

Workshop Series
Canadian Policy Towards Fragile, Conflict Affected, and Low-Income Contexts

Objective:

Through a series of workshops, NPSIA will bring together thought leaders on foreign policy, development, and fragility to develop practical recommendations for Canadian engagement in contexts of development, conflict, and fragility.

Output:

A short policy report with realistic and actionable recommendations to ensure that future Canadian foreign policy addresses fragile, conflict affected, and low-income contexts. The report will be shared at a public event in May.

Background:

Canada's policy priorities are shifting rapidly. Economic tensions with the United States threaten to send Canada into an economic recession. Canada faces intense pressure to increase its defence spending, intensify its border protections, and prioritise its economic security. With budgetary deficits and a precarious economic outlook, Canada has little fiscal headroom for other forms of global engagement, including for development and humanitarian assistance.

Yet the global order is unravelling. Low income and fragile contexts face multiple and overlapping threats whose scope and complexity is unprecedented, including climate change, low economic growth and soaring debt, growing authoritarianism, declining trust in institutions, and political polarisation. Violent conflicts have reached levels not seen since World War Two, causing protracted humanitarian emergencies and record levels of forced displacement.

While the number of global crises grows, global cooperation is waning. High-income countries are turning inwards, reframing their foreign policies, and conditioning their global engagements on a narrow and short-term interpretation of national self-interest. The starkest and most consequential example of this foreign policy reset is President Trump's "America First" agenda, the US abandonment of multilateral organisations such as the World Health Organisation, and the potential closure of USAID and the shuttering of American humanitarian and development programs including PEPFAR.

Rationale for Topic:

Canada's foreign policy is clearly at an inflection point. The resignation of Prime Minister Trudeau signals the end of his 'progressive' foreign policy, including the feminist development agenda. It is not immediately clear what comes next. Neither the contenders to replace Prime Minister Trudeau nor the leaders of Canada's opposition parties have articulated a clear foreign policy vision. Policies towards fragile, conflict affected, and low-income contexts are rarely mentioned, let alone prioritised.

Yet poverty, fragility, and conflict are set to increase, with impacts on regional and global diplomacy and security. Regardless of the political party that wins the next election, Canada needs to be better positioned to respond effectively and efficiently with these contexts.

Canadian foreign policy advisors must be able to answer key questions:

- Why should Canada engage in contexts of development, fragility, and conflict? What is the policy frame – how does such engagement relate to and advance our national interest?
- How should Canada engage in fragile, conflict affected and development contexts? With limited financial resources, how can Canada maximize its impact?
- Where should Canada focus our efforts?
- What sectors or initiatives should Canada focus on?
- How can Canada support the work of multilateral institutions, and work more closely together with international allies in these contexts?

Workshop Series:

To interrogate these questions, NPSIA will hold a series of small workshops under Chatham House rules. While the broad discussion will be reflected in the final policy report, the identity of those contributing to the discussion will be withheld.

Each workshop will include about 8-10 individuals. Questions will be circulated to the participants prior to the workshop.

Workshop Dates

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| Historic Foreign Policy Achievements | Friday February 14 9:15 am to 11 am |
| Social Development | Friday March 28 9:30 to 11:30 am |
| Gender Equality | Friday April 4 9:30 to 11:30 am |
| Humanitarian Issues | Friday April 11 9:30 to 11:30 am |
| Security and Development | Thursday April 17 9:30 am to 11:30 am |
| Economic Development | Tuesday April 22, 9:30 am to 11:30 am |
| Report Launch Date | Mid May |

Workshop One: 14 February

Topic: Canada's historic foreign policy achievements related to development, fragility or conflict.

Discussion Questions (in addition to key questions outlined above):

- What have been Canada's key policy achievements in contexts of conflict, fragility and development?
- What was the argument or rationale for Canadian engagement? How were these initiatives framed vis a vis Canada's national interests?

- To what extent were those achievements due to past geopolitical and structural conditions - i.e. not replicable? To what extent could such successes be recreated?
- What were the critical ingredients for those successes? Personalities? Resources? Institutional support? Political support? Public support?
- How did Canada leverage its institutional and diplomatic relationships to support foreign policy initiatives? E.g. the G7, the United Nations, other multilateral organisations?
- Did Canada's commitment to peacekeeping play a role in prioritising engagement in fragile and conflict affected settings?
- What lessons can we learn from those successes that are transferable or adaptable to the current context?

Workshop Two: 28 March

Topic: Social Development: Global Health and Education

Discussion Questions:

- Are the sustainable development goals worth saving? Can the SDGs survive a divided world?
- Canada was a global leader in health, from its role in the negotiations for the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FTCT) to leadership in negotiating the International Health Regulations. Can Canada once again exercise such leadership in Global Health? What are the ingredients for such leadership?
- What will be the impact of the withdrawal of US leadership and funding in global health? How can Canada work with other allies to mitigate the damage caused by the US withdrawal?
- Canada has focused on supporting primary education in many contexts. What are the successes? What lessons can be learned?
- How can we answer the question posed by Secretary Rubio in relation to social development and the America First Agenda: Does ODA towards social development make Canada stronger, safer, more prosperous? If so, how?
- OTHERS?

Workshop Three: 4 April

Topic: Promotion of Gender Equality

Discussion Questions:

- What have been the successes and failures of Canada's feminist international assistance policy and feminist foreign policy?
- Was gender equality in developing, fragile, and conflict affected contexts boosted or undermined by the 'feminist' label?
- Was Canada more successful in promoting gender equality before the FIAP? If so, how and why?

- How can we promote gender equality while mitigating backlash?
- How can we answer the question - does ODA towards gender equality make Canada stronger, safer, more prosperous? If so, how?
- OTHERS?

Workshop Four: 11 April

Topic: Refugee, Displacement and Humanitarian Policy

Discussion Questions:

- Many commentators have described the humanitarian sector as broken. What are the pathways forward for humanitarianism in a world of crises?
- Twenty-five years ago, when the humanitarian system was in a similar state of crisis, Canada played a leadership role in global cooperation to address the challenges of humanitarianism. What role could Canada currently play?
- How can we answer the question - does ODA towards humanitarian assistance make Canada stronger, safer, more prosperous? If so, how?
- OTHERS?

Workshop Six: 17 April

Topic: Peace and Security

Discussion Questions:

- What is the current level of engagement or 'state of play' between the Canadian security and defence establishment and the development sector? The humanitarian sector?
- How do security actors view the role of the development and humanitarian sector – generally and within operational environments?
- What are the key points of tension? Key areas of possible collaboration?
- How will the increase in Canadian security and defence spending impact the development sector (beyond potentially taking resources away from the ODA)?

Workshop Five: 22 April

Topic: Economic Development in Low-Income Settings

Suggested Discussion Questions:

- Much of Canada's ODA focus in the last decade has been on social development. What role has ODA played in economic development? On inclusive economic development? What role can it play? And how should ODA resources be channelled?
- What are the key indicators that the government of Canada should track when it comes to economic development?

- Under Prime Minister Harper, Canada's approach to development focused on 'building markets' in low-income contexts. What lessons can we learn from that policy initiative?
- Are efforts to leverage private capital a hollow promise or is its potential simply unfulfilled? How have Canada's efforts to support impact investing performed? What are the lessons learned?
- How can Canada support efforts to address corruption?
- Key questions outlined above.

Policy Report:

NPSIA will compile a short policy report based on the workshop discussions, and include concrete, actionable recommendations. In May, we will share the findings of the report during a public event.