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COVID-19 and Canada's Development Assistance in Sub-Saharan Africa

by Emily Gilfillan and Jeffrey Phillips
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► Executive Summary

COVID-19 has created unprecedented challenges for governments around the world. In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the global outbreak of COVID-19 a pandemic. In addition to a worldwide health crisis, the pandemic has had far-reaching socioeconomic impacts that have been severest for the most vulnerable people and have exacerbated existing inequalities. This presents wealthy countries like Canada with a challenge: addressing the health crisis and economic fallout at home, while simultaneously supporting a global COVID-19 response and continuing to tackle existing development priorities.

This report explores the implications of COVID-19 for Canada's development assistance efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Given that 27 of the 28 poorest countries in the world are located in SSA and half of Canada's Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget is expected to go to countries in Africa by 2021-22, it is a priority region.

To date, Canada has maintained ODA spending levels, while also providing additional funds in support of global efforts to address COVID-19. Evidence suggests that pre-pandemic priorities in the region, such as gender equality, health, and food security, have not been derailed. Rather, the impact of the pandemic has reinforced the importance of core development objectives such as achieving the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In particular, Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) is fit for purpose to address the gendered impact of the pandemic. It is clear that the pandemic does not affect men and women equally. While the right policy tools are in place, building back better will require Canadian resolve and leadership to stay the course and ensure the most vulnerable are not left behind.



Few of us could have imagined what was in store for the world when we first heard about “a cluster of cases of pneumonia”¹ in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Those cases were the first of a deadly new coronavirus, COVID-19, that would sweep across the globe, affecting every country and person on the planet. On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the global outbreak of COVID-19 a pandemic. As of Nov. 19, 2020, there were nearly 56 million confirmed cases worldwide, including more than 1.3 million deaths.²

The pandemic has had far-reaching socioeconomic impacts which have been severest for the world's most vulnerable people and have exacerbated existing inequalities. This presents wealthy countries like Canada with a challenge: addressing the health crisis and economic fallout of the pandemic domestically through mass stimulus funding, while at the same time supporting a global COVID-19 response and continuing to tackle other development priorities.

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is an important region of focus for Canada's overall development assistance efforts. The average poverty rate for the region is approximately 41 per cent, with 27 of the 28 poorest countries in the world located in SSA.³ It is also a region of great potential. It is home to over a billion people, half of whom will be under 25 years old by 2050, which presents a unique opportunity to drive inclusive growth and eliminate poverty.⁴

This report explores the implications of COVID-19 for Canada's development assistance in SSA, with a focus on official development assistance (ODA) funding levels and priorities. It also examines the challenges and opportunities for Canada's approach to development assistance in the context of COVID-19. The obvious limitation to the analysis is that we are still living through the pandemic and many unknowns remain with respect to both the trajectory of the virus and the Canadian government's policy responses.

Canada's International Assistance Framework

Most of Canada's international assistance comes in the form of ODA, defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as “government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries.”⁵ For decades, Canada has faced criticism for not spending enough on international assistance; spending levels

¹ World Health Organization, “WHO Timeline – COVID-19,” April 27, 2020. <https://www.who.int/news/item/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19>.

² World Health Organization, “WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard,” 2020. <https://covid19.who.int/>.

³ Nirav Patel, “Figure of the Week: Understanding Poverty in Africa,” Brookings Institute blog, November 21, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2018/11/21/figure-of-the-week-understanding-poverty-in-africa/>.

⁴ World Bank, “The World Bank in Africa,” October 22, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/overview>.

⁵ OECD, “Official Development Assistance (ODA),” (Paris: OECD, 2019).



are low compared to other wealthy countries. ODA for 2019 was 0.27 per cent of gross national income, substantially below the internationally agreed-upon target of 0.7 per cent.⁶

In 2008, Canada passed the *Official Development Assistance Accountability Act* (ODAAA), which aims to ensure that all Canadian ODA is “focused on poverty reduction and is consistent with aid effectiveness principles and Canadian values.”⁷ It applies to all federal ODA and requires that the funding: 1) contribute to poverty reduction, 2) take into account the perspectives of the poor and 3) be consistent with international human rights standards.

In line with the ODAAA, Canada is an ardent supporter of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 SDGs are an urgent call for action by all countries to address the most pressing global challenges such as poverty, climate change and inequality. In 2019, Canada created *Towards Canada's 2030 National Strategy*, an implementation plan that aims to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs, both at home and abroad. To support a whole-of-government approach, an SDG unit was created within the federal government to “coordinate efforts, raise awareness, monitor and report on implementation progress.”⁸ This commitment to the SDGs guides Canada's development assistance efforts.

Also, Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) was launched in 2017 as a cornerstone of its efforts to eradicate poverty around the world. With the core action area of “gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls”, FIAP leverages Canada's long-standing expertise in gender equality and women's rights and applies this lens across an additional five action areas: human dignity, growth that works for everyone, environment and climate action, inclusive governance and peace and security.⁹

FIAP includes a commitment that at least 50 per cent of bilateral ODA goes to countries in Africa by 2021-22. For the fiscal year 2018-19, Canada spent 40 per cent of its \$6.4 billion international assistance budget in Africa and 38 per cent of that budget, or \$2.4 billion, went to SSA. The top five recipients of Canadian ODA in the region were: Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.¹⁰

Taken together, the UN SDGs and FIAP guide Canada's development assistance in SSA and comprise the first two priorities in the December 2019 mandate letter for Karina Gould, Canada's minister of International Development:

⁶ Aniket Bhushan, “Analysis of Canada's 2018-19 Development Spending,” Canadian International Development Platform, April 17, 2020. <http://cidpnsi.ca/analysis-of-canadas-2018-19-development-spending/>.

⁷ Government of Canada, “The *Official Development Assistance Accountability Act*,” 2020. <https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/odaaa-lrmado/index.aspx?lang=eng>.

⁸ Government of Canada, “Towards Canada's 2030 Agenda National Strategy,” 2019. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/agenda-2030/national-strategy.html>.

⁹ Government of Canada, “Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy,” 2020. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang=eng.

¹⁰ Government of Canada, “Statistical Report on International Assistance,” 2020. <https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/assets/pdfs/publications/sria-rsai-2018-19-en.pdf>.



- 1) Deliver Canada's international development assistance that increases every year towards 2030, reflecting our commitment to realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- 2) Implement the Feminist International Assistance Policy, which is geared and prioritized towards reducing poverty, including by creating opportunities for women on the ground in developing countries.¹¹

COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa

The continent accounts for over two million cases and 48,439 deaths (as of Nov. 19, 2020). The first official case of COVID-19 in SSA was recorded in Nigeria on Feb. 27, 2020, with the first death recorded in Burkina Faso on March 18. As of Nov. 19, the number of cases in SSA was 1.36 million (approximately 2.4 per cent of global cases) with 30,971 deaths. The hardest hit countries have been South Africa, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Ghana.¹²

Early projections regarding the spread and severity of COVID-19 across Africa painted a grim picture. For example, a report released by the UN Economic Commission for Africa in April 2020 projected “anywhere between 300,000 and 3.3 million African people could lose their lives as a direct result of COVID-19 ...”¹³ This projection was based on underlying factors related to exposure (e.g., infection rate), susceptibility (e.g., concentration of population in urban slums, low access to hand-washing facilities) and vulnerability (e.g., low rates of hospital beds/health professionals, dependency on imported medical products).

Although baseline vulnerability to the pandemic remains high, the number of cases and deaths in SSA (though likely under-reported) have been substantially lower than projected due to a number of factors. For one, the median age in the region is just 19 and COVID-19 disproportionately, and more severely, affects people over the age of 60.¹⁴ Second, many countries in the region have prior experience with infectious disease control. The 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa led governments to implement strict public health policies and restrictive measures, similar to those now being enacted. Based on this experience, SSA countries were likely more prepared to act quickly and implement lockdown measures. Sierra Leone, for example, recorded its first case on March 31, 2020 and announced a nationwide lockdown five days later.

At a regional level, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention played a key role in co-ordinating a rapid response. More than 40 ministers from across the continent met as early as Feb. 22, 2020 to produce the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19. Combined with the

¹¹ Justin Trudeau, “Minister of International Development Mandate Letter,” Office of the Prime Minister, Government of Canada, December 13, 2019. <https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2019/12/13/minister-international-development-mandate-letter>.

¹² Africa CDC, “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Dashboard,” <https://africacdc.org/covid-19/>.

¹³ Jamie McLeod, Christine Achieng Awiti and Veerawin Su, “COVID-19 in Africa: Protecting Lives and Economies,” UN Economic Commission for Africa, April 2020. https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/eca_covid_report_en_24apr_web1.pdf.

¹⁴ Benno Ndulu, “The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on Sub-Saharan African Economies,” Centre for International Governance Innovation, August 6, 2020. <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/covid-19-pandemic-and-its-impact-sub-saharan-african-economies>.



African Union COVID-19 Response Fund (which was established shortly after), the strategy underpins “African leadership in responding to the outbreak from the very beginning.”¹⁵

While the health impact of COVID-19 may be less severe than anticipated, the pandemic has nonetheless “jeopardized years of hard-won development gains and upended the lives and livelihoods of millions.”¹⁶ Global poverty rates are set to increase for the first time since 1998 and more than 26 million people will be pushed into extreme poverty in SSA alone.

On the economic front, the implementation of lockdowns and other restrictive measures has led to a sharp drop in economic activity, causing the region's first recession in over 25 years. According to the International Monetary Fund, economic activity is projected to contract by three per cent in 2020, bringing per capita incomes back to 2013 levels.¹⁷

Much of the region's economy operates informally, with many informal workers concentrated in hard-hit sectors such as food and hospitality, retail, tourism and transport. These informal workers are largely excluded from basic services and social protections and lack savings and access to financial support. Importantly, the majority of informal workers are women: 74 per cent of women's non-agricultural employment is informal (compared to 61 per cent for men).¹⁸ In short, the most economically vulnerable segments of the population are the most directly impacted by the virus and the associated economic fallout.

The Gendered Impact of COVID-19

The pandemic has not affected men and women equally. It is clear that women face a number of gender-specific challenges that go well beyond the economic sphere, including: over-representation on the front line (women comprise roughly 70 per cent of the health-sector workforce);¹⁹ increased childcare responsibilities due to school closures and additional caregiving duties; reduced access to maternal, sexual and reproductive health services on account of overwhelmed health-care systems²⁰ and higher levels of gender-based violence during times of lockdown and crisis.

For girls in particular, COVID-19 threatens their education and safety. Schools often provide a safe environment, and when that is not available, girls face an increased risk of sexual violence

¹⁵ Patricia Geli, “Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID-19 Response: A United, Continental Strategy,” World Bank blogs, August 25, 2020. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/health/africa-centres-disease-control-and-preventions-covid-19-response-united-continental-strategy>.

¹⁶ Andrew Tiffin, “Regional Economic Outlook. Sub-Saharan Africa: A Difficult Road to Recovery,” International Monetary Fund, 2020. <https://data.imf.org/?sk=5778f645-51fb-4f37-a775-b8fecdb6c69b>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ International Labour Organization, “Five Facts about Informal Economy in Africa,” June 18, 2015. https://www.ilo.org/africa/whats-new/WCMS_377286/lang-en/index.html.

¹⁹ Mathieu Boniol et al., “Gender Equity in the Health Workforce: Analysis of 104 Countries,” World Health Organization, March 2019. <https://www.who.int/hrh/resources/gender-equity-health-workforce-analysis/en/>.

²⁰ Chuku Chuku, Adamon Mukasa and Yasin Yenice, “Putting Women and Girls' Safety First in Africa's Response to COVID-19,” Brookings Institute blog, May 8, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/05/08/putting-women-and-girls-safety-first-in-africas-response-to-covid-19/>.



and exploitation, teenage pregnancy and forced child marriage, among others. These risks have long-term implications and jeopardize 25 years of progress in girls' education and rights.²¹

All of this serves to further widen the gap between men and women and girls, preventing the potential for an inclusive and equitable economic recovery. Though it is beyond the scope of this report to document the full extent of the pandemic's gendered impact, addressing it is fundamental to Canada's development assistance framework and priorities in the region.

Canada's Response

In March 2020, UN humanitarian agencies and other partners launched an appeal for US\$2 billion for a global humanitarian response plan to combat COVID-19 in the world's poorest countries. In May, the amount was raised to US\$6.7 billion and then US\$10.3 billion in July. The appeal aims to support 250 million people in 63 countries, with nearly half of these countries located in SSA.²²

Canada's priority countries in the region have been some of the hardest hit, such as Mali, whose pre-pandemic humanitarian appeal of US\$398.9 million increased to US\$474.3 million; Ethiopia (US\$1.14 billion to US\$1.7 billion) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (US\$1.79 billion to US\$2.1 billion).²³

It cannot be taken for granted that the international assistance budgets of wealthy countries will remain intact during the pandemic. For example, new domestic spending in the United States to offset the economic impact of COVID-19 is expected to decrease appropriations to the 150 Account, the U.S. government's international affairs budget.²⁴ More overtly, in July 2020 the United Kingdom announced cuts to its annual international assistance budget of £2.9 billion due to the economic impact of the coronavirus.²⁵ To date, similar cuts have not taken place in Canada.

In March 2020, Canada announced \$159.5 million in funding to support global efforts to address COVID-19, with over half of the funds going to multilateral institutions (e.g., WHO, WFP, UNICEF, etc.) to support humanitarian appeals. Then, in June, an additional \$306 million was announced, including \$177.5 million to UN humanitarian agencies, \$75 million to NGOs and \$53.5 million to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The funds announced

²¹ UNICEF Data, "Gender Equality and COVID-19," May 22, 2020. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/gender/covid-19/>.

²² UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19," July 2020. https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHRP-COVID19_July_update.pdf.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Daniel F. Runde, Conor M. Savoy and Shannon McKeown, "Covid-19 Has Consequences for U.S. Foreign Aid and Global Leadership," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 1, 2020. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/covid-19-has-consequences-us-foreign-aid-and-global-leadership>.

²⁵ BBC News, "Coronavirus: UK Foreign Aid Spending Cut by £2.9bn amid Economic Downturn," July 23, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-53508933>.



were not new money and came from existing unallocated pool(s) within Canada's overall aid envelope.²⁶

The September 2020 speech from the throne, which provides a high-level overview of the Canadian government's priorities for the upcoming parliamentary session, notes "the Government will invest more in international development while supporting developing countries on their economic recoveries and resilience."²⁷ This signals an interest in maintaining a commitment to development assistance, though it remains to be seen what form this will take.

On Sept. 29, 2020, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced an additional \$400 million in new funding to go towards partners fighting COVID-19. The objective of the new funds is to "ensure that the development gains made over the past decade are not lost, and ensure that 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the SDGs are not at risk." Trudeau also emphasized that the funds will be used to address the disproportionate impact on women and girls.²⁸

Development Assistance Priorities during the Pandemic

When the authors interviewed Gould, she noted that ODA spending levels have not changed and are not expected to.²⁹ Thus, Canada is taking an 'in addition to' approach, rather than an 'instead of' approach for balancing the need to support ongoing development priorities with new challenges from COVID-19.

In terms of Canada's development assistance priorities, Minister Gould reiterated that Canada has no intention of shifting its focus, stating: "We need to keep up the momentum as we can't afford to lose the progress we have made."³⁰ This aligns with her previous statements which emphasize the importance of staying the course:

It is now more vital than ever to support the most vulnerable people. We must respond to the health crisis caused by COVID-19, but we must also respond to other ongoing humanitarian crises. Millions of people are still counting on us to alleviate poverty, food insecurity, gender inequality and the violation of human rights and to protect youth.³¹

²⁶ Cooperation Canada, "Canada's Global Response to COVID-19: Investing in Aid," September 21, 2020. <https://ccic.ca/canadas-global-response-to-covid-19-investing-in-aid/>.

²⁷ Aniket Bhushan, Bridget Steele and Lance Hadley, "Throne Speech: Opportunity to Stimulate Canada's Support for Development," Canadian International Development Platform, October 1, 2020. <http://cidpnsi.ca/throne-speech-opportunity-to-stimulate-canadas-support-for-development/>.

²⁸ Office of the Prime Minister, "Prime Minister Co-Chairs High-Level Meeting to Address Economic Devastation Caused by COVID-19 and Announces New Funding to Fight the Pandemic," Government of Canada, September 29, 2020. <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2020/09/29/prime-minister-co-chairs-high-level-meeting-address-economic>.

²⁹ Karina Gould, Minister of International Development, in an interview with the authors, September 21, 2020, Vancouver, B.C.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Global Affairs Canada, "Canada Responds to Humanitarian Crises with Funding to the World's Most Vulnerable," May 18, 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2020/05/canada-responds-to-humanitarian-crises-with-funding-to-the-worlds-most-vulnerable.html>.



As an example of balancing priorities, Canada partnered with the UN Population Fund in 2015 to empower women and girls in South Sudan by strengthening its midwifery services through the support of six national training centres. This \$50 million investment was due to wrap up at the end of 2020. However, on Aug. 27, the government announced an additional \$4.2 million to ensure the training of health-care professionals continues through the pandemic.³²

The same announcement included an additional \$4.5 million to support South Sudan's National COVID-19 Response Plan and the Health Pooled Fund, which Canada contributes to as part of ongoing basic health and nutrition services. This is illustrative of Canada's approach to support ongoing challenges while also addressing the immediate needs that COVID-19 presents.

This 'in addition to' approach is also reflected in changes to the Global Affairs Canada (GAC) contracting process that provides delivery partners "flexibility to adapt programs to some extent, recognizing that long term development priorities remain critical even as the world adjusts to the COVID-19 reality."³³ Specifically, new guidance states that reallocation of certain project funds to address COVID-19 crisis-related activities is acceptable as long as intermediate and ultimate outcomes remain the same.³⁴

Turning to FIAP, prior to the pandemic it was an important policy tool for helping Canada work towards achieving gender equality and the UN SDGs. Now, the framework is even more important for focusing development assistance efforts to prevent backsliding on previous progress while simultaneously addressing the gendered impact of COVID-19.

Canada's core FIAP action areas align with the gender-based challenges arising from the pandemic. For example, since 2016 Canada has funded the Canadian Red Cross in Mali to deliver a maternal, newborn and child health program, designed specifically to maintain key services during times of emergency.³⁵ This type of programming reinforces the human dignity action area of FIAP and helps mitigate gender-based impacts during the current pandemic.

As another example, a 2019 GAC-funded program in Senegal aims to improve the socioeconomic well-being and resilience of farming households, with a focus on women and youth.³⁶ The program includes specialized training in topics such as financial management, business planning and climate change, and creates a platform for community members to implement smart practices in agriculture and water resource management. Effective financial literacy programs that consider

³² Embassy of Canada to South Sudan, "Canada Announces Additional Funding to Support the Health Sector in South Sudan," Global Affairs Canada, August 27, 2020. https://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/south_sudan-soudan_du_sud/news_releases-communiqués/2020-09-02-news-release-communique.aspx?lang=eng.

³³ Cooperation Canada, "Investing in Aid."

³⁴ Government of Canada, "Questions and Answers – Guidance on Eligibility of COVID-19 Potential Costs," 2020. <https://www.international.gc.ca/development-developpement/partners-partenaires/bt-oa/covid-10-questions-answers-reponses-costs-depenses.aspx?lang=eng>.

³⁵ Global Affairs Canada, "Project Profile – Improving Maternal, Newborn and Child Health in Complex Contexts in Mali," March 1, 2019. <https://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/project-projet/details/D001994001>.

³⁶ Global Affairs Canada, "Project Profile – Adaptation and Valorization of Entrepreneurship in Irrigated Agriculture," March 1, 2019. <https://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/project-projet/details/P005390001>.



gender differences help women build the skills needed to ameliorate the economic distress of the pandemic.

In short, FIAP is fit for purpose. There is now an even greater need to put its contents into practice “so that, together with local organizations and individuals, it promotes social justice, gender equality and the tearing down of systemic barriers that create and sustain inequality on so many fronts.”³⁷

Challenges and Opportunities to Delivering Development Assistance

The pandemic has served to compound existing challenges, as well as create entirely new ones for delivering development assistance. Logistically, Canada's ODA is delivered through a network of partner organizations and institutions working locally, who often require a high level of mobility. Getting workers to the right areas can be difficult under the best of circumstances, but with an evolving landscape of border closures and lockdowns the challenge is heightened.

A study of lockdown measures in nine SSA countries found that there was notable variation in the design, timing and implementation of measures both within and between the countries.³⁸ Examples of some of the measures include the suspension of international passenger flights, restrictions on intra-country movement and limitations on gatherings and curfews. The variation in policies and timing makes co-ordination and planning difficult.

Lockdowns and restrictions have also placed new demands on digital solutions, but the lack of information and communications technology infrastructure in SSA limits the potential for these solutions. Though mobile internet connectivity is rapidly increasing, the region still accounts for half of the world's uncovered population. According to GSMA, “this lack of internet use not only excludes individuals from opportunities to overcome the social and economic impact of the current crisis, but also limits the ability of governments to effectively manage the pandemic and its economic fallout.”³⁹

The pandemic's disruptive nature also creates new opportunities. In order to build back better, Shannon Kindornay of Cooperation Canada notes the opportunity to “reset on a number of longstanding issues”;⁴⁰ foremost among these is the movement towards localization.

The global development community has long talked about the importance of localization, a concept that empowers communities to be the decision-makers for the programs and services that

³⁷ Rebecca Tiessen, “What's New about Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy: The Problem and Possibilities of ‘More of the Same’,” Canadian Global Affairs Institute, December 2019.

https://www.cgai.ca/whats_new_about_canadas_feminist_international_assistance_policy_the_problem_and_possibilities_of_more_of_the_same

³⁸ Najmul Haider et al., “Lockdown Measures in Response to COVID-19 in Nine Sub-Saharan African Countries,” *BMJ Global Health* 5, no. 10: October 7, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-003319>.

³⁹ Kalvin Bahia and Anna Delaporte, “The State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2020,” GSMA, September 2020. <https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/GSMA-State-of-Mobile-Internet-Connectivity-Report-2020.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Shannon Kindornay (Cooperation Canada), in an interview with the authors, September 25, 2020, Vancouver, B.C.



support their own needs. At a time when international organizations are closing offices and pulling staff from frontline operations, local actors are critical.

However, localization has been criticized as “... a lot of nice aspirational language, but no real action [or] substantive systems change.”⁴¹ FIAP states that “for our actions to be sustainable, we must ensure that they contribute to building local capacity.” This has been put to the test as the need for local leadership has never been greater.

Conclusion

To date, the pandemic has not fundamentally altered Canada's development assistance in SSA. The evidence suggests that the Canadian government's commitment to key action areas remains intact, and on a parallel track, Canada is supporting the global response to COVID-19 in the region.

Many of the key challenges stemming from the pandemic align with Canada's development assistance framework, in particular the focus on gender equality through FIAP and the commitment to achieving the UN SDGs. However, the existence of this policy framework and pre-pandemic spending levels are insufficient to meet the challenges ahead. Building back better will require Canadian resolve and leadership to stay the course and ensure the most vulnerable are not left behind.

⁴¹ Lisa Cornish, “Is it Finally Time for the Localization Agenda to Take Off?” Devex, June 3, 2020. <https://www.devex.com/news/is-it-finally-time-for-the-localization-agenda-to-take-off-97323>.



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