**Summary:**

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is the main focus of Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy. This includes promoting equal access for women to capital, markets, digital technology and business development services. In addition, Canada is focused on using innovative approaches, which includes (but is not limited to) the use of digital technologies to support programming that addresses deep-rooted gender inequalities. This may include building digital literacy skills and using digital technologies to build self-confidence, increase independence and influence and make better-informed decisions; and enabling women to communicate with peers online, to exchange information and build solidarity and to lobby decision-makers.

However, while digital technologies have the potential to be used in transformative ways to empower women and girls and advance gender equality, they have also enabled new forms of violence against women and girls. Canada believes that advancing gender equality and bridging the gender digital divide must include promoting and protecting the human rights of all women and girls to access and use digital technologies without being targeted by online violence and abuse.

Canada believes that additional research on the effectiveness of gender-responsive policies in the area of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), including ones that address barriers to affordability, threats that hamper access and use, digital literacy and confidence, and the availability of relevant content, applications and services, could help inform evidence-based programs and projects.

Canada welcomes ITU efforts to overcome the Gender Digital Divide through these open consultations. It is a discussion that is long overdue and considering that the majority of the 3.1 billion individuals who remain unconnected are women, this is a topic towards which ITU should divert significant resources.

**Introduction:**

1. Canada’s Feminist International Agenda

In June 2017, Canada launched its Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). Canada recognizes that supporting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is the most effective way to reduce extreme poverty, challenge inequity, and build a more peaceful, inclusive and prosperous world. This means promoting equal access for women to capital, markets, digital technology and business development services. Canada has also announced that one of the themes for its 2018 G7 Presidency is advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment – looking to identify concrete solutions to this complex issue.

Within the FIAP is a requirement to focus on innovation, which includes using digital technologies to support programming that addresses deep-rooted gender inequalities. This may include building digital literacy skills and using digital technologies to build self-confidence, increase independence and influence and make better-informed decisions; and enabling women to communicate with peers online, to exchange information and build solidarity and to lobby decision-makers.

However, while digital technologies have the potential to be used in transformative ways to empower women and girls and advance gender equality, they have also enabled new forms of violence against women and girls, such as threats, abuse and harassment. Nonetheless, digital technologies are increasingly prevalent as cornerstones in global social, political and economic networks. Therefore, Canada believes that advancing gender equality and bridging the gender digital divide must include promoting and protecting the human rights of all women and girls to access and use digital technologies without being targeted by online violence and abuse. If we don’t address cyber violence, we feel it will undermine our efforts to:

o Support gender equality;

o Promote the leadership of women and girls;

o Achieve sustainable development goals;

o Promote economic prosperity, and women’s economic empowerment; and

o Support diversity and inclusive governance.

Canada considers Online Violence against Women and Girls as a pressing human rights issue that the international community must address. Hence, Canada is working with different partners to foster research and build an international consensus on the importance of addressing cyber violence against women and girls.

Canada believes that governments need to understand and engage on issues relating to artificial intelligence (AI) particularly as it relates to human rights and the impact these new technologies can have on women and girls. The potential exists for AI to enable perpetrators of violence and abuse, of which women and girls are disproportionately the targets. Governance responsibilities relating to AI should not be mandated to the private sector alone – but requires a multi-stakeholder and cross disciplinary engagement to define the role for government in this rapidly evolving space that impacts all aspects of our lives.

Therefore, Canada is committed to a multi-stakeholder approach to AI governance that engages those who are unduly impacted by AI, including women and girls, and urges that their perspectives are systematically reflected in the development, application and evaluation of AI technologies. Moreover, Canada calls for an approach that is open, transparent, and participative in principle.

Canada has many projects that promote the access and use of ICTs to support its six action areas which include: Human dignity, growth that works for everyone, environment and climate action, inclusive governance, and peace and security.

For example, Canada is proud to support the **Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative** (We-Fi), an innovative new facility to advance women’s entrepreneurship and help women in developing countries increase their access to the finance, markets, technology, and networks necessary to start and grow a business. We-Fi helps provide women in developing countries with the tools and resources they need to succeed as business leaders and make a real difference in their communities.

The following link provides a tool to search Global Affairs Canada’s international projects and download information as open data files:

<http://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/?lang=eng>

Canada has developed tipsheets, guidelines and tools that help staff determine issues that need to be addressed regarding gender inequalities in access and control over resources, women’s participation in decision-making, and human rights of women and girls. For example, the gender-based analysis is fundamental to the application of the FIAP as it serves to inform the development of a theory of change that is informed by a feminist lens, and through which outcomes are developed for initiatives.

Canada has also developed a Gender Based Assessment tool (GBA+). This is an analytical tool used to assess how diverse groups of women, men and gender-diverse people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. The Government of Canada is committed to using this GBA+ tool to advance gender equality:

<http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/gba-acs/course-cours-en.html>

Additionally, Canada is currently working with partners on the elaboration of a *Playbook for Digital Equality in the Digital Age*. This playbook will outline a set of best practices for a multi-stakeholder approach to ensure that our collective digital future is positive and empowering for all. It will include areas of engagement related to fostering the role women play regarding both the development and the use of digital technologies, to ensure that women will equally profit from the benefits of the emerging economic opportunities, but also that the technologies are created to support and enable women instead of perpetuating historical patterns of gender-based bias and discrimination.

1. What are the gaps in addressing these challenges? How can they be addressed and what is the role of governments?

Two decades of experience within Global Affairs Canada have taught us several lessons that are relevant to supporting gender equality throughout programming initiatives. Gender equality is more apt to be achieved if certain conditions exist at the corporate level, in the planning process, during implementation and in performance measurement.

While general gender analysis guidelines exist, our suggestion would be to develop guidelines to target what to ask and what to do to support gender equality for internet users. This gender analysis could be informed by sex-disaggregated data on Internet access and use, which is often missing.

Canada believes that additional research on the effectiveness of gender-responsive policies in the area of ICTs, including ones that address barriers to affordability, threats that hamper access and use, digital literacy and confidence, and the availability of relevant content, applications and services, could help inform evidence-based programs and projects. The World Wide Web Foundation R.E.A.C.T. tool could serve as a good basis of measurement: <https://webfoundation.org/react/>

Regulatory approaches and/or initiatives should also be considered to:

- Ensure that appropriate safeguards, protections, and law-enforcement mechanisms are established to prevent the use of emerging technology in a manner that harms women;

- Contribute to the elimination of gender-based cyber violence and abuse;

- Eliminate discrimination;

- Foster women’s leadership roles in science and technology research and business; and

- Foster the use of technology by women through access, funding, education, training, inclusion, etc.

Finally, supporting local initiatives and targeted interventions is also an effective way to ensure that the needs of the population are met and that the specific challenges they face, especially regarding access to technologies and infrastructures, are being addressed. Women and girls should be empowered to leverage digital technologies to support their capacity to innovate and drive digital solutions to persistent development challenges in their communities.