



TACKLING INEQUALITIES IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY:

MAKING CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY WORK FOR WOMEN

Gender inequality shapes and structures the economy from the local to the global level. It affects the jobs that women and men do, what is considered and valued as work, and what issues become priorities in policy making. Feminist economic policies are needed to address these inequalities and ensure women can enjoy their economic rights.

The high-level political commitment of the Canadian government to the design and implementation of a feminist foreign policy is a welcome initiative, and one that potentially places Canada at the forefront of thinking globally on diplomacy, trade and development. Realizing that potential will require a re-examination of current policies and explicit efforts to invest in new or traditionally under-prioritized approaches that tackle gender inequality. Achieving the goals of a feminist foreign policy requires moving beyond helping

women to benefit from existing economic opportunities. It requires an understanding of the unequal gendered power dynamics that infringe on women's rights, and policies designed to transform such dynamics.

Bringing to bear Oxfam Canada's long experience in the promotion of economic development and women's rights, this paper examines a feminist approach to three economic dimensions of Canada's foreign policy: international trade, corporate accountability and international development assistance. It offers practical suggestions and analytical tools for taking a feminist policy agenda forward, to ensure policies go beyond business-as-usual to address deep-rooted gender inequalities in the economy. In doing so, it seeks to support Canada to realize its ambition of supporting women's rights and gender equality around the world.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Increasing trade between countries can support economic growth and poverty reduction, but the benefits have not been shared equally, including between women and men. Trade liberalization has created a race to the bottom on wages and labour conditions, with women concentrated in the lowest paid and most precarious jobs. The Liberal government's progressive trade agenda has included a focus on gender equality, through the inclusion of gender chapters in free trade agreements, for example. This acknowledgement of the link between international trade and gender equality is a positive step forward.

The Canadian government should build on this approach to develop robust and meaningful provisions on gender equality throughout trade agreements and trade policy. To realize Canada's feminist foreign policy through international trade, Oxfam Canada has four recommendations for the Government of Canada.

- Develop robust and meaningful provisions for gender equality in trade agreements. Measures designed to support gender equality should be included as part of binding sections of trade agreements, as standalone chapters and mainstreamed through other chapters.
- Increase the capacity of Global Affairs Canada to understand the gender impacts of trade and promote gender equality. Appointing a Senior Gender and Trade Specialist, conducting gender analyses of trade agreements and training staff on the gendered impacts of trade would support the implementation of a feminist foreign policy agenda.

Commit to inclusive and transparent consultation processes on trade negotiations, and support the contributions of women's rights organizations and advocates to trade policy.

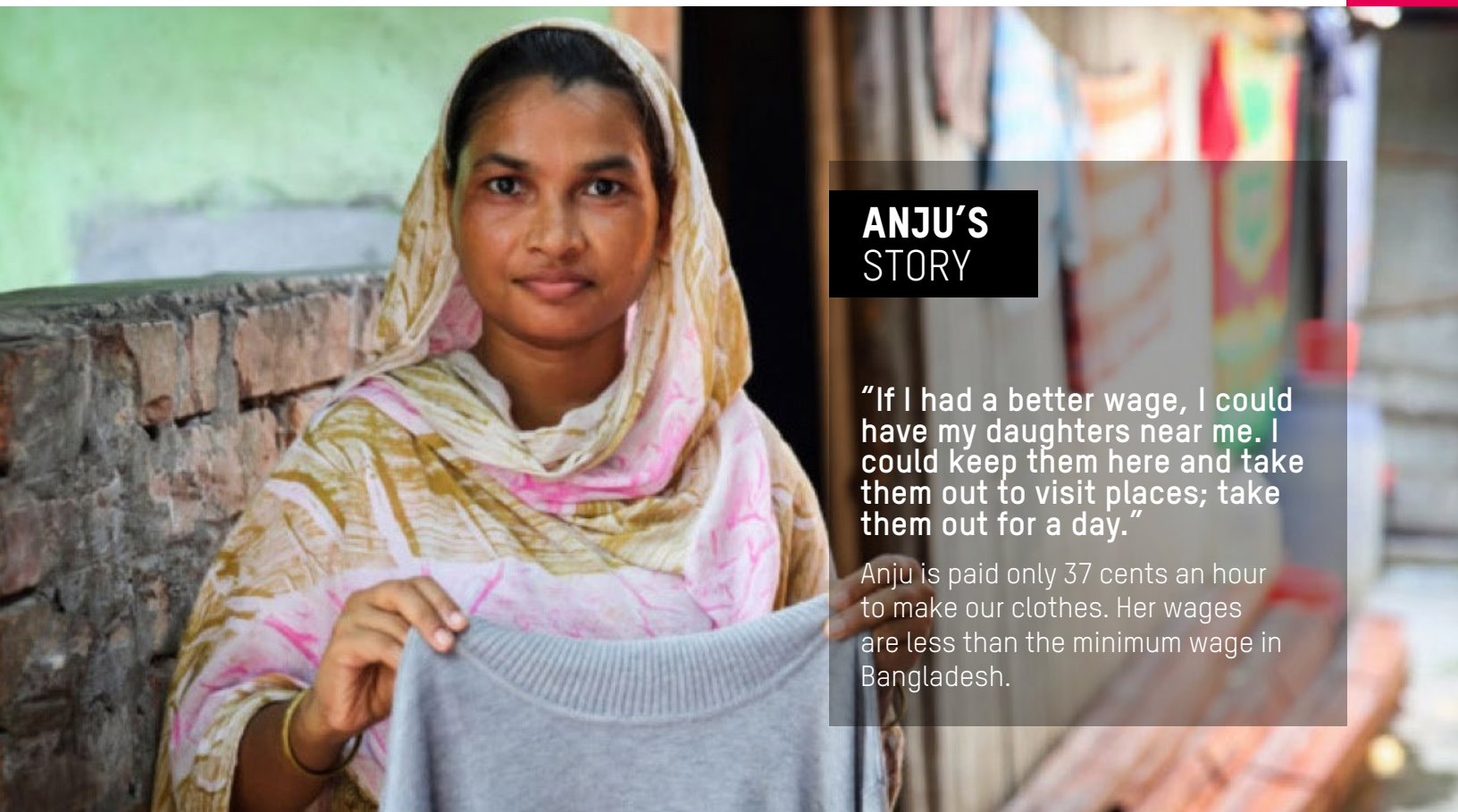
- Commit to inclusive and transparent consultation processes on trade negotiations, and support the contributions of women's rights organizations and advocates to trade policy. Negotiating texts of trade agreements should be made public, and support provided for women's rights advocates to engage in consultations.
- Play a global leadership role in the development of trade policy that supports gender equality. Working with like-minded governments to advance the gender and trade agenda globally should be prioritized.

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

A feminist trade policy must work in tandem with strong corporate accountability policies that support Canadian companies operating abroad to protect women's rights. A voluntary approach to corporate responsibility has proved largely ineffective, with cases of women's rights being infringed upon, particularly as workers at the bottom of supply chains and in communities where extractive companies operate.

To realize Canada's feminist foreign policy through corporate accountability, Oxfam Canada has three recommendations for the Government of Canada.

- Establish new mechanisms for corporate accountability with strong mandates on women's rights. Canada should appoint a human rights Ombudsperson for the extractives sector and establish a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights.
- Improve the implementation of existing strategies through a greater focus on gender equality. A thorough analysis of Canada's Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy from a gender perspective should be conducted, and guidelines for protecting women's human rights defenders should be strengthened.
- Require all large Canadian companies to undertake mandatory gender-sensitive human rights due diligence, prioritizing in the first instance companies in receipt of public funds or investment. Require this due diligence by business enterprises involved in federal government procurement, and take steps to have Export Development Canada adopt a Human Rights and Gender Policy that requires it conduct gender-sensitive human rights due diligence for all of its transactions.



ANJU'S STORY

"If I had a better wage, I could have my daughters near me. I could keep them here and take them out to visit places; take them out for a day."

Anju is paid only 37 cents an hour to make our clothes. Her wages are less than the minimum wage in Bangladesh.

ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy is an opportunity for Canada to become a global leader in implementing transformative programming for women's economic empowerment. But evidence shows that approaches which focus on women as individuals are not effective at breaking down the structural causes of gender inequality in the economy. Other types of programming, that tackle harmful social norms and unpaid care work, for example, need to be prioritized.

To realize Canada's feminist foreign policy through the economic dimensions of international assistance, Oxfam Canada has four recommendations for the Government of Canada.

- Build the capacity of Global Affairs Canada to implement the economic dimensions of the Feminist International Assistance Policy. A Senior Feminist Economic Adviser should be appointed to drive a learning agenda on feminist economics and programming.
- Become a global leader in addressing women's heavy and unequal responsibility for unpaid care. This can be achieved by implementing both standalone programming on care work and mainstreaming unpaid care analysis in all programs and policies.
- Promote macroeconomic policies that favour gender equality, support gender budgeting and support women's rights organizations and other actors that advocate for these policies.
- Invest in organizations that focus on women's labour rights and collective action. These organizations should become key partners in implementing the Feminist International Assistance Policy.

The recommendations in this report can help Canada achieve its ambition of promoting gender equality and women's rights through its foreign policy. Naturally, they alone will not transform longstanding power imbalances and harmful norms which block women's equality in society and the economy. But they hold enormous potential. Canada is well placed to capitalize on its commitment to a feminist foreign policy, and make a meaningful contribution to gender equality around the world.

OXFAM CANADA

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Oxfam Canada recognizes that women's rights and gender equality are essential to ending poverty and social injustice. Through this policy series, Oxfam Canada will analyze what a feminist foreign policy should look like, and how the Government of Canada can take concrete steps towards realizing its ambition.

For news, publications and events related to Oxfam Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy Series, visit:

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