

Challenging the international development and humanitarian assistance sectors in Canada to become leaders in operational greening

A CCIC concept note

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development challenges all stakeholders to better integrate social, economic and environmental considerations into their work, adopting holistic approaches that leave no one behind and respect planetary boundaries. For the international development and humanitarian sectors, this reality challenges organizations to move beyond social and economic dimensions of sustainable development to integrate environmental and climate change considerations into their work. While programming in these sectors has advanced to focus on adaptation and mitigation, there has been less emphasis on the environmental consequences of daily operations. The carbon footprint of international development and humanitarian organizations is indeed real, as organizations make decisions regarding the international meetings they will attend, work from home policies, going 'paperless' in the office, and if and how they will work through equitable, local partnerships to deliver sustainable development outcomes. Among civil society organizations (CSOs) in the international development and humanitarian sectors in Canada, there is a need to challenge organizations with respect to greening their operations and committing to good practices.

Environmental mainstreaming has been at the forefront of Global Affairs Canada (GAC)'s commitment to sustainable development. Some CSOs are also promoting change in the sector through tools such as WWF's [Living Planet @ Work](#) initiative. Yet, the extent to which Canadian CSOs in the international development and humanitarian sector are using existing tools and policy frameworks for environmentally-conscious decision-making is unclear, though anecdotal evidence suggests that many have yet to "green" their operations and ensure resiliency across their programming.

CCIC, in collaboration with the David Suzuki Foundation, Canadian Coalition on Climate Change and Development and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, is seeking partners for a research project with the goal of supporting CSOs in the international development and humanitarian sectors in Canada to emerge as global leaders in environmental mainstreaming and climate-conscious operations.

As a first step, the proposed project will engage civil society organizations to understand the current status of environmental and climate mainstreaming. This work will be done with a view to identifying internal and external barriers to "green operations," strategies to overcome these barriers and case studies of good practice. The research will include an examination of policies, operational practices, programming and public communications (i.e. how organizations integrate climate change into the stories they tell). The work will focus on short-term and longer-term solutions pointing to options that organizations can begin adopting to green their operations. In addition to reviewing the policies and operations of Canadian CSOs, the research would also consider the policy and regulatory environment in which Canadian CSOs operate, including the factors that influence uptake of green operations by CSOs, notably overarching government of Canada policies and funding regulations.¹ For example, CCIC members have recently indicated that carbon offsets are not eligible expenses for GAC funding, impacting the ability of organizations to 'green' their operations. Recognizing that a range of tools already exist to green operations, the project would also envision a collection of the tools available to the sector and discussion of their usefulness and availability with organizations engaged in the research.

¹ With reference to Canada's [environment and climate change policies](#), the [Federal Sustainable Development Strategy](#), Canada's [Feminist International Assistance Policy](#) and Global Affairs Canada's various funding requirements and regulations.

Potential follow-up from the initial research could include efforts to increase the uptake of tools, expand knowledge and experience sharing in the sector and/or the provision of training to promote green operations among international development and humanitarian CSOs.

Research approach

The work will engage with allies in and beyond the sector to establish the approach to this work, ensuring a participatory research project that meets the needs of CCIC members (and others) by creating opportunities to provide input on the research methodology, focus and best approach to supporting change in the sector. In addition, an advisory committee will be established to provide direction to the research. Finally, the project would include strategic engagement with government of Canada officials throughout the research process to identify opportunities and challenges for greening operations and recommended solutions.

Methodology

CCIC has a range of experiences with respect to research related to practice in the sector. Members will provide input on the best approaches to engagement on the initiative and through the research. Options include:

- *Member survey* aimed at identifying the current state of greening, barriers/challenges and good practices others could adopt. CCIC typically has a 20% response rate to surveys. This approach would require upfront buy-in from members.
- *Focus group discussions* in the form of online calls with members on key aspects of greening targeting appropriate staff within organizations (e.g. CEO level, communications, finance / contracts, programmers, advocacy/policy analysis, etc.).
- Identification / collection of *good practice case studies* on different aspects of greening with members volunteering examples to showcase through the initiative.
- Related to above, *facilitation of peer learning sessions* led by members to share their approaches and lessons learned with one another.
- *Desk-based review* of existing approaches, resources and tools that can support members. Includes also analysis of GAC policies that impact the sector's ability to green options.
- *Strategic engagement with GAC* throughout on challenges/issues raised.

Outputs

Depending on input from the Advisory Committee and research participants:

- Final report on the current state of play, barriers and opportunities for progress.
- Series of case studies providing examples to emulate.
- Policy brief on barriers and opportunities pertaining to the sector's engagement with GAC.
- Repository of greening tools.
- Series of events throughout 2020