



Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Budget

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We are determined to make clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene normal for everyone, everywhere within a generation.

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Charitable registration number #119288934 RR0001

List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the government develop and implement a feminist global water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) strategy and corresponding program through its Official Development Assistance (ODA) efforts, in support of the Feminist International Assistance Policy.

Recommendation 2: That the government provide funding in the amount of \$100 million for the development and implementation of the feminist global WASH strategy and program over a five-year period.

1. **Problem Identification & Rationale**

While the international community has pledged to “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” as Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, efforts in Canada are falling far short of this aim. Currently, 785 million individuals lack basic water services and 4.5 billion do not have access to appropriate sanitation. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, more than three billion people globally lacked access to soap and water at home¹ and almost half of healthcare facilities worldwide (43%) lacked basic hand hygiene facilities at points of care. The pandemic is exacerbating existing gender inequalities and will likely increase disparities in access to basic WASH services.²

Canada is uniquely placed to lead global efforts to address these challenges through the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), a policy that places Canada as a leading global authority in reducing inequalities faced by girls and women worldwide. Canada has made great strides to support gender equality and empowerment, including a \$1.4 billion commitment, based on the THRIVE agenda, over ten years to advance the health and rights of women, adolescents and children around the globe.³

However, without the specific **development and implementation of a feminist global water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) strategy**, which recognizes WASH as a key pathway to women’s and girl’s empowerment, the transformative objectives of the FIAP and Global Affairs Canada’s aim for “the integration of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls across all international assistance efforts” will not be fully realized.⁴ Further, reducing the spread and minimizing the impact of COVID-19 will rely in part on delivering adequate WASH services, particularly handwashing with soap and key hygiene behaviors, while prioritizing the poorest and most marginalized. As the international community begins to envision efforts to “build back better” and promote long-term resilience, redressing the impacts of COVID-19 must include a real commitment to the original roadmap for global progress enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to WASH. Innovative and sustainable WASH is a foundation for healthy, productive and inclusive societies and has integral role to play in supporting the hard won gains of Canada’s investment within the FIAP.⁵

To ensure Canada remains a global leader for gender equality and empowerment, Canada must acknowledge WASH as an essential component for mitigating the direct and indirect consequences of COVID-19 across priority sectors and systemically incorporate WASH into its feminist approach to international development and foreign policy to help build a fairer, more just world in the aftermath of COVID-19. **By doing so, Canada will continue to lead as a champion for the dignity, rights and capacity of women and girls throughout the world.**

2. **Analysis & Impact by Sector**

The negative impacts caused by a lack of WASH services in least-developed countries on gender equality and empowerment are well-established in empirical research. It is overwhelmingly clear that women and girls are disproportionately affected by these problems due to biological, social and cultural factors and gender inequality is exacerbated in health emergencies and economic crises.⁶

¹ WHO/UNICEF JMP (2019), www.washdata.org

² UN Water (2018): Highlights – SDG 6 Synthesis Report 2018 on Water and Sanitation (Geneva, Switzerland – UN Water).

³ Justin Trudeau (2019): Government of Canada makes historic investment to promote the health and rights of women and girls around the world (Vancouver, Canada –Prime Ministers Office).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Government of Canada (2018): Canada’s G7 Themes – Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. <https://g7.gc.ca/en/g7-presidency/themes/advancing-gender-equality-women-empowerment/>

⁶ WaterAid Canada (2016): Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: Essential Elements of Canada’s International Development Assistance (Ottawa, Canada – WaterAid Canada).

1. **Health and nutrition:** In health care facilities, inadequate access to and use of water, sanitation and hygiene services are strongly connected with high mortality rates and the transmission of diseases among mothers and newborns. In the home, poor sanitation and safe water access are significant contributors to maternal mortality. Diarrheal disease, primarily transmitted via unsafe water, is closely linked with malnutrition, stunting and cognitive disabilities, and increased mortality. Even in the absence of diarrhea, fecal-contaminated environments are associated with chronic undernutrition.⁷
2. **Education:** The WASH related challenges women and girls face also extend to the education sector and intersect with health outcomes. Adolescent girls are particularly at risk for health problems when they begin puberty and start menstruating,⁸ yet school water and sanitation facilities to support effective menstrual hygiene management (MHM) are often lacking. This results in higher rates of absenteeism for girls and lower educational attainment, limiting their overall development potential. Social stigmas and a widespread view of menstruation as taboo can be a source of shame, embarrassment and isolation for many women and girls, despite menstruation being a normal biological process and a sign of reproductive health.⁹
3. **Economic empowerment:** WASH is also connected to the empowerment of women and girls, who often are responsible for performing WASH-related activities in households such as collecting water, which is time-consuming and effort-intensive when water sources are far from home.¹⁰ This time burden places women in a deeper condition of economic dependence on the typically male head of the household and further reduces the time available for girls to study, play or engage in other wellbeing-promoting activities, building on existing societal inequalities. As schools close and families stay home due to COVID-19, domestic chores and caring responsibilities have increased greatly. At the same time, increased calls for washing hands, as well as for cleaning and sanitizing, multiply the need for water. Because of the gender division of labor, it is women and girls who will have to collect this extra water and care for people who are sick.
4. **Sexual and gender-based violence:** The risk of sexual and gender-based violence for women and girls is increased by lack of WASH availability and access, particularly in fragile states and contexts. Having to travel long distances to water points, often alone through insecure areas, puts women and girls at risk of attack or harassment.¹¹ Owing to lack of appropriate sanitation facilities, many women and girls are forced to practice open defecation and do so at night in secluded areas due to embarrassment, further increasing their vulnerability and the risk of being victims of violence.

3. **Recommendations**

Recommendation #1: To develop and implement a feminist global water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) strategy and corresponding program through the government's Official Development Assistance efforts, in support of the Feminist International Assistance Policy. To achieve this aim, WaterAid Canada recommends the following measures:

1. **Establish collaborative mechanisms for leveraging Canadian expertise:** widespread expertise in relation to WASH, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls already exists within Canada, spanning non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions and private sector firms. WaterAid recommends the government capitalize on this Canadian talent and distinct knowledge and

⁷ USAID (2015): WASH & Nutrition, Water and Development Strategy Implementation Brief (Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development).

⁸ Government of Canada (2017).

⁹ WaterAid (2015): WASH and Gender Equality Post-2015 Toolkit (London, UK: WaterAid).

¹⁰ WaterAid Canada (2016).

¹¹ WaterAid Canada (2018): Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: A Pathway to Realizing Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (Ottawa, Canada – WaterAid Canada).

mobilize it through the formation of a Multisector WASH Advisory Group, to engage the government in the development of a feminist global WASH strategy. Global Affairs Canada will benefit from the deepest and most technically advanced research and experience in this area. This approach will also showcase how Canada embraces civic engagement to inform the development of sound policy positions.

- 2 **Operationalization:** after the feminist global WASH strategy has been developed, with a strong focus on integrated assistance across sectors, WaterAid recommends the policy's timely operationalization. This includes a) developing **frameworks** to show the theory of change, casual pathways and outcomes targeted by the strategy, b) **guidance notes** for implementing parties, to give clear direction on how to translate the policy's aims into practical actions, and c) **key indicators** to track progress against the policy's targeted results. The Multisector WASH Advisory Group could continue to play a key supporting role in this process, to ensure approaches proposed are aligned with and reflective of global standards and best practices.
- 3 **Targeted programmatic and advocacy commitments:** To finance the policy and enact it across the globe, particularly in least-developed countries, WaterAid recommends the creation of a dedicated funding envelope for WASH programming and advocacy objectives. This envelope should be integrated into key sectors that most strongly connect to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, nutrition, education and economic empowerment, as outlined in the FIAP. WaterAid recommends that countries in sub-Saharan Africa be prioritized for targeting this support, in accordance with the government's aim of ensuring "no less than 50 percent of its bilateral international development assistance is directed to sub-Saharan African countries by 2021-2212". This is also a region recognized by the World Bank as requiring significantly increased spending for meeting universal coverage of basic services for water, sanitation and hygiene.¹²

Recommendation #2: WaterAid recommends that the **government provide \$100 million in funding for the development and implementation of the feminist global WASH strategy and program over the next five years.** This would help Canada meet its ODA target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI), thus enhancing Canada's global competitive standing as a progressive development assistance donor.¹³

4 **Funding Justification**

The business case for a WASH investment of this nature is strongly supported by a wide body of literature, with gender-linked outcomes demonstrated across the themes of health and nutrition, education, economic empowerment and sexual and gender-based violence. These are key aspects of the FIAP and are of high strategic relevance for the Canadian government. It is estimated that for every US\$1 spent on water and sanitation, \$4 is returned in economic benefits, making WASH one of the most cost-effective development investments.¹⁴ Sector-wise, a compelling rationale for funding exists:

1. **Health and nutrition:** The World Health Organization and UNICEF note that investing in WASH in health care facilities is essential for preventing infections, reducing the spread of disease, and enhancing and upholding the dignity of women and vulnerable populations.¹⁵
2. **Education:** the promotion of MHM and effective WASH in schools significantly reduces disease, improves attendance rates and makes meaningful contributions to furthering dignity and gender equality for girls.¹⁶ MHM is also an important entry point for advancing the sexual and reproductive health and rights

¹² WHO. (2018)

¹³ Government of Canada (2017).

¹⁴ WHO. (2018)

¹⁵ As cited in WaterAid Canada (2016).

¹⁶ As cited in WaterAid Canada (2016).

of women and girls.¹⁷

3. **Economic empowerment:** Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) findings from the World Health Organization and UNICEF estimate that 70% of the economic benefits women and girls experience due to improved WASH are related to time saving, which affords them greater opportunities for pursuit of livelihoods efforts and economic activities. As women take on decision-making roles in relation to WASH in their communities, they also gain increased confidence and more respect from other community members, which contributes to changes in attitudes towards women's leadership.¹⁸
4. **Sexual and gender-based violence:** improved WASH facilities and services can reduce the risk of sexual and gender-based violence and harassment experienced by women.¹⁹ The engagement of women and girls in the planning and delivery of WASH services ensures they are gender responsive, safe, secure and better meet their specific requirements. The need for strong WASH interventions in humanitarian or fragile contexts is particularly important, given the added vulnerability often present in such settings.

¹⁷ WaterAid & Marie Stopes International Australia (n.d.): Integrating Menstrual Health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, and Sexual and Reproductive Health in Asia and the Pacific Region.

¹⁸ WaterAid Canada (2018).

¹⁹ Ibid.