership in this area.

In practice, I serve as force multiplier for the government – or in other terms, a boost of surge capacity. This includes a surge of:

- *Strategic thinking and vision* – Canada’s national action plan includes nine implementing partners.¹ I work with each to ensure we build off each others’ experiences, and remain focused and ambitious. And, that we continue to address issues within our own country, acknowledging that First Nations, Metis, and Inuit women in Canada continue to pay the heavy price of living at the nexus of colonialism, racism, and sexism.
- *Ideas* – No country has a monopoly on good ideas. This field is relatively new, and the global context is always changing. There is much Canada can learn from governments, multilateral organizations, and civil society around the world. There is also much we can share about what has worked well at home and importantly, where we continue to struggle.
- *High-level attention* – The role is at the level of ambassador to send a signal of the government’s commitment. It enables unique access and helps confer importance – both at home and abroad.

It is key that my team and I take great care not to duplicate work already underway. It is also crucial that we take care not to enable – even unintentionally – the “outsourcing” of thinking or action related to this issue. We want to maintain, deepen, and broaden a sense of ownership and responsibility for implementing our national action plan.

We also want to remain informed by research and insights coming from academia and civil society about all aspects of gender, peace, and security.

Above all, the success of this position rests on listening – particularly to voices of women peacebuilders from the Global South. Their priorities and counsel must inform our direction and approach, and we must always seek to hear from them directly.

With a mindset of humility, curiosity, and determination, I hope to energize our government’s actions, listen to Canadians and people around the world, and build more awareness about the importance of women to peace and security. Canada is seen as a leader in this work; together, we can go even further.



Jacqueline O'Neill is Canada's Ambassador for Women, Peace, and Security.

¹ Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, the Department for Women and Gender Equality, the Department of Justice of Canada, the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces, Global Affairs Canada, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.



Farewell from the GrOW Research Series Team

By Sonia Laszlo and Kate Grantham

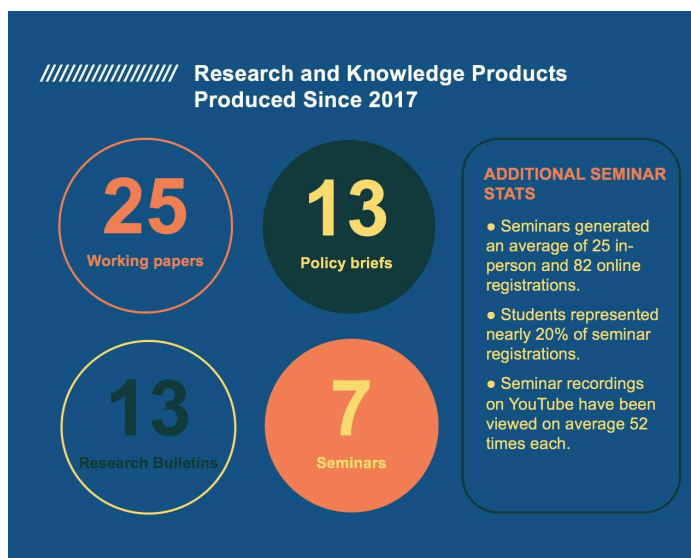
Dear GrOW Research Bulletin Readers,

It's with great pleasure and some sadness that we write this last issue of the GrOW Research Bulletin. In January 2017, just a few months after Prof. Laszlo took on the directorship of McGill's Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID), in partnership with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) we embarked on a two-year project to promote research on women's empowerment in developing countries, to engage with researchers from the Global South and Canada, and to promote a discourse on these matters between scholars, practitioners and policy makers.

Alongside the [Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women \(GrOW\) Research Series](#), initially promoting and disseminating the research output from [IDRC's 14 GrOW projects in 50 countries](#), we launched the GrOW Research Bulletin to provide a forum for discussion on policy relevant issues and research related to empowering women globally. And the timing couldn't have been better – just a few months later, Canada announced its Feminist International Assistance Policy, and you can read the Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau, then Minister of International Development and la Francophonie, discuss it in [Issue 4 \(December 2017\)](#). This also coincided with ISID's increased interest in gender and development, capped with our 2018 Annual Conference on this very theme ([Issue 6, April 2018](#)), and our own increased academic interest in understanding the role that social

protection and anti-poverty policies play in improving women's well-being ([Issue 10, March 2019](#)).

Both the GrOW Research Series and the Bulletin were absorbed into the [Women's Empowerment in Development \(WED\) Lab](#) at ISID in March 2018 and a two-year project turned into three thanks to additional funding from Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. This last year saw us deliver [seven research-to-practice seminars](#) on different topics related to women's empowerment, hosted at IDRC's offices in Ottawa, to provide yet another means to mobilize and translate knowledge to a broad range of stakeholders. We also produced an additional five [working papers](#) and four related [policy briefs](#) through the GrOW Research Series, adding to our total count of research and knowledge products produced since 2017.



We hope that you have enjoyed reading about the exciting and often thought-provoking issues that our contributors brought to the fore these last three years. We also hope that the Bulletin contributors benefitted as much as we and the readers did from moving the discussion forward.



Celebrating McGill and IDRC's Collaboration for Gender Equality

Gillian Dowie and Arjan de Haan, IDRC

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has a long history of working with McGill University. In GrOW, the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) program, McGill researchers were involved in a number of collaborative projects between Canadian institutions and researchers in the Global South, including projects on the impact of subsidized childcare on women's ability to work. Other researchers were advisors to teams, for example in Tanzania, in a project on the gendered impacts of the country's new social protection program.

These successful partnerships contributed to a new kind of collaboration with McGill, the development of the GrOW Research Series. This exciting joint exploration contributed a great deal to the success of GrOW. A major – and lasting – contribution of the GrOW Research Series was a one-stop-shop that houses working papers, briefs and other products from researchers from around the world, from a variety of disciplines, and using multiple methods.

This online space, and the team at McGill, played a significant role in one of the GrOW program's objectives – to support researchers from institutions in the Global South in creating knowledge and having it available to a global audience. They supported teams to develop and publish high quality working papers, make results available early while peer-reviewed, and to condense them down into policy-oriented briefs, accessible to anyone on

the repository. This created a space for publication instead of having papers remain difficult to find and underrepresented in the wider literature. It also helped build up capacity, particularly to communicate research more accessibly.

The role of the McGill team contributes to Canada's leadership in advancing gender equality. McGill worked with networks of researchers from around the world, including the Global South, and created a recognizable online space. It created a forum for connecting to policy actors, as illustrated by the contributions to the bulletin from the Former Minister for International Development, Marie-Claude Bibeau, as well as other notable figures from Canada and abroad, and have built up a diverse network of partners.

With this last issue of the GrOW Research Bulletin, we at the IDRC celebrate the success of this partnership. The team at McGill have proven the value of the Research Series by growing it into the Women's Empowerment in Development Lab (WED Lab), which will sustain the impact, and even add exciting activities for research and practitioners in Canada and abroad.

Throughout the year, we've been pleased to support the WED Lab seminars at our offices in Ottawa, where researchers and practitioners came together in person and online, and shared knowledge and challenges on topics ranging from social norms to women's unpaid care responsibilities. They created a space where practitioners hear the current state of research in a relevant area, and share back with researchers their implementation challenges and knowledge gaps. The goal is to make programs and policies use evidence and share scalable solutions, while also directing researchers towards in-demand questions. Collaboration is needed to advance gender equality, and this kind of dialogue should happen more often – something the team at McGill are passionate about.



The webpage of the WED Lab is also an exciting initiative, as it now houses the Research Series, but has expanded to include a lot more content of different kinds. This is sure to raise McGill's profile as a hub for knowledge on gender and development.

We also celebrate what the team at McGill has been producing through this initiative and their own dedication – a new generation of young scholars coming out of their development program who have access to researchers and mentors promoting gender equality. This gives us at IDRC hope that we will continue to make progress, and continue to see Canada's significance, both through future IDRC programs on women's empowerment and through institutions' like McGill's ongoing commitment to finding solutions and sharing knowledge. While this may be the final bulletin, we are all looking to the future and excited about what is to come!

Gillian Dowie is a Senior Program Officer, Employment and Growth at IDRC.

Arjan de Haan is the Director of IDRC's Inclusive Economies program.

Q&A with Jane Parpart Editor of “Rethinking Silence, Voice and Agency in Contested Gendered Terrains”

Silence and voice are being increasingly debated as sites of agency within feminist research on conflict and insecurity. Drawing on a wide range of feminist approaches, [*Rethinking Silence, Voice and Agency in Contested Gendered Terrains* \(2019\)](#) examines the various ways that silence and voice have been contested in feminist research, and their impact on how agency is understood and performed, particularly in situations of conflict and insecurity.

I had the opportunity to connect with one of the editors of this collection, Jane Parpart, about the motivation, process and findings of this work.

Q: This collection is centered around “rethinking silence, voice and power” in feminist theorizing and research on conflict and insecurity. Why is it necessary to rethink these issues in contemporary feminist work? What has been incorrect or absent from past interpretations or ways of thinking about silence in relation to gender and power?

Feminist thinking has tended to focus on the voice of women since most women around the world found it difficult to speak in public, especially to give prominent lectures in established venues. The focus on speaking out was necessary for women around the world because there was little opportunity for women to speak out and even if they did, they were rarely taken seriously. It is understandable, therefore, that the women's movements around the world have largely focused on women's



voice and the importance of being able to talk and to be taken seriously as a speaker. This focus assumed for the most part silence was the process of being silenced. A few feminists have begun to question this and have taken up the argument that silence can be powerful, and indeed is often used as a tool by women to gain power as well as using silence as a means for rethinking, strategizing and empowering themselves. The collection has developed this argument, drawing on the scholarship of feminists from around the world. The book argues that silence is a form of power as well as sometimes disempowering, and that silence needs to be understood in its various forms and powers.

Q: The contributors to this collection approach the question of silence in quite diverse contexts – ranging from war memorials to comic books and online forums – to show that silence does not necessarily signify disempowerment. How did you land on these chapters for the collection? What do you think is compelling or interesting about them?

The editors decided to ask feminist scholars with international foci to undertake their own understanding of silence, voice and agency in different contexts. The collection does not aim for a single goal, but rather argues that silence can be both empowering and disempowering in different circumstances. The different chapters provide a number of alternative explanations for the power of silence (and sometimes the disempowering nature of silence). We feel that this global perspective helps to understand the need to rethinking silence, voice and gender with a broad perspective. The chapter on Rwanda, for example, demonstrates the essential nature of silence in a still very fraught and potentially dangerous situation. The chapter on Trinidad demonstrates the deep influence silent meditation can have for rethinking one's entire life and manners, and seeking new

understandings that will bring forth the ability to build a more constructive and caring life for young men caught up in criminal activities. Lene Hansen demonstrates the power of silence as a mechanism for understanding alternative explanations of a particular story. Using graphic novels, she calls for a three-pronged understanding of a story line, one of which involves silence. We hope the book will encourage further uses of silence for understanding and working towards a more gender equal world.

Q. How can the insights gleaned from the different chapters and contributors help inform a discussion about doing international development and gender equality work (e.g. advocacy, projects, programs, partnerships, etc.) differently?

Many people working in international development and gender equality work encounter situations where silence is necessary for moving forward. Both development and gender experts often find themselves in situations where certain facts, stories and encounters require silence. Development efforts often involve people who have been persecuted and frightened by policies and institutions. Speaking out in such situations can bring terrible consequences. The book explores this kind of situation in quite a few chapters.

The authors warn of the need to employ silence for protection, but silences are also part of managing life and surface in many 'solutions' to difficult situations. Both international development and gender equality work aim to improve gender relations, to protect women who are in dangerous situations and to enhance our understanding of the potential power of women. Indeed, the political activism of the Women in Black or the Mothers of the Disappeared has proven the power of collective silence. Individuals struggling



with difficult and dangerous situations also find silence an important tool for survival. And above all, silence as well as voice are necessary tools for both fostering a more gender equal and developed world and enhancing the ability of people to manage in an often dangerous world.

Q: Who should read this collection? Was it published with a particular audience in mind?

This book was published with many different people in mind. The book aims to bring silence into discussions about development and gender equality, not as a sign of weakness, but as a source of understanding, rethinking, strategizing and empowering women and men who struggle to find a better life for themselves and their families around the world.

Jane L. Parpart is Emeritus Professor and the former Lester Pearson Chair in International Development at Dalhousie University, Canada, as well as Adjunct Professor at Carleton University, University of Ottawa and University of Massachusetts Boston, USA.

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OUR PARTNERS



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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