



Oxfam Canada Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2020 Budget

Recommendation 1: Invest in a just economy

- Advance women's economic equality by investing \$1 billion in child care, expanding women's access to employment insurance, and raising the federal minimum wage.
- Tackle the climate emergency by setting more ambitious national commitments for greenhouse gas reductions, eliminating fossil fuel subsidies, and investing in green jobs.
- Ensure tax justice by eliminating unfair loopholes, restoring corporate tax rates, increasing the top marginal income tax rate, and cracking down on tax evasion.

Recommendation 2: Invest in ending gender-based violence and upholding sexual and reproductive rights

- Allocate \$500 million to launch a National Action Plan to Prevent and Address Gender-based Violence, and scale up investments in shelters.
- Launch a \$20 million dollar 5-year national campaign on healthy relationships and sexuality, and commit to universal cost coverage for contraceptives.

Recommendation 3: Demonstrate global leadership on women's rights and gender equality

- Develop a 10-year plan to achieve the UN aid target of 0.7% of gross national income.
- Increase contributions to global climate financing in the form of grants, not loans.
- Commit \$120M to gender-transformative programming in fragile and conflict-affected states.

Introduction

Economic inequality, gender inequality and the climate emergency are interrelated challenges the government must address in tandem. A just transition to a low carbon economy will only succeed if it is rooted in social justice. We must create green jobs that pay living wages, close the gender wage gap, and ensure all Canadians can cover their costs of living.

A low carbon future is a meaningful goal only if we also decide to tackle historic injustices and create opportunity for the many, not just the few. That is why the government should also commit to fight gender-based violence, fulfill sexual and reproductive health and rights, and champion women's rights on the global stage.

The federal government should also continue to make gender budgeting a priority through a robust implementation of the Gender Budgeting Act of 2018. To ensure that fiscal policy responds to women's needs and advances gender equality, at least 15% of the witnesses in the Standing Committee on Finance pre-budget consultation hearings should be women's rights organizations or focus their testimony on recommendations to advance gender equality. The government should specifically support women who are most systematically marginalized – Indigenous women, women of colour, women with disabilities and LGBTQI people – to participate in budget processes so that policies are responsive to their realities and address their unique challenges.

1. Invest in a just economy

Women's economic justice

All over the world, women earn less than men. Sexism affects the jobs women have access to, the money they earn, and the way society values their work. Women share a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care, which limits their ability to find decent work. Child care is the smartest investment the government can make to ensure Canada is more inclusive, more equal, and more prosperous. At the same time, too many women are stuck in precarious, low-paid and unsafe jobs. Women make up 70% of part-time, casual and temporary workers¹ and 60% of minimum wage earners.² Because of the precariousness of their employment, many women have difficulty accessing employment insurance or receive such low levels that they are forced to move from one low paid job to another.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Invest \$1 billion in child care in 2020 and move towards universal child care by setting a 10-year timetable to reach the OECD target of 1% of GDP. Enact national legislation grounding child care in universality, quality and comprehensiveness and include a workforce strategy to ensure caregivers have decent work that pays living wages.
- ✓ Expand women's access to employment insurance by modernizing the employment insurance system to lower the universal threshold, include voluntary job leavers, and ensure an eligibility requirement for low-wage workers to help tie access, level and duration to need rather than just earnings.
- ✓ Raise the minimum wage for workers under federal jurisdiction to a living wage. Use federal government procurement to support women-led businesses and favour companies that pay living wages and protect labour rights, particularly collective bargaining.

Climate justice

Domestically, Canada needs to lock-in the progress made on climate action, specifically on the implementation of the Pan-Canadian Framework on Climate Change and Clean Growth. This includes strengthening the federal carbon tax framework by eliminating the preferences for large emitters, eliminating fossil fuel subsidies and investing in programs to address climate change. Rich countries are fuelling the global climate emergency, and Canada is warming twice as fast as the global average.³ Global warming will hurt the most vulnerable communities, particularly in the Global South and Canadian North, the hardest. Women are already hardest hit by floods, droughts, tsunamis and fires.⁴ Canada can help build momentum and diplomatic channels to ensure the global community achieves the Paris Agreement.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Set and legislate new and more ambitious national commitments for greenhouse gas reductions to keep global average temperature rise below 1.5°C.
- ✓ Eliminate fossil fuel subsidies and stop using public funds, including financing, to support oil and gas companies.
- ✓ Invest in green jobs and support a just transition for workers, applying gender analysis to this transition.

Tax justice

Around the world, the underfunding of public services and a general failure to crack down on tax dodging by large corporations and the wealthy have fueled inequality for decades. Women and girls are doubly hit by rising economic inequality as they lose access to essential public services and are left to fill these gaps with many hours of unpaid care work. In Canada, tax cuts over the past two decades have reduced federal revenues by \$50 billion annually.⁵ Canada's system of income tax expenditures and loopholes is expensive – costing over \$100 billion annually – and predominantly rewards wealthy men.⁶

Recommendations:

- ✓ Eliminate unfair loopholes that allow corporations and high-income earners to pay lower rates of tax than the rest of the population, including regressive income tax measures such as pension income splitting.
- ✓ Restore corporate tax rates to 18% and increase the top marginal income tax rate on incomes over \$1 million from 33% to 37%.
- ✓ Introduce stronger laws, enforcement and penalties to prevent offshore tax evasion and avoidance by corporations and wealthy individuals.

2. Invest in ending gender-based violence and upholding sexual and reproductive rights

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is a global crisis of epidemic proportions. Globally, one in three women have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. In Canada, it is estimated that intimate partner violence and sexual violence cost the Canadian economy \$12.2 billion annually.⁷ Violence against women and girls knows no boundaries of geography or culture, but those living in poverty face higher levels of

abuse.⁸ Indigenous women are six times more likely to be killed than non-Indigenous women. Other populations, such as transgender people, women with disabilities and elderly women, are also at higher risk.⁹ While some progress has been made through the implementation of the Federal Strategy on Gender-Based Violence, reach is limited to federal jurisdiction and therefore cannot fill critical and ongoing gaps in access to services and protection for women across the country.

Recommendations

- ✓ Allocate \$500 million to launch a National Action Plan to Prevent and Address Gender-based Violence, so women everywhere in Canada have access to the same services.
- ✓ Scale up investments in shelters and other services for women experiencing violence.

Sexual and reproductive rights

Women's access to sexual and reproductive services remains uneven across Canada. Comprehensive sex education for all Canadians is lacking, and yet it would contribute to healthy relationships and have positive impacts on individual health, public health and gender equality. While education is a provincial jurisdiction, the federal government has a role to play in eliminating discrepancies across jurisdictions and increasing access. At the same time, access to contraception is fundamental to the right to health and gender equality, while also reducing public health care costs and increasing women's labour force participation and economic empowerment. Canada's international assistance includes support for access to contraceptives, however in Canada significant barriers remain. The current patchwork of private insurance plans and compassionate programs to cover contraceptives is not adequately and equally available to all who need it.

Recommendations

- ✓ Launch a \$20 million dollar, 5-year national campaign on healthy relationships and sexuality based on the updated Guidelines for Sexual Health Education.
- ✓ Commit to universal cost coverage for contraceptives as part of a national public drug plan. By one estimate, this would cost \$157 per person per year and result in millions of dollars in savings to the healthcare system.¹⁰

3. Demonstrate global leadership on women's rights and gender equality

International assistance

The world is looking to Canada for leadership on gender equality. In an era of political backlash against hard-won women's rights, Canadian governments of different political stripes have made headlines with their commitments to women's rights. From the Muskoka Initiative investment in maternal newborn and child health in 2010 to the more recent Feminist International Assistance Policy and investments in global sexual and reproductive health and rights, Canada has demonstrated that it is a global gender equality champion. All the while, Canada's international assistance budget is at its lowest in the past half century. The aid budget needs to increase if Canada is going to live up to the recent announcement of \$1.4 billion per year for women and children's health without driving down spending in other critical areas.

Recommendations

- ✓ Develop a 10-year plan to achieve the UN aid target of 0.7% of gross national income, ensuring private finance for development is additional to official development assistance.

Climate finance

With climate change threatening to push an additional 100 million people into extreme poverty by 2030, Canadian aid should increase support for gender-responsive adaptation initiatives, recognizing that climate change affects women and girls the most and that women's rights organizations are often at the forefront of adaptation initiatives.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Increase contributions to global climate financing, in particular for the least developed countries, and achieve a 50-50 balance between funding going to adaptation and mitigation initiatives. Funding should be in the form of grants, not loans.

Humanitarian action

Canadian humanitarian organizations and their partners find it difficult to secure funding for gender-focused programming in emergency contexts. Yet protracted humanitarian emergencies present opportunities for addressing acute, immediate needs in ways that promote long-term gender equality. Local women's rights actors are crucial players in gender-transformative humanitarian action: they deliver assistance in culturally appropriate ways and can integrate their humanitarian work with their long-term efforts to achieve gender equality.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Commit \$120M to gender-transformative programming in fragile and conflict-affected states. This funding should provide long-term, flexible and sustainable funding, particularly for local women's rights actors.

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