



LEADERSHIP ON AND INVESTMENTS IN A FEMINIST FUTURE

Oxfam Canada's Recommendations for Budget 2019

Pollisree officials pose as 'empowered women' in Rangpur, Bangladesh, as part of Oxfam Canada's Creating Spaces project—Photo: Abir Abdullah/Oxfam

Budget 2018 took important steps in advancing Canada's gender budgeting approach and made considerable investments to promote gender equality and women's rights, at home and abroad. This demonstrated Canada's feminist leadership domestically and globally, standing strong in its commitment to gender equality at a time when inequality is reaching obscene levels and countries across the world succumb to sexist, populist and racist politics. Budget 2019 is an opportunity to consolidate Canada's leadership on gender equality, including by responding decisively to the urgency felt by women to stand ground amidst a rising backlash against women's rights. This brief outlines key budget commitments the federal government needs to make to advance women's economic equality in Canada and to move the feminist agenda forward globally. Women – in Canada and around the world – are counting on it.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Invest in women's economic equality in Canada

INVEST \$1 billion in 2019-2020 in childcare and move towards universal child care by setting a ten 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.

RAISE the minimum wage for workers under federal jurisdiction to a living wage, supporting women in low paid jobs to stay out of poverty. Use federal government procurement to support women-led businesses and favour companies that pay living wages and protect labour rights, particularly collective bargaining. Expand women's access to employment insurance by modernizing the employment insurance system to tie access, level and duration to need rather than earnings.

ALLOCATE \$500 million to launch a National Action Plan to Prevent and Address Gender-based Violence, developed in collaboration with the federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments to address the root causes of gender discrimination and ensure women everywhere in Canada have access to the same services.

RATIFY ILO Convention 189 on the protection of domestic workers and provide open work permits for caregivers coming to Canada.

SUPPORT a new ILO Convention and Recommendation on Ending Sexual Harassment in the World of Work and once passed, swiftly ratify the convention.

INVEST \$100 million a year in Status of Women Canada to support feminist and women's rights organizations and movements to address the systemic barriers to women's economic equality and gender equality writ large.

Demonstrate global leadership on women's rights

DEVELOP a robust ten year plan to achieve the UN aid target of 0.7% of gross national income. Ensure private finance for development is additional to official development aid, not a substitute, and closely aligned with the goals of the Feminist International Assistance Policy.

INVEST \$700 million a year for ten years starting in 2020 in sexual and reproductive health and rights, with a focus on the neglected areas of SRHR including comprehensive sexual education, abortion, adolescent SRHR and comprehensive contraception care, as well as funding for women's rights organizations to engage in SRHR advocacy.

ESTABLISH a dedicated pool of funding for gender in emergencies programming comprising at least 15% of humanitarian assistance and ensure Canada implements its Grand Bargain commitment of allocating 25% of humanitarian assistance to local humanitarian actors, of which 25% should go to local women's rights organizations.

INCREASE international assistance investments in women's rights organizations and feminist movements to \$2.2 billion over ten years, building on the Women's Voice and Leadership initiative.

LAUNCH a feminist foreign policy that brings coherence to Canada's aid, trade, defense and diplomacy policies and appoint a high-level champion to oversee implementation and engagement with other countries to build a Group of Friends.

Strengthen Canada's gender budgeting approach

ENSURE that at least 15% of the witnesses in the Standing Committee on Finance pre-budget consultation hearings are women's rights organizations or focus their testimony on recommendations to advance gender equality.

The Committee should also provide guidance to encourage all budget submissions to address the implications of their recommendations for gender equality.

APPLY an intersectional lens to all gender-based analysis and ensure women who are most systematically marginalized—Indigenous women, women of colour, women with disabilities, LBTQI—are supported and resourced to participate in budget processes so that policies are responsive to their realities and address their unique challenges.

COLLECT more and better disaggregated data, going beyond age and sex and applying an intersectional lens, in order to better track and understand progress made by policies and investments dedicated to promoting gender equality, including amongst marginalized groups of women.

ESTABLISH an advisory council on gender budgeting that includes diverse representation from women's rights organizations. The advisory council should assist the government in increasing its capacity to do gender budgeting, making the process more inclusive and setting clear gender equality priorities and targets for all upcoming federal budgets.

INTRODUCTION

Earlier this year, Oxfam published its annual flagship inequality report. The findings are clear: inequality is out of control. Of all the wealth created worldwide last year, 82% went to the richest 1% of the global population. Over the same period, the 3.7 billion people who make up the poorest 50% of the world's population saw no increase in their wealth.¹ This global trend also rings true in Canada. Last year, the richest 1% in Canada saw their wealth increase by 32% and Canadian billionaire fortunes grew by a staggering \$28 billion—enough to pay for universal child care and lift 4.9 million Canadians out of poverty.²

The impacts of the inequality crisis are visible across the world. Millions of people are on the move escaping poverty and violence just to find themselves in new cycles of exploitation and insecurity. Populist governments are on the rise, spreading xenophobia, threatening the rules-based international order and rolling back hard won women's rights. People everywhere fed up with corrupt governments conniving with corporate interests at the expense of hard working citizens.

Inequality is bad for everyone, but it is especially bad for women. Much of the wealth of the rich is built on the backs of poor women, who provide free and cheap labour. Around the world, as in Canada, women are vastly overrepresented in the poorest-paid and least secure jobs, unable to escape poverty. According to the World Economic Forum, the gender gap globally continues to widen and they estimate that at current rates of progress, it will take 217 years before gender parity is achieved.³ Canada is no exception, ranking 29th globally in this ranking.

Budget 2018 saw some major investments in and measures to tackle inequality and advance gender equality. It included commitments to the women's movement, pro-active pay equity legislation, second caregiver leave, gender budgeting legislation and an increase to foreign aid. These investments were welcome and confirm the government's commitment to levelling the playing field for women in Canada and abroad. However, despite these considerable advancements, there are several areas where the government needs to step up and show leadership in order to hold ground and push for further progress on gender equality and women's rights (see Oxfam Canada's 2018 [Feminist Scorecard](#)).

Budget 2019 is this government's chance to address some key shortfalls and to consolidate its feminist leadership at a time when women's rights gains are under significant threat. With only one year left in its current mandate, the federal government must not retreat, but instead take bold actions to tackle economic and gender inequality, invest in transformative feminist initiatives and support women's rights and movements. Oxfam Canada is looking to the government to invest in women's economic equality in Canada, demonstrate global leadership on women's rights and strengthen Canada's gender budgeting approach.

INVEST IN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EQUALITY IN CANADA

Women in Canada continue to be economically disadvantaged in comparison to men, despite high levels of education. A study on women's economic security conducted by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women found that "factors contributing to women's economic insecurity are numerous and include systemic and structural barriers in the economy."⁴ The OECD's Economic Survey of Canada revealed that Canada is still lagging behind when it comes to female labour force participation.⁵ The labour force gap between men and women—close to 10 percentage points—has merely budged in the past two decades, despite clear evidence that closing this gap is critical to Canada's economic growth.⁶

Despite solid evidence that investments in child care are essential to increase female labour force participation and level the playing field for women, Canada continues to spend less on care services than any other OECD country—a meagre 0.2% of GDP.⁷ Women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, spending on average 50% more time on unpaid work than men.⁸ A study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that 44% of non-school aged children, roughly 776,000, live in "child care deserts", communities where child care spaces are not available.⁹ Investing in child care is the most effective and transformative investment the federal government can make to close the gender gap in the economy and significantly advance women's economic equality.

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 workers¹⁰ and 60% of minimum wage earners.¹¹ Because of the precariousness of their employment, many women have difficulty accessing employment insurance or receive such low levels of employment insurance that they are forced to move from one low paid job to another. The gender wage gap remains significant, hovering at 32% on average and as high as 45% to 55% for Indigenous women, immigrant women and women with disabilities.¹² The federal government committed to introducing pro-active pay equity legislation in Budget 2018, but women are still waiting to see the legislation. There are additional levers the federal government can use to boost women's economic security and ensure women have decent work, including raising the minimum wage and promoting gender-responsive procurement policies.

Gender-based violence is another key barrier to women's economic equality. Women cannot perform well at work, or even hold down jobs, when their safety and security is significantly undermined. Gender-based violence costs the Canadian economy \$7.4 billion annually.¹³ Tackling domestic violence and sexual harassment at work must be further prioritized and can be best tackled through a national action plan that ensures women everywhere have access to resources, services, justice and support. Particular attention must be paid to vulnerable workers, such as domestic workers.

In order to ensure continued progress towards women's economic equality, the federal government should:

INVEST \$1 billion in 2019-2020 in childcare and move towards universal child care by setting a ten 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.

RAISE the minimum wage for workers under federal jurisdiction to a living wage, supporting women in low paid jobs to stay out of poverty. Use federal government procurement to support women-led businesses and favour companies that pay living wages and protect labour rights, particularly collective bargaining. **Expand women's access to employment insurance** by modernizing the employment insurance system to tie access, level and duration to need rather than earnings.

ALLOCATE \$500 million to launch a National Action Plan to Prevent and Address Gender-based Violence, developed in collaboration with the federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments to address the root causes of gender discrimination and ensure women everywhere in Canada have access to the same services.

RATIFY ILO Convention 189 on the protection of domestic workers and provide open work permits for caregivers coming to Canada.

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TASMIA CAME TO CANADA IN APRIL 2017 from Bangladesh under the skilled visa program. She had been practicing as a medical doctor in Bangladesh for ten years and hoped to continue her career in Canada. But instead she finds herself going from one 'survival job' to another to make ends meet as her professional credentials are not recognized in Canada. She found a job in a cosmetics factory but at eight months pregnant she was laid off when she was just five hours short of the 600 hours needed to be eligible for parental leave. Tasmia was devastated.

"I went totally insane. What do I do? I didn't know. At that time I was seven and a half to eight months pregnant ... no other company wanted to give me a job as a new employee."

Tasmia is still aiming to work as a doctor, pursuing different opportunities to get licensed in Canada and completing the necessary education and residency. But she knows it will take years until she gets there. In the meantime, she is taking care of her newborn and seven year-old children, trying to juggle care work with employment.

"Childcare is also a difficult thing for us. We have no other relatives and I'm alone at home, doing all the house work and looking after my two children. If I do not get the childcare subsidy then I cannot afford the childcare costs here, -so that is another big barrier for me."

In order to receive child care subsidies, Tasmia must be employed full-time or be a full-time student. But to be able to study for the licensing exam, she needs time. This means she will continue to move from one 'survival job' to another.

DEMONSTRATE GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Around the world, hard won gains to advance gender equality are under threat as conservative and fundamentalist forces take power and systematically roll back women's rights. In this context, it is critical that Canada continues to champion gender equality and supports women's rights organizations. Women's rights organizations and movements play a key role in holding ground and pushing forward the feminist agenda. The federal government must ensure they have resources and support at this time of backlash.

While Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy is poised to make a difference for women and girls around the world, progress is hampered by Canada's comparatively low level of investment in foreign aid, where Canada remains a long way from meeting the UN aid target of 0.7% of gross national income (GNI). Last year's budget announcement of an additional \$2 billion over five years was welcome, but this amount will do little to budge Canada's current aid/GNI ratio of 0.26%, or improve its ranking amongst OECD peers, where Canada currently ranks 16th.¹⁴ A substantive level of investment is needed to ensure Canada pays its share to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and lays the ground for sustained progress on women's rights. Leadership requires resources.

One key area of women's rights has been particularly targeted by conservative governments—sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Global Gag Rule, issued by US President Trump, has had dire consequences for women worldwide. Any organization providing abortion referrals and counselling, advocating for the decriminalization of abortion or providing abortion services have seen their funding cut, and it is estimated that this rule resulted in a funding shortage of \$2.2 billion in global health funding.¹⁵ Canada has stepped in to provide some of the critical funds, but more is needed to ensure women everywhere have access to the comprehensive range of SRHR services.

With an unprecedented number of people displaced due to poverty, conflict, violence and climate change, it is crucial humanitarian assistance is gender transformative and addresses the needs of women. Women face unique challenges and insecurity in times of crisis, but at the same time take charge of their families' lives, often breaking down entrenched gender norms. Canada has an opportunity to play a leadership role in humanitarian response by ensuring dedicated funding for gender in emergencies programming and committing to getting humanitarian aid funding into the hands of local women's rights organizations.

In order to advance its feminist agenda globally, Canada should:

DEVELOP a robust ten year plan to achieve the UN aid target of 0.7% of gross national income. Ensure private finance for development is additional to official development aid, not a substitute, and closely aligned with the goals of the Feminist International Assistance Policy.

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LAUNCH a feminist foreign policy that brings coherence to Canada's aid, trade, defense and diplomacy policies and appoint a high-level champion to oversee implementation and engagement with other countries to build a Group of Friends.

STRENGTHEN CANADA'S GENDER BUDGETING APPROACH

The federal government has taken great leadership in advancing gender budgeting and enshrining it in legislation. Now is the time to strengthen the application of gender budgeting across government, by applying a feminist approach and ensuring women's voices and experiences are at the heart of budget and decision-making processes.

Central to the implementation of a feminist approach are intersectionality, agency and process. Intersectionality is a framework that recognizes the multiple aspects of identity that play out in everyone's life and experiences, such as class, race, ethnicity, ability and sexuality and that compound and exacerbate discrimination and marginalization. Agency refers to an individual or group's ability to make choices, and to transform those choices into desired outcomes. A feminist lens is not just about results, but also process. Fundamental to feminist process are collaboration, inclusivity and responsiveness.

In order to strengthen Canada's gender budgeting approach, the federal government should:

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LAE LAE LEFT MYANMAR WHEN SHE WAS 21 YEARS OLD HOPING FOR A BETTER FUTURE. She paid a broker 5000 baht (\$184) to smuggle her into Thailand. After six years on a rubber plantation, she found work in the hotel sector, where she works as a hotel housekeeper. Despite her long hours, it is impossible for her to save money. As a housekeeper at a small hotel where all the housekeepers are Burmese migrant women, she earns 10,000 baht (\$367) a month, plus tips. Because the work is seasonal, she only has that job for six months of the year and works in a small noodle shop the rest of the year. Strapped for money and time, she had no choice but to send her two children, 6 and 11 years old, back to Myanmar to stay with relatives. She hasn't seen her children in four years.

COLLECT more and better disaggregated data, going beyond age and sex and applying an intersectional lens, in order to better track and understand progress made by policies and investments dedicated to promoting gender equality, including amongst marginalized groups of women.

ESTABLISH an advisory council on gender budgeting that includes diverse representation from women's rights organizations. The advisory council should assist the government in increasing its capacity to do gender budgeting, making the process more inclusive and setting clear gender equality priorities and targets for all upcoming federal budgets.

NOTES

1. D.A.V. Pimentel, I. Macías Aymar, and M. Lawson. (2018). *Reward Work, Not Wealth*. Oxford: Oxfam International.
2. Calculation is based on data provided by the Credit Suisse Global Wealth Data Book and compared against the annual ranking of billionaire wealth created by Forbes. According to the OECD, it takes roughly 1% of GDP to pay for universal child care, so \$15,6 billion. According to a study by the National Council of Welfare, it would cost approximately \$12.3 billion to lift the 4.9 million Canadians living below the poverty line to go above it.
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4. The Standing Committee on the Status of Women. (June 2018). *Women's Economic Security: Securing the Future of Canada's Economy*. Ottawa: House of Commons.
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