

Nobel Women's Initiative and
The MATCH International Women's Fund



Advocating for peace, justice & equality

POLICY BRIEF

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Feminist Approach Requires Feminist Implementation

The Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) offers great potential. Yet we are also very aware that there are many challenges as Global Affairs Canada (GAC) forges new ground. We are keen to work with GAC in a constructive dialogue as we collectively move forward to support transformative change on the ground in the global South.

Our focus for this brief is the Women's Voice and Leadership Initiative (WVL), a landmark commitment in the new policy. Funding for women's rights organizations and movements is a cornerstone of a feminist approach to international assistance. This brief builds on the experience of the women's funding movement around the world.

We are encouraged that plans to establish the WVL are moving ahead. However getting the fundamentals right is absolutely crucial to ensure that the initiative delivers on its potential.

We note current challenges and issues:

» The vision for WVL is that it will contribute to changing power dynamics, and put more power directly in the hands of local women's leadership and women's movements. Shifting power involves trusting women's organizations with the lead

*Women must be partners,
not just beneficiaries.*

— Leymah Gbowee, Nobel Peace Laureate, Liberia

and control on how money is managed. This should involve making women's funds and local women's organizations the partner of choice. When necessary, it could also encompass new consortia and new partnerships so that women's organizations build the administrative capacity to successfully manage larger financial flows.

» If country-based initiatives repeat old ways of working (with international NGOs holding the purse strings and making decisions), then there will be few—if any—contributions to changing relationships. Most international non-governmental organizations are not embedded in the women's movement in the relevant countries, and in such a context, flow-through money from INGOs to local organizations can actually undermine local partners rather than strengthen them. Therefore, it is crucial that country programs look for innovative ways to put national women's organizations (including women's funds) in the lead in planning, decision-making and management of funds.

- » A major challenge is to incubate new ways of working within existing structures. Current contracting and administrative practices inhibit building programmes consistent with the intention of the FIAP to provide long-term, predictable, flexible funding to a range of women's organizations and movements. A greater commitment to change within GAC is required. More creativity needs to be applied in order to revise internal mechanisms so that they more aptly support feminist programs.
- » Building a creative and innovative WVL requires new capacities on the part of GAC staff—both at headquarters and in embassies. Consultation skills, political analysis, policy dialogue, knowledge of feminist movements and issues, creativity, and tolerance for risk are among the skills and knowledge needed to successfully implement a visionary WVL initiative. It is critically important to draw upon civil society and other allies to help build (and rebuild) that internal capacity and, in particular, understand the local women's movements and build new relationships with leaders in those movements.
- » Decentralizing the WVL initiatives to the country level will ideally allow for context-appropriate programming. Yet it is also important that this program not be limited to 30 or so unconnected, differing country contexts. There is a need to invest in learning and monitoring/evaluation to build a cohesive narrative up from individual organizational experiences and maximize the impact of investments. Networking and collective learning are key elements in feminist process that ideally the program will adopt as well.
- » There are many questions from Canadian NGOs and women's organizations around the world on the structure, timelines, mechanisms and expected outcomes of the WVL. The announcement in the

Women's organizations on the ground KNOW what is needed. They are experts at peace. Innovation is talking to these women.

— Yanar Mohamed, Iraqi women's rights activist

FIAP was greeted with much enthusiasm. However GAC has provided little public information on how the WVL is being implemented. Greater transparency is key to making this initiative more inclusive and successful, and ultimately more accountable to the vision laid out in the FIAP.

Our **RECOMMENDATIONS** at this stage include:

1. Give **priority to women-led organizations** based in the specific country or region as **implementing organizations** for WVL programs. Requirements for demonstrated managerial performance must be balanced with new partnerships and ways of working, if WVL is to achieve its feminist aspirations. Changing power imbalances must be at the core of WVL.
2. Develop **clear written** guidance to country programs that outline **minimum standards** for WVL structure and process. This should include:
 - » Clear direction that the preferred implementing agency should be a women-led, women's rights organization. If a locally based women-led organization/women's fund is not chosen, the country program must be able to explain why this was not done. Furthermore, if the primary implementing organization is not a locally based women-led organization, options for consortia should be explored.

- » Where national women's funds exist, strong consideration should be given to their value as implementing agencies for the WVL program. Where there isn't a women's fund at the national level, country programs should also explore partnerships with regional women's funds who are already supporting women's rights organizations at the country level and have proven movement building strategies in many of the countries, even if their office is not physically based there.
- » Results frameworks should emphasize movement building & strengthening. This includes shifting power and influence (including who makes funding decisions and who holds the purse-strings).
- » The importance of supporting the agendas and priorities of women's rights organizations. This has several dimensions: 1) the flexibility to support these organizations in their own agendas; 2) clear understanding that although the involvement of men and boys is essential to change, this type of programming is not the priority for the WVL. WVL initiatives may fund women's organizations working with men and boys, but funding recipients must be women-led organizations.
- » Best practice in terms of working within existing operational constraints to best deliver on the feminist potential of the WVL.
- » Guidance on the political nature of this program and the importance of discussions and coherence across the diplomatic and trade streams in the Department (not just the development side).

Getting resources directly to women's organizations on the ground is what women's funds are designed to do, and they do it well.

— Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro, Global Fund for Women & Theo Sowa, African Women's Development Fund; *Globe & Mail*, August 2017

3. Develop a **communications strategy** for WVL. It is critically important to increase transparency through the sharing of information on the WVL process with Canadian civil society organizations and international women's organizations. We acknowledge that negotiations with national governments may be delicate in some situations, however, it is important to publicly clarify GAC's vision, timelines and process. Outreach to the global women's movement who enthusiastically welcomed this announcement in the FIAP is particularly important.
4. Develop **new ways of linking and learning** across WVL initiatives in specific country programs. Sharing lessons will be vital to the overall success of the initiative. This could involve developing a complementary initiative to document good practice and promote exchanges among successful initiatives.
5. Establish and staff a high-ranking **gender equality advisor** in the new International Assistance Operations Bureau with the responsibility to advise and support country programs on WVL. Design and implement a **capacity building strategy** focused on supporting WVL design and implementation, as well as skills to consult with local women's organizations (another key FIAP commitment).



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