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NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

The capacity building needs and knowledge gaps of Canadian small and medium organizations, and appropriate learning methods.

(SHORT VERSION)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Inter-Council Network (ICN) and the Spur Change team would like to express our deep appreciation to all those who provided us with the possibility of completing this report. We would also like to thank the staff of each Provincial and Regional Council for International Cooperation who supported the needs assessment survey across the country and led roundtables in five different cities.

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The Inter-Council Network (ICN) is a coalition of the eight Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation who are committed to global social justice and social change. These independent member-based Councils represent more than 350 diverse civil society organizations (CSOs) from across Canada. The ICN provides a national forum through which the Councils collaborate for improved effectiveness and identify common priorities for collective action. Rooted in communities across Canada, we are leaders in public engagement at local and regional levels and are recognized for bringing regional knowledge and priorities to the national level.



The Spur Change program is a five-year initiative, operated by the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation, funded by Global Affairs Canada, aiming to increase the effectiveness of Canadian small and medium organizations (SMOs) in delivering sustainable results in support of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy and the Sustainable Development Goals set forward by the United Nations. The main outcomes of the program are to increase the engagement of Canadian SMOs in international development and to increase the engagement of Canadians, particularly youth, as global citizens.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report addresses questions about the capacity building and knowledge sharing needs of Canadian small and medium organizations (SMOs) working in international cooperation. What are their organization's ambitions? What are key priority areas for learning and capacity building for their organization to achieve its ambitions? What are their preferred learning methods? What is their level of knowledge and understanding of the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? Some questions also aim to gather information regarding the youth engagement and global citizenship component of Spur Change programing, for example by asking about their level of interest and experience in engaging with schools, educators, and students.

The report is based on 252 responses from over 150 SMOs across Canada through an online survey (63), in-person roundtables in five Canadian cities (39), online post-activity surveys, and an in-person consultation/validation at the Spur Change annual conference (80). The findings in this report are significant for Canadian SMOs aiming to increase their impacts, the Spur Change team planning a comprehensive capacity building program for Canadian SMOs, and Global Affairs Canada, who works closely with funded SMOs. This needs assessment provides insights into the strengths of SMOs and how SMOs can achieve their ambitions. The report also highlights SMOs' preferred adult learning approaches.

The report highlights six central findings:

01. Resource mobilization is the most important area of capacity building for Canadian SMOs.

Resource mobilization came out from our consultation as the most important priority. Within the resource mobilization categories, three subcategories particularly stood out: 1) fundraising, 2) institutional funding, and 3) innovative financing. This priority was confirmed in a validation session held at the Spur Change annual conference in November 2019 with over 80 SMOs. Program and project development was identified as the second priority. The third priority, which rated very low compared

to the two others (78% anglophone and 100% francophone respondents reported either resource mobilization or program and project development as their first priorities), was identified as external relations. When asked about their second-highest priorities to help build their organization's capacities, program and project implementation was slightly more important in the anglophone survey (23%), and all the other capacity building categories (resource mobilization, project and program development, organizational development, and sectoral knowledge and expertise) were rated at the same level of priority (18%).

02. There is a need to differentiate between donor-driven and organization-driven capacity building needs.

Resource mobilization and fundraising were confirmed by all participants as priorities. Some other priorities related to donors' requirements were identified as very important such as results-based management (RBM) (including theory of change), a project implementation plan (PIP), baseline study, gender analysis, risk assessment, and donors' financial requirements. These pressing needs are instrumental to the growth and sustainability of many organizations, but they should not hide other capacity development areas to improve the quality and effectiveness of SMOs' programming in the long term. In fact, respondents highlighted capacity building needs closely related to SMOs' organizational development such as knowledge management (documenting best practice, managing learning), networking and partnership with other CSOs, effective governance, and organizational policy development.

03. Integrating a gender-lens emerged as a strong theme cutting across all capacity building areas.

SMOs identified the need to increase their capacity to integrate a gender-lens in all phases of a project cycle from project and program design (gender-based analysis), organizational development (PSEA policies), and

program and project implementation (gender transformative programming and measuring gender empowerment).

04. Knowledge of FIAP and SDGs is high amongst SMOs.

Overall, knowledge of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations were self-assessed as quite high by SMOs answering the survey. The level of understanding across their organizations of both the FIAP and SDGs was equally high according to respondents. A better understanding of the FIAP's action areas was identified as the most important capacity building priority in terms of sector knowledge. The level of knowledge and understanding of the SDGs' indicators was slightly lower compared to that of the SDGs' goals and targets.

05. SMOs' strengths and weaknesses are diverse, which calls for flexibility and variety while choosing learning opportunities.

The strengths of Canadian SMOs significantly vary from one region to another and within provinces. Cross-cultural communication, volunteer mobilization (national and international), and contextual analysis / gender-based analysis are identified as the main strengths in some provinces

and as weaknesses in others. Different factors such as the size, location, number of staff, number of years since the organization's creation, presence of communities of practice, and thematic provincial government funding opportunities could affect each organization's capacities. There is not a "one-size-fits-all approach" while designing capacity building opportunities for SMOs. An illustration of that diversity in terms of needs is that what some SMOs perceive as their strengths is perceived by other SMOs as their weaknesses.



06. Preferred learning methods are not always the most effective methods for consolidating learning.

The preferred learning methods identified by respondents in the needs assessment are not necessarily the most effective (evidence-based) approaches to consolidate learning. SMOs raised the importance of having meaningful learning methods that allow long-lasting engagement and networking opportunities. At the same time, the preferred learning methods of survey participants tended to prioritize short-term, individual, and online methods. This contradiction could be a consequence of the limited time and resources SMOs may be able to allocate to these learning opportunities that require more commitment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SPUR CHANGE PROGRAM

01. Mixed Approaches - Use both online and in-person learning opportunities to encourage participation, accessibility, and equity.

The Spur Change program should develop a mixed approach by organizing national in-person training across the country and also meaningful online opportunities such as a webinar series and an online course.

02. Follow up - Always embed follow-up activities or opportunities with asking questions of an expert.

Each learning opportunity should be followed by an online session to ask questions to our trainers or to pursue dialogue among participants. Participants should receive hand-outs and materials designed to be used and adapted to their own context and needs.

03. Timing - Determine with funded SMOs (both GAC and FIT) a training schedule based on the implementation of their activities.

The Spur Change team will work collaboratively with Global Affairs Canada's Development Impact Windows secretary and FIT's director to design timely capacity building opportunities based on the needs of SMOs. These capacity building opportunities should provide the organizations with the support to successfully implement their projects.

04. Participatory Design - Design learning opportunities using participatory approaches.

Each learning opportunity should be designed with the end users in mind. As part of the Spur Change team, a learning content designer will work with trainers and consultants to design participatory trainings. Spur Change learning opportunities will be designed using multiple participatory approaches.

05. Collaborative learning - Offer opportunities for peer learning and build a learning program on participants' knowledge and experiences.

The Spur Change program will build on the expertise of SMOs and larger organizations to design its learning opportunities. Spur Change's training will be designed to encourage peer learning. For instance, our conference programing is built on participants' expertise as they are the ones leading most sessions. In-person training will be preceded by pre-training surveys to gather participants' experiences and inform the training content. Champions in the sector (small, medium, and even large organizations) should be invited to contribute to a webinar series dedicated to specific themes. These organizations will then contribute to building SMOs' capacities to collectively raise the impact of our sector.

06. Accessibility - Make training materials publicly available afterward.

The Spur Change program should build an online library along with an online multimedia platform (video, podcasts, handouts, etc.) to share all resources developed as part of the program. The Spur Change program should also collect and share existing resources through this library.

07. Equity - Offer learning opportunities across Canada and outside large cities.

The Spur Change program should organize training opportunities outside Central Canada. Rather than asking SMOs to travel, the trainers should replicate the same training in several locations in French and in English. With an approach to bring the training to the participants instead of the other way around, the program will reduce inequitable access for rural SMOs. The national training program, which will happen once to twice a year, aims to be replicated across the country. The Spur Change annual conference will be hosted in different cities across Canada each year, and participants will receive subsidies to attend.

08. Evidence-based approach - Develop capacity building opportunities informed by evidence.

The Spur Change team should inform its decisions through consulting the evidence. The Spur Change program should refer to the literature of adult education to select learning methods. The SMO studies, along with the initial and mid-term needs assessments, should guide its programing.



Needs Assessment Report

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