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Canadian Views on International Assistance Tracking Study

Executive Summary

Prepared for Global Affairs Canada

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This research report presents the results of an online survey conducted by EKOS Research Associates Inc. on behalf of Global Affairs Canada. The research involved an online survey of 3,056 Canadians. The survey was conducted across Canada in both official languages. Data collection for the survey took place from January 31-February 22, 2022.

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SUMMARY

A. Background and objectives

International assistance is a key component of Canada's foreign policy, but the work that Canada does to support developing countries can seem disconnected from the everyday lives of Canadians at home. To effectively bridge the gap between Canadians' experiences and issues happening thousands of kilometres away, Global Affairs Canada requires a solid understanding of how the Canadian public views international assistance and global issues. Global Affairs Canada would also benefit from knowing how the views of Canadians compare to those of people in other like-minded countries. This will enable Global Affairs Canada to make evidence-based decisions about how they frame communications messages, announcements, programs and policies.

Global Affairs Canada had undertaken its own public opinion research in February 2020 and February 2021 to learn more about Canadian attitudes toward international assistance. These surveys revealed that while most Canadians remain unaware of assistance efforts, awareness has increased modestly. Canadians said they were proud of Canada's international assistance activities and believed them to be important. However, the public perception is that the Government of Canada performs poorly when communicating about international assistance and there is a lack of confidence in Government of Canada information.

Global Affairs Canada began looking at the international public opinion research into public attitudes toward aid and assistance conducted by the Development Engagement Lab (DEL), researchers based out of University College London. DEL has conducted online public opinion research since 2013 with populations from Great Britain, the United States, France and Germany.

Consequently, Global Affairs Canada commissioned EKOS Research Associates to conduct an online survey in Canada that mirrors the questions and methodology of the DEL tracking panel. With DEL's permission, this study employs a similar methodology and questionnaire, which will allow for in-depth analysis of what the Canadian public thinks about international aid and global issues, as well as how those attitudes may have changed when confronted with changing circumstances, such as the pandemic.

The study aims to measure and better understand what the general public thinks about international assistance issues and why (and how) they decide to become involved. This

information will be used to inform Global Affairs Canada's approach when communicating with the public about why international assistance matters, about the relevance and impact of individual projects, and about funding announcements related to these themes.

B. Methodology

The research involved an online survey of 3,056 adult Canadians. The results are valid within a margin of error of +/- 1.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The survey was conducted across Canada in both official languages. The field dates for the survey were January 31-February 22, 2022.

Appendix A contains a detailed description of the methodology used in this study.

Appendix B contains the full survey questionnaire.

Appendix C contains the data tables.

C. Key findings

Outlined below are key findings from the study. The remainder of this report describes survey results in more detail.

Results are organized around 6 main themes:

- Canadian world views
- concern about global poverty
- views on international aid
- interest in global poverty and development
- involvement with development charity groups
- views on international development NGOs and charities

Canadian world views

Results reveal that Canadians have a strong sense of global citizenship. Three in four (77%) say they enjoy visiting other countries and learning about other cultures, and roughly the same proportion (76%) feel they have a duty to ensure their actions do not harm people living in other countries. More than half of Canadians (54%) believe that what happens to people in other countries makes a difference to their own lives, and only 10% feel they have very little in common with the people living in other countries.

Findings also reveal that Canadians express strong views on global equality and compassion. Almost nine in ten (87%) agree that helping people in need is the right thing to do, and fully 78% agree that all people in the world should be treated equally. About half say they would feel very guilty if they ignored the needs of poor people in poor countries (52%), and that countries like Canada should give more money to international aid because it is the morally right thing to do (48%).

When asked how to secure a prosperous and safe country, most Canadians (64%) believe we are best placed to do this in cooperation with other countries. Very few (17%) think we are best placed to secure a prosperous and safe country on our own.

Concern about global poverty

Narrowing the focus to views on global poverty, two thirds of Canadians (64%) disagree that what happens in developing countries rarely affects them; only 1 in 5 (19%) agree with this idea.

The majority of Canadians (64%) also express concern about levels of poverty in poor countries; only 11% say they are not concerned about poverty in poor countries.

When asked to what extent they think various organizations are able to make a difference in reducing poverty in poor countries, findings reveal that Canadians feel many of these organizations can make a difference in reducing world poverty, but are less confident in the Government of Canada's capacity, and their own ability to make an impact in this area. The majority of Canadians (63%) believe that businesses can make a difference in reducing poverty in poor countries, followed closely by the United Nations and other international organizations (59%), and development NGOs/charities (56%). Interestingly, fewer than half of Canadians (45 %per cent) believe the Canadian government can make a difference in reducing world poverty, and only 13% per cent believe that they personally can make a difference in reducing poverty in poor countries.

Views on international aid

Turning to views on international aid, results suggest fairly strong levels of support for providing international aid to poor countries. Over half of Canadians (55%) think that the Government of Canada should give international aid to poor countries; only 3 in 10 (28%) believe the government should not provide this type of aid.

Results further reveal that fully 71% agree that international aid improves people's lives by providing access to education, health care, clean water, and sanitation.

Results reveal more mixed views on whether the Government of Canada should increase or decrease the amount of money that it spends on international aid to poor countries. A plurality (37%) say the government should increase the amount of money spent on international aid, however, about 1 in 5 (23%) say the government should decrease its spending on international aid. About 1 in 3 (35%) feel the amount should stay the same.

When asked what they think the main purpose of international aid to poor countries should be, results reveal that a clear majority of Canadians (61%) feel the primary purpose of international aid spending should be to reduce poverty in poor countries; only 12% believe the primary purpose of international aid spending should be to promote Canada's national interests.

When asked to rank the most important priorities for government spending on international aid to poor countries, access to clean water was seen as most important (45%), followed by education (42%), and access to health care (37%).

Despite generally positive views on international aid, Canadians also express some fairly negative views about certain aspects of international aid. More than half feel that a lot of international aid from Canada ends up in the pockets of corrupt politicians in the developing world (58%) and that most international aid does not get to the intended recipients (56%).

Results also reveal that only 1 in 4 Canadians (26%) believes that government spending on international aid is effective, while almost twice as many (42%) think that government spending is ineffective.

Despite mixed views on the effectiveness of international aid, half of Canadians (51%) think that international aid helps countries become self-sufficient; rather than making countries too dependent on charity (26 per cent), and only 1 in 5 feels Canada cannot afford to provide international aid.

Interest in global poverty and development

Results suggest that Canadians are fairly interested in global poverty and development issues. Fully 79% say they have read, watched, or listened to a news article about global poverty and development in the last year, and two thirds (64%) say they have discussed global poverty with

friends, family, or others over this time frame. A sizable minority (32%) say they have shared/forwarded an article or information about this issue over the past year.

When asked if the news they have read/heard/seen/shared about global poverty was generally more positive than negative, only 13% say the news they saw about global poverty was more positive than negative while two thirds (66%) say the news they have been exposed to was more negative than positive.

Involvement with development charity groups

Turning to Canadians' involvement with development charity groups, respondents were asked whether they have donated money to an international NGO or charity working on global poverty and development in the past 12 months. Three in ten (30%) say they have donated money to an international NGO or charity, however, the clear majority of Canadians (67%) have not.

Respondents were also asked if they have been involved with a development charity or group in the past year. Results reveal limited involvement with these groups. Only 20% of Canadians say they became a member of or subscribed to a newsletter from a development charity or group in the past year; even fewer (10%) say they have volunteered for an organization or charity working on global poverty over this time frame.

Canadians were also asked about their actions in support of or opposition to efforts to address global poverty. Most say they have not taken any of the actions presented in the survey. Almost 4 in 10 (39%) say they have purchased products/services or boycotted products/services to support efforts aimed at reducing global poverty. One in four (25%) say they have taken action such as signing a petition or writing a blog to support efforts aimed at addressing global poverty. Very few say they have contacted a Member of Parliament or other elected official (9%) or participated in a march, rally, protest, or other large event (4%) to support the efforts of addressing global poverty. Virtually no one has undertaken any of these actions to oppose efforts to address global poverty.

Views on international development NGOs and charities

Canadians were also asked to rate the level of trust they have in international development NGOs and charities. Results reveal very mixed views on this issue. Almost 4 in 10 (39%) say they trust these types of organizations, however, roughly the same proportion (40%) express little trust in them.

When asked for their views on corporate partnerships between private sector business and charities, results again reveal mixed views. Half of Canadians (53%) agree that partnering with private sector corporations is a smart way for charities to increase their resources and impact. However, roughly the same proportion (52%) agree that private sector corporations that partner with charities are just trying to boost their reputation and enhance their brand. Only about 4 in 10 (41%) feel that corporate partnerships with charities effectively harness the power of business to achieve wider social goals. However, only 3 in 10 (27%) agree that charities that partner with private sector corporations are compromised and less trustworthy.

Results also reveal that a clear majority of Canadians (63%) feel it is important that large international development NGOs partner with local NGOs to deliver aid programs and funding; only 8% feel this is not important.

Conclusions and implications

Survey results reveal Canadians generally have positive attitudes about international aid and its role in fighting global poverty. They support federal government aid to poor countries, and most think that international aid should at least stay at the current levels. Canadians understand that international aid helps other countries become self-sufficient and should be driven by altruistic reasons to reduce poverty, not for realist purposes such as promoting Canada's national interest abroad.

Canadians think that there are many advantages to international aid. Specifically, they feel that international aid can improve people's lives by providing access to education, health care, and clean water.

Moreover, Canadians think that the federal government can afford to continue providing international aid. This finding is important given that this survey was taken during the COVID-19 pandemic when other economic issues (for example, inflation) would likely be top of mind for many Canadians. The fact that Canadians still believe that international aid should continue at this time emphasizes the importance of international aid for Canadians.

There are caveats to this overall positive picture. Many Canadians think that international aid is ineffective and that corporations, the United Nations, and international NGOs can do more to reduce poverty than can the Canadian government. Many Canadians also think that Canadian foreign aid does not always get to its intended recipients and often ends up in the pockets of corrupt politicians.

Overall, however, Canadians see global poverty as a serious problem and are widely supportive of providing international aid to poor countries. Furthermore, Canadians generally think that there is an interconnectedness between themselves and the rest of the world. They believe in global cooperation and reject isolationism. Canadians see themselves as part of a global community in which prosperity is achieved by working with other countries and that poverty in other countries also affects Canadians themselves negatively.

Key demographic and regional differences

Throughout the survey, females are more likely than males to express positive views about international aid and its intended purpose to combat global poverty. Women are also more likely to express views consistent with international cooperation and multilateralism. They are not as pessimistic about foreign aid likely ending up in the hands of corrupt politicians and they are more likely to engage in global poverty activism, such as signing a petition or boycotting products/services.

Findings also reveal significant differences between university-educated Canadians and those with lower education levels. As was the case with the responses by females, Canadians with a university degree have more positive views about international aid and are less cynical about its intended purposes. They are more likely to think that it is important that Canada continue to provide foreign assistance and that the goal should be to reduce global poverty, not advance Canada's national interest. Moreover, those with university education are more likely to think that international aid is effective and are far more likely to participate and engage in global poverty activism than Canadians without a university degree.

There are also key differences among the age groups, most notably between younger Canadians (18 to 34 years old) and older Canadians (65 years old and older). Younger Canadians are more likely to be negative about international aid and less likely to think that matters taking place outside Canada affect them. Moreover, they are less likely to feel that foreign aid spending should increase and are significantly less likely to believe that the primary purpose of aid is to reduce poverty in poorer countries.

The survey also revealed some regional differences. Canadians in Quebec, British Columbia, and Atlantic Canada express the most positive views about international aid and its aims and express the most altruistic and internationalist views. Conversely, Canadians in the Prairie provinces, that is, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, are the most likely to be negative

about the aims, purposes and results of international aid and more likely to express isolationist views.

D. Contract value

The contract value for the POR project is \$73,708.94 (including HST).

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For more information on this report, please contact Global Affaires Canada at:

POR-ROP@international.gc.ca.

E. Political neutrality certification

This certification is to be submitted with the final report submitted to the Project Authority.

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research.

Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed by:



Derek Jansen (Vice President)