



**Marie-Claude Bibeau** is Canada's Minister of International Development. In June 2017, Bibeau launched the country's new Feminist International Assistance Policy.

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## “ EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS IS THE BEST WAY TO ERADICATE POVERTY AND INEQUALITY ”

In June 2017, Canada launched its Feminist International Assistance Policy. Canada's Minister of International Development, Marie-Claude Bibeau, explains what her country seeks to achieve with it and why we cannot afford to leave the potential of women untapped.

Lucia John, a smallholder farmer in the Wau region of South Sudan, has more status and say in her family and community as a result of having participated in the Fortifying Equality and Economic Diversity project. Lucia attended a Farmer Field School where she learned new agricultural techniques, developed new skills, and gained invaluable knowledge. She quadrupled the size of the land she ploughs with the help of an ox that she received through the project. All of this helped Lucia to increase production of her crops and her income. She can now feed her family three meals a day instead of only two. Her success means that her husband now treats her with more respect and shares in the household tasks like cleaning and collecting water.

Fatoumata Mariko's life also changed when she joined the Sabati co-operative of more than 1,800 women producers in Zantiebougou, Mali, through the Support for the Marketing of Agricultural Products project. By working in a co-operative, the women in Sabati are able to get better prices for their products and access credit to invest in growing their businesses. The Sabati women now all have stable incomes and are able to send their children – girls and boys – to school. They have even set up a canteen so that children from neighbouring communities can eat before school. The women's newfound economic power gives them more influence. Fatoumata now has a say in family decisions and is no longer too shy to participate actively in community meetings.

### WHY A FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE POLICY?

Lucia and Fatoumata's stories are what Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy is all about: empowering women to make better lives for themselves, their families and their communities. Our policy is based on evidence that the most effective way to eradicate poverty and inequality for everyone is to empower women and girls.

We built the policy after consulting for a full year – with more than 15,000 people, including many youth, in over 65 countries. Our partners told us that protecting human dignity, promoting gender equality, and building local capacity must be at the heart of Canada's development and humanitarian actions. We listened – centring our policy on Canada's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the understanding that SDG 5 – to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – is an enabler and accelerator to achieving the Goals as a whole. Our policy takes a human rights-based approach – one that considers all forms of discrimination based on sex, race, ethnicity, place of birth, colour, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability or migrant or refugee status.

### MAIN FEATURES

By 2022, our goal is for 15 per cent of our bilateral international development assistance funding to support gender-transformative projects that directly target women's empowerment and gender equality and for 80 per cent to integrate gender equality. We want to see more women included in decision-making, so that all of the initiatives we support take into account the specific needs and priorities of women and girls. To make sure that we effectively track and reach these targets, gender equality specialists review each initiative.

The complexity of empowerment is reflected in the six action areas of our feminist policy. One targets gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls specifically, and the other five focus on human dignity, growth that works for everyone, environment and climate action, inclusive governance, and peace and security, while mainstreaming and targeting gender. Sustainable agricultural development underpins two of these action areas in particular: growth that works for everyone and environment and climate action.

Investing in women and girls can change the world – and there is no better example of this than women farmers.

Women make up 43 per cent of the global agricultural labour force, and 79 per cent of women who work in the least developed countries report agriculture as their primary source of income. In Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa, women who are employed are more likely to have jobs in agriculture than in any other sector. Despite this, women make up less than 20 per cent of land owners. Discriminatory laws and cultural norms prevent women from securing property rights, controlling or owning agricultural resources such as livestock and seeds, accessing financial services and training to help them start or build their businesses, or engaging in markets. These kinds of gender inequality mean that women farmers produce on average 20 to 30 per cent less than their male counterparts do. Estimates indicate that closing this gender gap could increase global agricultural production by up to four per cent and potentially reduce world hunger by as much as 17 per cent.

### EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS THROUGH AGRICULTURE

Tapping into the potential of women and girls is not an opportunity we can afford to ignore. As powerful agents of change within the agricultural sector, women can actively contribute to improving food security, advancing economic development, and mitigating the effects of climate change. Advancing the rights of women and girls is critical to sustainable agriculture. Empowering women in agriculture is about ensuring that they have decision-making power – over production and productive resources and within households and communities. It also means improving women's property rights, access to land and markets, and leadership opportunities.

Through its feminist policy, Canada will support work on all of these fronts. We will provide assistance to local women-led agricultural businesses and help them to scale up, and we will promote women's full and equal participation in rural economies. We will strengthen women's skills and knowledge, and empower them to manage natural resources in a sustainable manner. We will support governments to develop and put in place gender-sensitive legislation and regulations that enforce women's rights to land and resources, and provide women with the right to inherit and possess land and other property.

### HOW HAS TAKING A FEMINIST APPROACH CHANGED THINGS?

This year, the Government of Canada provided the means to deliver on our feminist policy by injecting an additional two billion Canadian dollars into our official development assistance and committing 1.5 billion dollars towards innovative financing for development. This funding will support initiatives that promote the rights, health, education and empowerment of women and girls.

During its 2018 G7 Presidency, Canada made gender equality the overarching theme of the G7. Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau set a new precedent for the G7 by creating the Gender Equality Advisory Council to ensure that gender equality continues to guide the work of the G7 Leaders' Summit. This not only helped to focus G7 discussions on women and girls, it also translated Canada's feminist talk into concrete global leadership and action.

The development finance institutions of the G7, including Canada, also committed to mobilising three billion US dollars by 2020. Through the 2X Challenge Financing for Women initiative, the funding will advance women as entrepreneurs, business leaders, employees and consumers of products and services.

Women's organisations are instrumental to advancing the rights of women and girls, including in agriculture. That is why Canada is investing in building capacity to make lasting change for the world's women and girls by supporting the needs of local women's rights organisations in developing countries through initiatives like Women's Voice and Leadership. The creation of a unique partnership of philanthropists, investors, private sector, and civil society – from Canada and internationally – is expected to catalyse new investments that could advance women's rights in developing countries.

Educated and empowered women invest more in their families' health and well-being: making sure that girls and boys attend school, have nutritious food to eat, and are able to access quality health care when needed. They also contribute fully to their communities.

Lucia, Fatoumata and the many remarkable women and girls I have met around the world are proof of that. They are full of possibility and potential. They can and will change the world for the better. They are the reason why Canada is investing in gender equality and in the empowerment of women and girls through our Feminist International Assistance Policy.



Thanks to her taking part in the rural development programme, farmer Lucia John's living conditions haven't only changed in economic terms, she now also enjoys more status and say in her family and community.

Photo: Oxfam