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Global Affairs Canada: Feminist Foreign Policy Dialogue

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
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Written Contribution:

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

What should be the high-level/overarching principles and guidelines that the Feminist Foreign Policy should adopt to implement its vision?

Feminism is defined as “the struggle to end sexist oppression” (hooks, 2004). It does not seek to put women over men, or to benefit specific groups of women. Rather, feminism as a movement aims to transform lives in a positive way, recognizing the interconnectedness of identities and contexts as noted above and the ways these identities and contexts contribute to power. In this regard, feminism is about social transformation, of ensuring both equity and justice. Defining feminism as a movement as bell hooks notes, creates the space for analysis of underlying biases and assumptions that hinder the full participation and inclusion of community members, to better understand forms, spaces and levels of power, and to advocate for inequalities to be addressed.

Coady Institute has been prioritizing feminist transformative leadership education, in order to support change agents whose agendas prioritize achieve equity and inclusion. Tracy Barton in Batliwala (2010) emphasizes the need to define feminist transformative leadership as follows:

“Leadership from a feminist standpoint is informed by the power of the feminist lens, which enables the feminist leader to identify injustices and oppressions and inspires her to facilitate the development more inclusive, holistic...communities. Feminist leaders are motivated by fairness, justice and equity, and strive to keep issues of gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, and ability at the forefront... the elements particular to a feminist leadership construction include a focus on both individual or micro-level and societal or macro-level social justice concerns, a desire to bring marginalized voices to the center of the conversation and a willingness to take risks as one strives to enact a transformative agenda.

At Coady Institute, we feel that learning and unlearning is fundamental to individual, community and societal change – both within and outside of our own institutions. Our feminist foreign policy needs to encourage gender quality and empowerment interventions that centralize the design and facilitation of learning informed by feminist pedagogy.

Feminist pedagogy is sensitive to different ways of knowing and learning and recognizes that everyone comes into a learning environment with existing knowledges, skills, and practices.

Feminist pedagogy draws critical attention to contexts, individual and socio-cultural, political, and economic norms and values, systems and practices, powers, inclusion, and marginalization – through the lens of gender.

Creating and holding space for multiple and diverse, including marginalized, voices, in particular women’s voices, reflects the feminist practice of inclusion and challenging dominant narratives. It is also critically and collectively exploring and imagining what is possible and how to create this.

Education on feminist approaches will allow women and men to recognize and act upon entrenched unequal gender, economic, and societal inequities and dominant traditional structures, and make their voices strong enough to enact change. Providing feminist education in particular to women in civil society will help them develop and apply culture specific feminist approaches to all aspects of international development and lead to social and cultural transformation.

Whether through specific education programs or through our negotiations, programs and projects, we recommend the following principles be upheld to all aspects of our engagement with other states, particular in our international development assistance efforts:

- Life-long learning: Promoting life-long co-learning and self-sufficiency benefits both individuals, communities and countries as a whole. Learners must have authority over their learning journeys. Design, facilitation, and content of learning informed by feminist pedagogy opens spaces for marginalized knowledge and voices, critical analysis, and reflection, and builds relationships to sustain ongoing learning and development of practices and knowledge.
- Person-centered: People are at the centre of the conversation, decision, and action. Working with people locally in communities to understand their context, concerns, opportunities, and ideas, enables them to engage in successful, sustainable and meaningful change. Putting gender equality at the centre of this work means seeking out and listening to marginalized voices, understanding their desires and concerns, and engaging in a process to best support people.
- Co-creation and collaboration: Intentionally working alongside those directly impacted by a decision, challenge, or issue allows people who care enough to act to move the initiative/action forward. This ownership over co-creation of solutions can create more holistic, sustainable outcomes.
- Diversity: Diversity of people and ideas allows for more sustainable, innovative, and holistic approaches to be developed and implemented, as we strive towards a world where all people, regardless of their background of identities, can fully benefit from equal participation in economic, political, social, and cultural life.
- Asset-based: All people have knowledge, wisdom, skills, experiences, and insights to offer in how to build a safer and more prosperous world, yet how often are we asked to describe the strengths that exist in every community? When we use terms such as “beneficiaries,” and “target groups,” what does that say about our own approaches and powers? When we largely, or only, characterize people by their experiences of victimization, poverty, and marginalization, how are we reinforcing these narratives and unintentionally affecting individual and collective “agency”?
- We must start with strengths – no matter how few – individual capacities, local associations, cultures, histories, and physical, natural, and financial resources that exist in every community, even those characterized as “poor.” There are few “boxes” for strengths or existing efforts in our funding proposals. Are they assumed and therefore overlooked, and by association, undervalued? This needs to change.

- Check our words, especially what is commonly used - We question the usefulness of using being at “the table” as a metaphor for inclusion or diversity. The singularity of this term perpetuates patriarchal thinking and systems by wrongly assuming that the “table” is where decisions might informally made. Having women and other under-represented groups at the decision-making table—the ‘add women and stir’—approach is not enough if their opinions are not heard, valued, and incorporated into decisions.
- Collective Impact: Think globally, act locally. The actions of many can lead to greater impact globally. As we strive to promote rights-based, open, and inclusive societies, supporting lasting peace and security, foster prosperity, and achieve the SDGs by 2030, it will be through distributed leadership and community-based actions that can collectively bring about the change we wish to see. This is grounded in the assumption that there is a central goal that all partners are striving towards.
- Lead by Example: Our words and support globally are meaningless if we fail to adopt feminist principles at home in our country. In particular, our work at home to address the multiple systems of oppression facing Indigenous peoples by wholeheartedly adopting the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the recommendation of the MMIWG Inquiry as well as the UNDRIP principles. Furthermore, we recommend engaging Indigenous leaders from across Canada in our work overseas in order to recognize and prioritize Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing and doing.
- Care: Care-work, paid and unpaid, is foundational to, and sustains individuals, families, communities and nations. Recognizing the importance of care-work means to understand its contextual reality and value in ways meaningful to the people, as well as to support the value-add of care-work for development. Moreover, a feminist approach to international assistance needs to recognize and build awareness around what it means to mobilize collective care in order to ensure health and sustainability of movement builders.

References

- Batliwala, S. (2010). *Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud*. New York: CREA.
- hooks, b. (2004). *The will to change: men, masculinity, and love*. New York: Atria Books.