



BUILDING AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR WOMEN

Oxfam Canada's Recommendations for Federal Budget 2018

Anne Toraltes Leite / OXFAM

The federal government has taken significant steps over the past year and a half to tackle inequality and to promote women's rights and gender equality. Despite considerable advancements, there are several areas where the government has fallen short of its ambitions, particularly in making the economy work for women. Federal Budget 2018 provides an opportunity for the government to deliver on its ambitious feminist agenda by making bold investments and fiscal policy decisions. Moving towards an economy that works for the many, not just for the few, will require action in four key areas, including involving women's rights advocates in the budgeting process, greater investments in Canada's global leadership on women's rights, gender sensitive taxation and spending decisions, and increased protection of workers' rights.

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Taking gender budgeting to the next level

THE GOVERNMENT should **set up an advisory council on gender budgeting**, which includes representatives of women's organizations and is designed to increase the government's capacity to do gender budgeting and sets clear gender equality targets for all upcoming federal budgets. The government should also encourage all government departments to consult with and engage in ongoing dialogue with women's rights organizations, and to build their own capacity to conduct quality GBA+.

THE STANDING COMMITTEE on Finance should **ensure that at least 15% of witnesses in the pre-budget consultations hearings are women's rights organizations** or focus their testimony on recommendations to advance gender equality. For subsequent consultations, the Committee should also provide guidance to encourage all submissions to address the implications of their recommendations on gender equality.

Demonstrating global leadership on women's rights

TO PROPERLY implement Canada's new feminist international assistance policy, **commit to year-on-year increases to the international assistance envelope** in Budget 2018 and 2019, and develop a 10-year plan to achieve the international benchmark of 0.7% of GNI. Ensure that Canada's new Development Finance Institution is subject to the same principles as the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act, is mandated to focus on poverty reduction and gender equality, and works in strategic alignment with the new international assistance policy.

SPEARHEAD a progressive business and human rights agenda by swiftly setting up an Ombudsperson's Office that is effective, impartial and empowered to investigate human rights violations, make public recommendations, and provide remedies to victims of human rights violations committed by Canadian companies overseas. Develop guidelines requiring large Canadian companies to report annually on their impact on society, human rights and the environment. Require Canadian companies sourcing from international suppliers to monitor and report on the gender and human rights impacts of their supply chains.

IMPLEMENT a progressive trade agenda by carrying out human rights and gender equality assessments of current and future trade agreements; investing in training for Global Affairs staff on gender and trade; committing funding to increase the voice and participation of women in trade agreements and policy making; and including gender chapters in all trade agreements with clear goals, outcomes and mechanisms for accountability and monitoring.

CHAMPION a second generation of global tax reforms at the UN level that puts all countries on an equal footing, tackles the key problems not addressed by the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting measures (such as tax havens, tax incentives, special export zones and harmful tax competition), and reduces tax dodging by creating a public registry of companies and trusts that includes beneficial ownership information and mandating large multinational enterprises to file public country-by-country reports.

Raising more revenue to reinvest in gender-sensitive social spending

COMMISSION an independent review of the tax system (including a gender-based analysis of the entire system) to find a better balance between corporate income tax, consumption taxes and personal income taxes, to close inefficient tax loopholes, to identify regressive income tax measures that hurt women (such as pension income splitting) and to allocate the tax burden according to principles of ability and progressive taxation of incomes. Raise more revenue by gradually increasing the federal corporate income tax rate from 15% to 21% and closing tax loopholes that benefit only the rich.

INVEST 2% of GDP in social infrastructure (education, healthcare and social care services), including for First Nations, which will help increase overall employment rates, specifically for women, stimulate growth, and address the challenge of an aging population.

ENSURE that the forthcoming Canadian poverty reduction strategy uses an inter-sectional human rights and gender approach and has dedicated funding attached to it, and that a rights-based national housing strategy is adequately funded.

SET A 10-YEAR timetable to incrementally increase child care funding to meet the international benchmark of 1% of GDP, starting with an investment of \$1 billion in 2018-2019, and introduce legislation that lays the foundation for a national child care system based on the principles of universality, quality and comprehensiveness, and that includes a workforce strategy.

INVEST in the collection and open access publication of gender disaggregated data by Statistics Canada that captures the full range of identity factors and measures unpaid care.

Increasing Canada's social safety net and protecting workers' rights

INVEST \$100 million a year in Status of Women to restore and support Canada's women's movement both at the grassroots and national level to engage in collective organizing, advocacy and service delivery.

ENSURE women earn living wages by raising the minimum wage for employees under federal jurisdiction and awarding federal government contracts only to living wage employers. Increase access, duration and levels of EI benefits for women, tying them to need rather than earnings.

INTRODUCE AND PASS pro-active pay equity legislation in 2017, with particular attention to the greater pay equity gap for racialized, Indigenous and immigrant women, and strongly encourage all provinces and territories to adopt pay equity legislation and improve compliance rules.

DEVELOP A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN on violence against women, building on the new federal strategy on gender-based violence, in partnership with the provinces that addresses the structural factors causing inequality and sets concrete targets, timelines, indicators and resources. Introduce legislation for employees under federal jurisdiction that gives the right to time away from work for victims of domestic violence. Ratify ILO Convention 189 concerning decent work for domestic workers and provide open work permits for caregivers coming to Canada under the Live-In Caregiver Program in order to address exploitation.

INTRODUCTION

Today, 8 billionaires own the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of humanity. In Canada, just 2 billionaires own more wealth than the bottom 30% of Canadians.¹ Growing inequality is bad for all; it makes it harder to end poverty, and it has particularly adverse consequences for women who continue to make up the majority of the world's poor.

Our current economic model relies on women's cheap labour to maximize corporate and shareholders' profits. Around the world, as in Canada, women are the lowest-paid workers, often working in jobs that provide minimal security and physical safety. In fact, the World Economic Forum estimates it would take 170 years to close the economic gender gap.² Sexism affects the time women have to work for pay, the jobs women have access to, the money they earn, and the way society values their work.

Economic growth on its own is not sufficient to move the needle on gender equality. Governments must enact policies and make budget allocations that help level the playing field by tackling the structural inequalities and deep rooted discrimination that keep women from benefiting from the gains to which they contribute.

The federal government has taken significant steps over the past year and a half to tackle inequality and to promote women's rights and gender equality. The government's commitment to feminist policy-making has been underscored by Prime Minister Trudeau's appointment of a gender-balanced budget, the launch of Canada's first feminist international assistance policy, the creation of a national inquiry on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and a dedicated gender chapter in Budget 2017. This commitment has also been backed with new investments in childcare, women's rights organizations and women's shelters, and a federal strategy to address gender-based violence.

Despite these considerable advancements, there are several areas where the government has fallen short of its ambitions (see Oxfam Canada's [Feminist Scorecard](#)).³ The area where the government has made the least progress is towards its promise of inclusive growth, having taking no tangible steps to close the gender wage gap and to ensure living wages for the working poor, most of whom are women.

Federal Budget 2018 provides an opportunity for the government to deliver on its ambitious feminist agenda by making bold investments and fiscal policy decisions. Moving towards an economy that works for the many, not just for the few, will require action in four key areas: (1) taking the gender budgeting process to the next level by actively involving women's rights advocates; (2) making investments and policy decisions that strengthen Canada's global leadership on women's rights; (3) raising more revenue to reinvest in gender-sensitive social spending; and (4) increasing Canada's social safety net and protecting workers' rights.

TAKING GENDER BUDGETING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Budgeting and fiscal policy are core feminist issues, and the government took an important first step by introducing Canada's first Gender Statement in Federal Budget 2017. More can now be done in the lead up to Federal Budget 2018 to strengthen Canada's commitment to gender budgeting as a tool to advance gender equality.

Gender budgeting is not merely a technical exercise, but a process that brings women's voices to the forefront through meaningful consultations and ongoing dialogue with women's rights organizations. Every government department has a role to play in ensuring their budget requests include strong gender analysis and targets to advance gender equality.

The Standing Committee on Finance can also take a leadership role in ensuring that the recommendations of women's organizations are considered and brought to the fore. Last year, only a handful of women's organizations were invited to testify at the Finance Committee's Pre-Budget Consultation hearings. The Committee itself, in its call for submissions, makes no mention of the importance of addressing the gender implications of recommendations put forward for consideration.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

THE GOVERNMENT should **set up an advisory council on gender budgeting**, which includes representatives of women's organizations and is designed to increase the government's capacity to do gender budgeting and sets clear gender equality targets for all upcoming federal budgets. The government should also encourage all government departments to consult with and engage in ongoing dialogue with women's rights organizations, and to build their own capacity to conduct quality GBA+.

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DEMONSTRATING GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The world is looking to the Canadian government for leadership on gender equality. In an era of political backlash against hard-won women's rights, Canada made headlines with the announcement of its first feminist international assistance policy⁴ and its decision to invest in women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.⁵ But we cannot stop there. Canada's ambition to be a global champion for women's rights can only be achieved through a robust feminist foreign policy, a meaningful reinvestment in international aid and unrelenting championing of women's leadership.

A feminist foreign policy would ensure that the multiple facets of Canada's engagement in the world are aligned to promote women's rights and gender equality – whether through aid, diplomacy, trade or defense. In 2016, the government only invested 0.26% of Gross National Income (GNI) in foreign aid, putting Canada at the bottom end of OECD countries.⁶ With Canada's international assistance budget at the lowest it has been in half a century, Canada is poised to fall short of its ambitions to play a leadership role globally. The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International

Development called on the government in November 2016 to come up with a plan to reach 0.7% by 2030.⁷ Yet, Budget 2017 did not allocate any additional resources in foreign aid. Despite the current economic climate, seven other donor countries were able to meet the 0.7% UN target in 2016, clearly demonstrating that meeting the benchmark is feasible, financially and politically.⁸ A new investment of \$14 billion over 10 years for defense without additional investments in aid does not bode well for making the case that Canada is back when it comes to feminist leadership.

The new Development Finance Institution (DFI)⁹ provides for an opportunity to be innovative and leverage finance for poverty reduction and gender equality, but Canada will need to be bold in how it is designed in order to ensure these goals are met. Private finance should never be a replacement or substitute for aid. However, if designed carefully and in alignment with Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy, the DFI could add important contributions towards achieving the same goals. The experience of other development financing facilities shows that without a strong alignment with the goals and strategies of sustainable development, public backed private finance can fail to reach its potential contribution, and in some cases, reinforce existing inequalities. The DFI should avoid these pitfalls by starting with a strong mandate to reduce poverty and to compliment the government's Feminist International Assistance Policy.

The government is aiming to redefine trade policy by pursuing a progressive trade agenda that includes considerations of labour and environmental standards, and gender. In June 2017, Canada modernized the free trade agreement with Chile and included a gender chapter, and gender has also been put on the agenda for the NAFTA negotiations. This is a good first step in ensuring women are not adversely impacted by trade regulations; more importantly, gender equality should be prioritized across the whole trade agenda as a core component of all agreements and chapters. This will require investments to ensure trade all staff have the tools and knowledge necessary to truly make trade work for women.

While globalization has brought economic opportunities for women across the world, many countries are pursuing economic development strategies that rely on cheap and precarious work, the majority of which is done by women. How Canadian companies operate abroad and source their supplies directly impacts women. Women working in garment factories, for example, work long hours and yet cannot sustain themselves and their families. Governments, including Canada, recognize that female labour participation is good for the economy, but are much less concerned with making sure that women experience the benefits of their work. Corporate accountability is a key piece of a feminist foreign policy. Investments in women's economic equality can only go so far if companies continue to exploit women's labour to increase profits. Robust accountability and reporting mechanisms are needed to ensure the achievements of Canada's international assistance are not undermined by exploitative corporate practices.

Collecting taxes is one of the key means by which governments are able to address poverty and inequality. Yet we know that big business is dodging tax on a massive scale, depriving governments across the globe of the money they need to invest in public services. Developing countries are hardest hit. Africa as a continent loses at least USD 50 billion annually in illicit financial flows, which is twice as much as it receives in international aid.¹⁰ Tax competition, with the most extreme form being tax havens, has resulted in a race to the bottom in the taxation of global corporations. The OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting framework has provided some measures to reduce tax dodging, but developing countries, who are most impacted by tax evasion, were absent when the framework was created. A second generation of tax reform is needed to bring all countries on an equal footing and to address issues that are not covered by BEPS and continue to cost governments millions of dollars in revenue.

If backed with sufficient financial resources and political will, Canada has the opportunity to champion feminist leadership globally in a way that supports women’s leadership, secures rights for women living in poverty, challenges unjust power systems, and helps makes the economy work for women.

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RAISING MORE REVENUE TO REINVEST IN GENDER-SENSITIVE SOCIAL SPENDING

Fiscal policy has an important role to play in ending poverty and advancing gender equality by redistributing wealth and investing it in gender-sensitive social services. One of the key drivers of the inequality crisis is tax evasion and competition. Elites and corporations use ever more extravagant tax schemes to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. As a result, governments have seen a steady decline in revenues, which has limited their ability to deliver essential services to those who most need them, often women. Canada is no exception. To deliver on its ambitious agenda of inclusive growth at home and abroad, the federal government will need to raise more revenue and reinvest money retrieved into gender-sensitive social spending that improves equality.

Canada’s tax system has become significantly less progressive in the past two decades. Years of neoliberal economic policies and tax cuts have resulted in ordinary Canadians having to make up for public revenue shortfalls by paying much higher tax rates than corporations and small businesses.

Total federal spending as a percentage of GDP currently stands at 14%, making this government the smallest in the past 60 years.¹¹ As a result, Canada's ratio of tax revenue to GDP is lower than that of most OECD countries, ranking it at 25th out of 35.¹² Budget 2016 and 2017 both included measures to reverse some of these trends. The government is also working to close tax loopholes for individuals who incorporate. But the government has failed to close some of the biggest tax loopholes, resulting in upwards of \$15 billion in lost revenues.¹³ Budget 2018 needs to take bold steps to reform the tax system and ensure everyone pays their fair share of taxes.

Taxation also has an important role to play in tackling gender inequality as tax rules have different impacts on women and men. Tax policies designed without attention to their different gendered impacts can have a negative effect on economic growth overall and on women's economic security in particular. The Budget 2017 Gender Statement, which focused solely on spending, lacked a gender analysis of the tax system and its impact on women. The government will need to address this gap in the next gender statement and take action in some key areas to raise more revenue and ensure tax measures support, not disadvantage, women.

A recent report by the McKinsey Global Institute found that Canada could raise its GDP by \$150 billion by 2026 if it took specific steps to close the gender gap.¹⁴ Yet, in rich and poor countries alike, women are tied up in providing unpaid care; according to a recent report by Statistics Canada, women do 50% more unpaid care than men in Canada.¹⁵ Unpaid care work, which increases as public services diminish, hampers women's ability to pursue employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Investments in the care economy are instrumental in leveling the playing field for women and would have the triple benefit of stimulating employment, contributing to more inclusive growth and increasing gender equality by opening up women's options.

The government launched the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework earlier this year in an effort to ensure that the provinces, territories and federal government work toward a shared long-term vision of child care.¹⁶ However, the framework falls short of delivering the Liberal government's election promise of universal child care. Universal child care is essential to addressing poverty and gender inequality; women's economic security cannot be achieved without the provision of accessible universal child care.

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INCREASING CANADA'S SOCIAL SAFETY NET AND PROTECTING WORKERS' RIGHTS

The world over, women are over-represented in informal, vulnerable and precarious work. Despite having surpassed men in educational attainment, women in Canada are hampered by the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, the gender barriers in many fields of work, the undervaluing of jobs held by women, and the often unspoken social norms that offer men higher wages and rates of promotion.

The Liberal Party campaigned on the promise of inclusive growth, but few meaningful steps have been taken to address women's precarious work. Too many women are working full-time and yet are stuck in poverty. Women in Canada earn on average 74 cents for every dollar men earn, for racialized and Indigenous women it can be as low as 56 cents. Women continue to represent 60% of minimum wage earners, and single senior women are some of Canada's poorest.¹⁷

Women are often forced in to low paid and insecure jobs because they have less of a safety net – in part because of difficulties accessing employment insurance (EI) and the lower benefits they receive. Due to care responsibilities, women often take up temporary, contract, or part-time jobs that offer low wages and few benefits. This in turn makes it even more challenging for women to leave abusive relationships when necessary. Violence against women and poverty are often closely intertwined and must be tackled together. Domestic violence has a devastating impact on women's lives and their economic security because it can lead to absenteeism, poor work performance and sometimes job loss. The federal government estimates the economic impact of violence against women at \$12.2 billion a year.¹⁸

Organizing and collective bargaining is essential to ensuring workers' rights, particularly for women stuck in precarious work. Canada's ratification of ILO Convention 98¹⁹ on the right to organize and collective bargaining was a most welcome step, but more is needed to address women's precarious work, starting with a comprehensive strategy to modernize labour standards, ensure living wages and pay equity, reform the Employment Insurance system, and provide protection for victims of violence and migrant workers.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

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gives the right to time away from work for victims of domestic violence. Ratify ILO Convention 189 concerning decent work for domestic workers and provide open work permits for caregivers coming to Canada under the Live-In Caregiver Program in order to address exploitation.

RELEVANT OXFAM PUBLICATIONS:

SHORTCHANGED: Make Work Paid, Equal and Valued for Women

TIME TO TURN FEMINIST WORDS INTO ACTION: Feminist Scorecard 2017

AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR WOMEN

MAKING WOMEN COUNT: the Unequal Economics of Women's Work

WOMEN AND THE 1%: How Extreme Inequality and Gender Inequality Must be Tackled Together

EVEN IT UP: Time to End Extreme Inequality

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