



# Global Affairs Canada: Feminist Foreign Policy Dialogue

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Thank you for your contribution to the feminist foreign policy dialogue. We invite you to provide your contribution below, within the five (5)-page limit

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Please indicate if you are submitting this contribution:

- ☐ As an individual
- ☒ On behalf of an organization
- ☐ On behalf of a group of organizations or individuals

Please indicate the areas covered in your contribution:

- ☒ Overarching considerations
- ☐ Enhanced diplomatic engagement
- ☐ Women, Peace and Security (WPS)
- ☒ Responding to evolving vulnerabilities
- ☐ Inclusive digital transformation
- ☒ Other: please specify Women's rights and access to farmland

## Written Contribution:

\* Please respect the **five (5)-page limit**

### **About CELADA:**

The majority of African populations are heavily reliant on agriculture, often in a smallholder subsistence farming capacity where land and water access, management and ownership directly impact their livelihoods. The Coalition for Equitable Land Acquisitions and Development in Africa (CELADA) is comprised of a group of Canadian activists, academics and development professionals, many from various African diasporas, who are deeply concerned with the state of land rights in Africa. CELADA seeks to raise awareness of the issues surrounding land and resource transactions; promote and conduct research, dialogue and debate among local, regional and international decision-makers; and lobby relevant institutions and governments for improvements.

Increasing globalization, industrialization and concentration within our agri-food systems have led us to a precipice. Fewer corporate middlemen are moving agricultural inputs and outputs across an increasingly intricate, globalized and fossil fuel dependent web, creating systemic power imbalances and vulnerabilities. Farmers are unable to make a living and feed their families. Some 820 million people worldwide do not have enough to eat while a quarter of the world's population is experiencing moderate to severe levels of food insecurity. Women farmers play a crucial role in feeding households in developing countries. **Empowering women farmers by strengthening their access and rights to resources, particularly land, should therefore be fundamental to Canada's feminist international assistance policy. And systemic shifts are required in how food is produced, distributed and consumed.**

Earlier this year, Canadian Minister for International Development, Karina Gould, [released a joint statement](#) with her Brazilian, Egyptian and Italian counterparts which underscored the critical need for "open, transparent, and predictable trade [...] to keep food supply chains going and prices stable during and after the COVID-19 pandemic crisis", recognizing that "many countries rely heavily on regular imports of basic staples and food distribution channels."

While this is an important response to the immediate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerating climate change have highlighted the need for a longer-term shift. As the [UN Deputy Secretary-General has since stated](#), the pandemic provides an opportunity to "rebalance and transform our food systems, making them more inclusive, sustainable and resilient."

According to Tim Wise, author of ["Eating Tomorrow: agribusiness, family farmers and the battle for the future of food"](#), increasingly powerful agribusiness multinationals (such as Bayer, DowDuPont and Cargill) are enmeshed in agricultural policy-making all over the world, particularly in vulnerable countries. Inequitable trade policies and narrow donor support from developed countries often reinforce this system.

However, there is growing evidence for more holistic alternatives that seek to reduce our fossil fuel dependence, promote shorter food supply chains, and integrate time-tested farmers' knowledge and selection practices into the production system. They would strengthen local food webs, reduce food loss and waste, and transition towards sustainable and more regenerative approaches to agriculture. This "agroecological" approach views the strengthening of family farms – currently the source of 80% of the world's food – as critical.

Equitable access to land is a key pillar to this approach. Security and ownership of land is critical to social and economic empowerment, particularly for women and other marginalized groups that are facing discrimination based on their race, caste, age, sexual orientation and capacities. According to a survey of 34 developing countries by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), women own only 10% of land. Female farmers also lack equal rights to own land in more than 90 countries. Women are additionally disadvantaged with respect to access to basic inputs for their farming operations. By supporting family farmers' access to land and basic production inputs, particularly women who produce 60-80 percent of food in most developing countries, the underlying power imbalances that stunt agricultural production and food security can be addressed.

Despite the self-proclaimed feminist orientation of Canada's foreign policy, whether the current Canadian government is open to transforming food systems of developing countries remains unclear. On one hand, Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) commits to support rural women in climate-smart agriculture, yet it stops short of the systems-level changes required. To support transformations that will benefit women and other marginalized people, it means that the FIAP must address diverse gendered power relationships, cultural and societal norms, political processes and institutionalized inequalities. This is necessary to better understand the structures that prevent or limit women and other marginalized people from fully exercising their rights to access to land.

Canada's "inclusive" trade policy, moreover, makes no mention of the impact on women farmers. While Canada [has recognized](#) the need to ensure the benefits of trade are distributed fairly to counteract protectionist thinking and rhetoric, Canada has played a role in the unfair governance of global agri-food systems for decades. Canada's trade policy is designed, first and foremost, to benefit Canadian producers. Whereas this is necessary for Canadians, it may run contrary to Canada's objective of "inclusive" trade. Canada should make its trade policies consistent with the objectives of the FIAP by benefiting women farmers and at a minimum not harming them.

The need for agri-food system transformation has become widely recognized by the scientific community, and promoted by the FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which [launched the UN Decade of Family Farming in 2019](#). Speaking recently, FAO's Director-General urged G20 agricultural ministers to seize the opportunity that the pandemic opens up to accelerate systemic change.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 renders key pillars of our global food systems, particularly women's land rights, more vulnerable. Given domestic abuse typically increases during times of crisis, women are often forced from their land as a result. This has been compounded as men return from urban areas due to lack of work, or in cases of spousal COVID-19 deaths where customary inheritance laws do not favour surviving female family members. Reports of armed groups taking advantage of isolation measures to exert greater control over territory is also of grave concern as women often lack legal backing and economic resources to fight for their land.

Given its intent on strengthening food security within the global recovery, Canada needs to address the growing fissures in our current global food system, and its drastic impacts on inequality and our environment. **A truly feminist foreign assistance policy would support a transition from globalized, industrial agriculture to locally resilient, gender-equitable and sustainable agroecology.**