

April 14, 2020

The Honourable Karina Gould, M.P.
Minister of International Development
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada

Dear Minister,

As a collective of the eight Provincial and Regional Councils for international cooperation, the Inter-Council Network (ICN) represents more than 350 member organizations from coast to coast to coast. The strength of our collaboration allows us to effectively deliver joint programs, engage the public and amplify the impact of Canadians working to build a more just and sustainable world. We would like to take this opportunity to commend the Government of Canada for its pragmatic response to reduce the social, health, and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During this unprecedented and uncertain time, we are all reminded of the vulnerability and interconnectedness of communities around the world. Viruses do not discriminate based on borders, belief, or birth. During the coming weeks, as physical distancing and isolation remain extremely important in our efforts to flatten the curve, it is also important to stay connected, engaged, and motivated to work for a collective future that recognizes gender equality and human rights for all.

The COVID-19 global crisis has highlighted the fragilities within our systems and societies the world over. It presents significant challenges to the sustainability of our sector and the viability of international development efforts. As you know, public engagement and collective work are critical mechanisms for supporting understanding and solidarity. When a collaborative approach is used, employing a variety of public engagement strategies and methods, an effective and coordinated response to combatting COVID-19 and its long-term effects can be achieved. Therefore, the ICN believes there is a significant role for public engagement throughout this crisis and beyond. This will ensure support for sustained international development efforts that uphold feminist, socially just, and human rights-based approaches.

The ICN's Fund for Innovation for Transformation (FIT) continues to provide immense support for small and medium organizations (SMOs) by allowing them to test innovative solutions to advance gender equality. This work is a shining example of how change can occur, even in the context of a major crisis. These collaborative efforts with SMOs are closely aligned to Canada's demonstration of leadership at home and abroad as we seek to find innovative solutions together.

SMOs can adjust quickly to changing circumstances. They are innovative, creative, and adaptable due to their strong partnerships with communities in Canada and the Global South. In this time of great uncertainty, SMOs are working to provide a social safety net to low-income populations and communities that are gravely affected by the impacts of COVID-19.

As we seek to adjust to this new reality, the ICN would like to make a number of recommendations to the Government of Canada as part of its public engagement and advocacy efforts to increase investment in international cooperation at this critical juncture. The ICN recommends:

- Support continued public engagement initiatives within the international development sector
 - Increase funding and flexibility to address COVID-specific public engagement
- Maintain a gender analysis lens on this pandemic and the impact on women and girls
 - Continue to emphasize the FIAP action areas; allow for flexibility in shifting:
 - funding for new and current partners,

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- overhead expenses regarding personal security activities, and
- programming priorities for SMOs to the COVID-19 response
- Allow for shifts in programming to address rising hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition
- Ensure and defend humanitarian access and guarantee the inclusion of the most vulnerable
- Increase financial and technical support to the most vulnerable countries and take a leadership role in global debt forgiveness
- Continue to fund innovation initiatives and maintain staffing to enable the sector, particularly SMOs, to adjust programming to create innovative ways to respond effectively and collaboratively to the emerging needs of this crisis

These recommendations are put forward in the spirit of global solidarity for social justice and resilience. We look forward to speaking with you in the coming weeks as we continue to brainstorm ideas, and collectively implement measures to further confront the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that no one is left behind and we all come out stronger.

Yours sincerely,



Jennifer Slood, Executive Director
Atlantic Council for International Cooperation



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