

Engaging Canadian Civil Society

in the Implementation of Canada's
Indo-Pacific Strategy

May 2024

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Executive Summary

The [Indo-Pacific Strategy](#) (hereafter the IPS or the Strategy), launched in November 2022, presents a comprehensive and integrated approach to expand Canada's presence and strengthen partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region to effectively protect and promote Canadian interests. Given the rise of the Indo-Pacific region, and the profound impacts of the region on the lives of all Canadians, the Government of Canada recognized the need for a comprehensive, whole-of-society strategy to guide Canada's actions in this important region. The Strategy outlines five interconnected strategic objectives:

1. Promote peace, resilience and security
2. Expand trade, investment and supply chain resilience
3. Invest in and connect people
4. Build a sustainable and green future
5. Canada as an active and engaged partner to the Indo-Pacific

To achieve the third IPS objective of investing in and connecting people, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) collaborated with Cooperation Canada, an important convener of and voice for Canadian civil society organizations (CSOs) active in international cooperation, to organize a public consultation on the implementation of the IPS.

This report provides a synthesis of 'what was heard' through the consultation held on January 15, 2024, which brought together nearly 225 participants in Ottawa (80 participants) and online (124 participants) from the development, philanthropic, business, government, and diplomatic sectors. The report seeks to reflect what was shared and discussed through the consultation. It does not reflect official positions or recommendations of Cooperation Canada. The consultation had the following objectives:

- Raise awareness on Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy with the broader Canadian civil society sector;
- Mobilize the Canadian civil society sector in the Strategy's implementation and facilitate meaningful dialogue and valuable expertise exchange; and
- Serve as a launchpad for subsequent complementary regional events held by civil society partners in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver.

The opening address by Kate Higgins, CEO of Cooperation Canada, and the keynote remarks by Christopher MacLennan, Deputy Minister of International Development at Global Affairs Canada, drew attention to the ambition and scope of the Strategy and the importance of partnerships in realizing the ambition of the strategy.

The panel discussion that followed emphasized the critical importance of the Indo-Pacific region for Canada and the role that Canadian actors can play in the region, acknowledging the heightened complexity of the geopolitical environment. Highlights from the panel included:

- The interconnectedness of the Strategy's five strategic objectives. For example, stability in the Indo-Pacific region (the first IPS strategic objective) is essential to global peace and security, which has obvious implications for the second IPS strategic objective to expand trade, investment, and supply chain resilience.

- The search for economic opportunities for Canadian businesses should not overshadow an emphasis on solidarity, that is a critical aspect of fostering connections and partnerships between people (and an important remit for civil society). Canadian CSOs have a history of working in partnership and solidarity with actors in the region, for example through long-standing women's empowerment and poverty alleviation programs. These partnerships have strategic importance to Canada's relationship with the region.
- Connections between human rights, corporate accountability, and environmental sustainability must remain at the forefront of strategy implementation as Canada positions itself as an active and engaged partner to the Indo-Pacific region.

Following the rich panel discussion, participants engaged in small group discussions on the third IPS strategic objective, Investing in and connecting people, through more focused conversations and deeper dives into the linkages between this strategic objective and the other four strategic objectives. The main recommendations for IPS implementation are presented below. Overarching, cross-cutting recommendations that emerged are presented first, followed by more specific recommendations for each of the five strategic objectives of the IPS.

Cross-cutting Recommendations

Ensure the protection of human rights

In implementing the IPS, Canada should remain true to its commitment to human rights. This could mean appointing an Ombudsperson focused on the human rights implications of trade agreements and labor practices, for example. It also means integrating human rights into conversations on democracy, civic space, and media freedom, while being cognisant of sensitivities around the use of language focused on human rights.

Ensure policy coherence across foreign policy, trade and official development assistance in the region

Policy coherence should be central to Canada's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, and indeed the IPS experience could be used to inform Canadian strategies and approaches to policy coherence in other regions of the world. Canada's engagement in the region must involve enhanced coherence between Canada's foreign policy, official development assistance (anchored in the Feminist International Assistance Policy, FIAP), and private sector and trade promotion policies and strategies.

Build a learning orientation into IPS implementation

The government should maintain a learning orientation in the implementation of the IPS, including by comparing Canada's approach with other countries' engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, and developing indicators to measure progress on implementation.

Thematic Recommendations

- **Peace and security: Expand efforts to ensure effective initiatives at the nexus of peace, humanitarian crises and development**

The government should expand its efforts to design and fund effective initiatives at the nexus of peace, development, and humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region, maintaining coherence across all Canada's foreign policy pillars to enhance stability and resilience in the region.

- **Trade and investment: Support market development with diverse partners**

Canada should support market development efforts in and between the Indo-Pacific and Canada, supporting diverse Canadian entrepreneurs (e.g., Indigenous, women, small and medium enterprises) in building networks in Indo-Pacific markets, profiling business opportunities in Canada for entrepreneurs from the region, and promoting ethical labor practices across the Indo-Pacific region.

- **Investing in and connecting people**

- **Advance equitable, contextually driven partnerships**

The Government of Canada should advance equitable partnerships that address colonial approaches to international cooperation, including by fostering Indigenous-led climate action, strengthening local business development from the ground-up, adopting gender lens investment strategies, and engaging in mutual education and exchange of expertise.

This requires urgently addressing travel restrictions and visa bottlenecks for visitors from the Indo-Pacific region and recognizing the great diversity of the Indo-Pacific region and avoiding “one-size-fits-all” approaches.

- **Support civil society as active partners in IPS implementation**

It is essential to acknowledge and foster civil society's role in connecting people. There is currently limited funding allocated for Canadian CSOs to work in the Indo-Pacific region, and very limited opportunities for organizations from the Indo-Pacific to be supported, including through funding, and to bring their own strategies to the table.

- **Sustainability: Demonstrate true commitment to climate leadership**

The IPS presents Canada with the opportunity to demonstrate leadership in the fight against climate change, making it a cross-cutting issue in the Strategy implementation. This could involve improving the understanding of Indigenous-led nature-based solutions, enhancing collaboration with Small Island States, and building strong allyship allowing for collective responses to climate emergencies.

- **Partnerships: Demonstrate Canada's value proposition and priorities in the region**

Canada should further demonstrate its value proposition in the region by clarifying its priorities (by key countries and issues). The government should also reflect on how to ensure that Canada's presence in the region, including on international development, is positioned for multi-partisan, consistent engagement in the region.

1 Introduction

1.1 Consultation Objectives

For over five decades, Cooperation Canada (formerly the Canadian Council for International Cooperation or CCIC) has been an important convener, thought leader and advocate for Canadian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working in international cooperation. In this role, Cooperation Canada has a long-standing relationship with Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and partners regularly with the department to develop dialogues and consultations between the department and partners in Canadian civil society and beyond. Building on this strategic collaboration, Cooperation Canada worked with GAC to organize and deliver the consultation on the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS).

The collaboration between GAC and Cooperation Canada on the IPS rests on the double premise that effective civil society engagement is key to the success of the IPS, and that international assistance is a critical component of the strategy. Cooperation Canada started its work with GAC in November 2022 to refine the engagement approach, alongside L'Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI), British Columbia Council for International Cooperation (BCCIC), the Inter-Council Network (ICN), and Ontario Council for International Cooperation (OCIC). Given Cooperation Canada's position as the national coalition, as well as work Cooperation Canada has led to inform Canada's engagement with other regions, including Africa, it was agreed that it would lead the organization of a national consultation. The consultation had the following objectives:

- Raise awareness on Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy with the broader Canadian civil society sector;
- Mobilize the Canadian civil society sector in the Strategy's implementation and facilitate meaningful dialogue and valuable expertise exchange; and
- Serve as a launchpad for subsequent complementary regional events held by civil society partners in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver.

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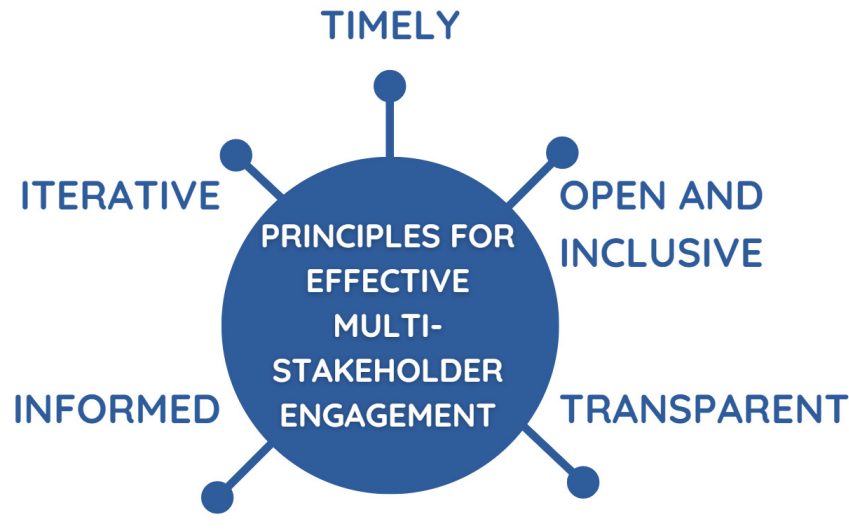
1.2 The “Red Thread” in the Consultation Process

In planning and organizing the national consultation, Cooperation Canada's “red thread” was managing the breadth and depth of conversations. This entailed on the one hand, presenting the broad and interconnected objectives of the Strategy, as agreed in earlier conversations with GAC and regional councils, and on the other hand, making space for deeper dives into and around the third IPS strategic objective. Successfully conducting the challenging exercise of managing breadth and depth required careful consideration of participants and diligent adherence to established principles of stakeholder engagement.

1.3 Principles of Engagement

In planning and organizing this public consultation, Cooperation Canada was mindful of following a principled approach, informed by ethical practices established in Canada¹ and internationally². Our approach is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Principles for effective multi-stakeholder engagement³



1.3.1 Timely

Abiding by the principle that effective multi-stakeholder engagement must be timely, we endeavored to engage early and initiated communication with key resource people as soon as contractual arrangements between GAC and Cooperation Canada were finalized in November 2023. This allowed stakeholders reasonable time to plan and prepare for their engagement in the new year. The registration deadline was extended to account for the holiday break and gradual return to work.

1.3.2 Open and Inclusive

Cooperation Canada is aware that openness does not equate inclusivity. Reasonable efforts were made to ensure the presence and participation of people and groups that rarely can engage with each other, i.e., international development CSOs, business associations, diplomatic community, etc. Adopting a bilingual and hybrid format for event allowed participants to connect online and in-person.

1 Ontario Council for International Cooperation, OCIC (2022). Ethical Principles for Public Engagement Practice. https://ocic.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/PRFPE_F.pdf

2 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN DESA (2019). Multi-stakeholder engagement in 2030 Agenda implementation: A review of Voluntary National Review Reports (2016-2019). <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26012VNRStakeholdersResearch.pdf>

3 British Columbia Council for International Cooperation, BCCIC, and Canadian Council for International Cooperation, CCIC (2019). Effective multi-stakeholder engagement to realize the 2030 Agenda. Good Practice in 2030 Agenda Implementation Series. https://www.bccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Effective_Engagement_International.pdf

1.3.3 Transparent and Informed

Multi-stakeholder engagement should be transparent, so we ensured that information was shared as clearly and widely as possible, in French and English, despite the tight time frame. All participants received an information package outlining, in addition to logistical information, background information on the IPS, the event agenda and objectives, biographies of the speakers, and guiding questions for group discussions. After the event, all registered participants were asked to complete a feedback survey.

1.3.4 Iterative

Effective multi-stakeholder engagement should be iterative, so this national event serves as launch pad for subsequent regional roundtables. The plenary segment was recorded to be shared with the provincial councils, in preparation for their respective consultation events. This report will also be shared with them to allow for complementarity and more in-depth engagement.

1.4 Limitations and Challenges

1.4.1 Scope

Given the complexity of the IPS, it was difficult to go beyond the surface in one event. There is an obvious need to establish an ongoing consultation process with regular planned touch points with engaged stakeholders. This would allow unpacking the interconnected strategic objectives with the depth that each warrants in ways that introductory consultations can hardly achieve.

1.4.2 Representation

Beyond civil society, efforts were made to engage the business community, foreign and security policy experts, and development practitioners for this event. It must be noted other important groups, including those representing Indigenous Peoples and diaspora groups, were not part of this consultation.

1.4.3 Timeline

Ideally, a public consultation would have taken place while the strategy was under development to allow the different interests and concerns to be incorporated. Also, the consultation occurred after the close of the window for CSO proposal submissions.

1.4.4 Location

The venue had several constraints related to accessibility, security, time management, and internet access.

2. Consultation Highlights

2.1 Opening Remarks

Kate Higgins, CEO of Cooperation Canada, welcomed the participants, reminding them of the acute and chronic nature of global challenges affecting Canada and people in Canada. From climate change to the erosion of democracy, to heightened global insecurity, to global economic uncertainty, Canada's future is inextricably linked with the rest of the world's – including the Indo-Pacific region. Ms. Higgins emphasized that Cooperation Canada's members have long-standing partnerships with communities across the Indo-Pacific region. Working with partners, they are at the forefront of implementing the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), providing humanitarian assistance in times of natural disasters and conflict, providing opportunities for sustainable and inclusive economic development, and defending and promoting democracy and human rights.

In his keynote remarks, Christopher MacLennan, Deputy Minister of International Development at Global Affairs Canada, acknowledged the many traditional territories that host the offices of GAC across the country, including offices in the National Capital Region located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people. Deputy Minister MacLennan stressed that the ten-year Indo-Pacific Strategy was a timely demonstration of Canada seeking to “up its game” in the region across diverse sectors because of the importance of the Indo-Pacific region to Canada and Canadians.

Deputy Minister MacLennan stressed that reducing poverty and generating economic growth are central to the IPS, but also to the FIAP. The \$2.5 billion allocated for the first five years of the IPS touch on 24 distinct initiatives across 17 federal departments and agencies. One such initiative includes a \$30million funding envelop aimed at strengthening civil society and democratic spaces in the Indo-Pacific. Global Affairs Canada is currently reviewing concept notes submitted by Canadian organizations in response to this call.

2.2 Panel Discussion

Odette McCarthy, Executive Director of Equitas and member of Cooperation Canada's Board of Directors, introduced the panel discussion as an opportunity to engage with topics that are not often brought together in the same conversation, and to hear critical perspectives about the five strategic interconnected objectives.

Vincent Rigby, Slater Family Professor of Practice at Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University, shared thoughts on peace and security, commended the strategy's ambition and financial commitment, but expressed concerns about Canada's ability to sustain military presence in the region and ramp up substantial resources to match its ambition. Noting that though Canada's “hard power” capabilities may not guarantee a seat at important tables such as the Aukus Alliance and the Quad diplomatic partnership, Mr. Rigby highlighted the opportunity for Canada to leverage its “soft power” capability in areas like cybersecurity and intelligence research. Overall, he is hopeful that the \$2.3 billion is a downpayment that will be followed by more strategic investments in the future. For Mr. Rigby, the IPS might be a turning point in sustained engagement in the region, but “it needs to have meat on the bone,” which starts by sorting out and making effective key relationships with countries like China and India. Mr. Rigby expressed concerns about

the coherence of the IPS vis-a-vis the rest of Canada's foreign policy and other regional engagement policies. He noted the opportunity to build on the IPS as a foundation during the first five years, expanding the people-to-people connections with soft capabilities including through capacity building, leveraging work on the Women Peace and Security agenda, and action against gender-based violence, for example.

Trevor Kennedy, Vice President, Trade and International Policy, Business Council Canada, spoke to the second IPS strategic objective to expand trade, investment, and supply chain resilience, and stressed the opportunities that the Indo-Pacific region offers for Canadian businesses. Both geopolitical risks and climate change increase the vulnerability of global supply chains. Canada's ambitious trade strategy is gradually being rolled out with bilateral and regional trade agreements with Indonesia, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and joint trade missions to several countries. Canadian stakeholders, and business actors in particular, have with the IPS the opportunity to show regional actors that Canada is in the region to stay. Economic security and energy transition are both central concerns for businesses and government and Canada has a lot to offer to the Indo-Pacific region, in terms of capital (e.g., through pension funds), resources and technology (e.g., Canadian liquefied natural gas, hydrogen, nuclear energy and small modular reactors, and critical minerals). There is a strong business case for engaging in the Indo-Pacific region as Canada offers stability and security. Canada needs to maintain policy consistency in its engagement. Business Council Canada members see an important role in the IPS implementation for Indigenous-led businesses, especially in natural resources management.

Representing ASEAN Diplomats in Canada, Dr. Quynh Tran, Head of Trade Office at the Embassy of Vietnam welcomed the IPS as a symbol of Canada's return to the region. The IPS is an important step for Canada, though it was acknowledged that it was released after the ASEAN's Indo-Pacific strategy. A dominant trait among ASEAN countries is solidarity over competition in a period of increased polarization. Dr. Tran presented important connections between human rights, corporate accountability, and environmental sustainability, all important considerations for Canadian and ASEAN companies that are gradually expanding their interests, moving from real estate and natural resources to electronic equipment, automobile, and energy transition technology. Moreover, West-East railroads offer opportunities for ASEAN corporations to expand throughout North America. ASEAN corporations realize the need for sector diversification to maintain strong supply chains. Resilience should not be the dominant paradigm anymore. Indeed, market size is essential for small and medium-sized enterprises to thrive, so cooperation is essential.

A solidarity perspective was brought by Emrul Hasan, Vice President, Global Programs, CARE Canada, who stressed that the complex geopolitical context in the Indo-Pacific region is reflected in the interconnected strategic objectives of the IPS. He emphasized the need to move from interconnectedness to integration of priorities such as human rights and gender equality and articulate these as cross-cutting priorities throughout the IPS, rather than stand-alone dimensions. Regarding sustainability, he welcomed the engagement of business actors in sustainability conversations and climate action. Observing how CSOs foster connections and partnerships between people, Mr. Hasan reminded the audience that economic development is not necessarily synonym of social development. The FIAP is grounded in gender equality and human dignity, and these important principles and outcomes are not well understood by the business community. The IPS challenge is to foster and articulate conversations across these themes.

Speaking mainly to the fifth strategic objective of the IPS - Canada as an active and engaged partner to the Indo-Pacific - Dr. A.W. Lee, Director of Inclusive International Trade at the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, shared some directions that the Foundation is taking to pitch Canada as an opportunity for Indo-Pacific countries, including through enhanced presence in the region (in Singapore specifically). The Foundation is actively working to demonstrate the pool of resources available in Canada along several axes such as education and business. Dr. Lee admitted that Canada had a branding issue in Asia as it is perceived as a modest provider of development aid (with contracted aid over the years) and more of a resource economy (forest products, etc.) This narrative needs to be reshaped to present Canada as a hub for innovation and technology, especially for high-growth countries in the region. The Women Business Mission initiative, led by the Asia Pacific Foundation, contributes to showcasing Canada's value proposition for shared prosperity and dignity, providing an opportunity for collaboration, respect, and shared dignity. This aligns with the vision of many Southeast Asian countries having difficult colonial histories.

There is room for growth on both sides of the Pacific when it comes to people-to-people relationships. National opinion polls provide longitudinal data showing that the public opinion in Canada is dominated by observations on the meteoric rise of China, though this has in recent years been counterbalanced across diverse segments of the Canadian public, based on age, ethnicity, etc. For example, younger generations are more interested in culture while older generations are more into geopolitics. Also, negative sentiments towards specific Asian countries are not uniform across Canada. The Asia Pacific Foundation cultivates interest in the region through education and professional programs. The multi-pronged approach of the IPS creates a robust network and foundation for sustained diplomatic and economic relationships, provided that the \$2.3 billion commitment is a downpayment. Dr. Lee also shared that, since 2018, the Asia Pacific Foundation has been supporting Canadian women entrepreneurs to explore new markets in Asia and find interconnected opportunities through GAC's women entrepreneurs ecosystem strategy. This helps address the gender gap and the low rate of female entrepreneurship, fostering women's empowerment, and facilitating engagement with civil society, academia, and businesses.

Representatives from the Equality Fund, Jacqueline Ovens and Beatriz Gonzalez, provided remarks on the intersections between the FIAP and the IPS, highlighting human rights, gender equality, and economic and social development. Because social movements and civil society play a huge role in advocating for social development, including by enabling democratic and civic space, women's empowerment, and inclusive governance, there is a need to sustain support for human rights based work and civil society in the region. For its part, the Equality Fund aims to be a large funder in support of gender equality, and to champion gender-lens investing. In practice, this involves increasing access to finance for women (e.g., loans, microfinance), scaling services and products that have a disproportionate impact on gender equality (e.g., energy, water, food), and targeting investments toward systemic inequality (e.g., governance). It is essential to raise awareness about gender equality and gender-lens investing among investment practitioners and financial partners. Canada is well positioned to centre human rights and gender analysis in any regional strategy, including the IPS.

2.3 Deeper Dives into Strategic Objective # 3: Investing In and Connecting People

Following the rich and insightful panel discussion, participants had the opportunity to focus on the third IPS strategic objective, *Investing in and connecting people*. Participants approached this theme in small groups, which allowed for more focused conversations and deeper dives into the linkages between this strategic objective and the other four IPS objectives (*Peace and security, Trade and investment, Sustainability and a green future, and Active and engaged partnership*). In this regard, each group started from the broad question: How can the IPS concretely foster investing in and connecting people?

Each group addressed the broad question from the perspective of one strategic objective to reflect the interconnections in the Strategy and unpack it further using additional prompting questions shared with facilitators and participants ahead of the consultation. The main insights from the thematic discussion groups are presented below in aggregate form (organized by question).

2.3.1 What is working well in the people-to-people relationships between Canada and Indo-Pacific countries?

Existing connections

Connections have been built between Canada and the Indo-Pacific region across several generations through trade relationships (involving free trade agreements, small and medium enterprises, women's trade missions, and diverse exports), but also diaspora connections, technology transfer, education exchanges, and civil society initiatives. Those connections reveal the dynamism of civil society actors and wealth of human resources in Indo-Pacific countries.

There are also existing partnerships around development, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and disaster management. Those partnerships have led to Canadian NGOs setting up warehouses and fleets in India and the Philippines, initiatives supporting exports from the Indo-Pacific region towards Canada through norm compliance, and unification of cooperatives, among other things.

Canada's respected reputation in the Indo-Pacific region

There is in the Indo-Pacific region a general positive bias toward Canada, thanks to good relationships already established with countries like Vietnam and Indonesia, as well as interest in Canadian markets, and experience in entrepreneurship, crops, and exports.

2.3.2 What and where are the pressure points, challenges, and areas of tension?

Lack of coherence

Participants expressed concerns about the lack of coherence between the IPS, the FIAP, and trade promotion and private sector strategies. The IPS does not pay sufficient attention to issues of workers' rights (especially in the garment industry), democratic backsliding, and the role of free and fair media in many places in the region. The IPS seems to be heavily driven by trade and economic interests, as signalled by the significant funding allocation to FinDev compared to international assistance funding for civil society.

The lack of coherence can be seen from the angle of imbalance between the ambitious IPS vision, and the relatively nominal international assistance funding envelop for several countries in the region. Further, despite having peace and security as a strategic objective, the IPS provides limited funding and support for peace-inducing processes.

There is also an apparent inconsistency in Canada's efforts and leadership on climate change, especially regarding cooperation with Small Islands States, and climate finance flows available to support these significant challenges.

False solutions and unintended consequences

The IPS seems to emphasize commercial ties and false sustainability solutions with little attention to issues of inequality, inclusion, human and children's rights, gender-based violence, environmental degradation, and accountability. It is essential to acknowledge that there are instances where Canada's trade and business sector is extractive, with little economic benefit brought to local communities.

While the strategy aims to strengthen Canada's international student program with permanent residence and job opportunities for students from the Indo-Pacific region to attract highly skilled workers to Canada, Canada needs to consider the brain drain in Indo-Pacific countries as an unintended consequence.

Colonial approach

Participants noted the persistence of a colonial and lopsided approach to cooperation, with only Canada sending experts to the Indo-Pacific region. In the meantime, Indo-Pacific partners are facing visa restrictions and visas can take up to 700 days to be obtained, which makes it difficult for businesses to consider Canadian trade. Further, not only is there limited funding allocated for Canadian CSOs to work in the Indo-Pacific region, but there are also few opportunities for organizations from the region to be supported, including through funding, to bring their own strategies to the table.

Attention needs to be placed on language, prejudice, and bias, given the growing racial prejudice and racism that hinders connections between people. It is important to acknowledge the socio-cultural diversity of the Indo-Pacific region and understand that human right principles expressed from a Canadian perspective may hinder organizations (private or non-government) that operate in the region. It is also essential to refrain from dictating and promoting a specific Western type of democracy when there are indigenous models of democracy that do not make it into the discussion. While Canada is one of the places that is humble enough to recognize that there are challenges domestically in our country (i.e., it isn't a perfectly functioning democracy), it needs to recognize that the global order favors the West.

What Can be Done to Address the Challenges?

This question elicited from participants suggestions about possible mitigation measures that could be taken in the short (one to two years), medium (two to five), and long term (beyond five years).

Short Term

Establish Canada's profile in the Indo-Pacific

- Establish a stronger profile for Canada to stand out as a preferred partner. There are many interested parties courting the Indo-Pacific region, and some players, like Scandinavian countries, are making their value propositions very clear and not diluting their efforts.
- Consider appointing an Ombudsperson for the IPS implementation.
- Prioritize engagement with priority countries and areas of work for realistic implementation and to manage expectations on what can be achieved.

Promote inclusivity, equity, and reciprocity in IPS implementation

- Ensure robust localization practices, including by fostering Indigenous-led climate action, strengthening business development from the ground-up, strengthening women entrepreneurship and gender-lens investing in a way that maintains the integrity of women and girls as autonomous and capable agents (not just solely as receivers of development aid, but as already thriving entrepreneurs).
- Improve communication about the IPS, both among Canadian taxpayers to underscore the people-to-people connections and address anti-Asian racism, and in the IP region to present Canada as an engaged partner.
- Emphasize reciprocity in relationships for mutual learning and benefit (e.g., send over Indo-Pacific representatives/partners for every Canadian being sent over).
- Address the issue of cost for Indo-Pacific small and medium enterprises to access Canadian markets, especially for Indigenous groups, women and communities severely impacted by climate change.
- Position Indigenous and women's entrepreneurship, as well as climate change, as cross-cutting issues in the IPS.
- Develop and use indicators to measure implementation progress blending different factors related to all sectors.
- Bring together Canadian and global civil society partners, including diaspora communities in Canada, to profile their relationships and their competencies.
- Address travel restrictions and visa bottlenecks for visitors from the Indo-Pacific region, with a dedicated visa application stream for people attending events in Canada.

Medium Term

Promote and address human rights and gender equality

- Use the IPS to advance equality and human rights.
- Support Canadian women and small and medium entrepreneurs to develop relationships with Indo-Pacific markets.

Enhance partnerships across between Canada and the Indo-Pacific Region

- Improve travel between Indo-Pacific countries and Canada for cultural and academic exchange.
- Compare other countries' engagement in the Indo-Pacific region and how they implement their strategies.

- Raise awareness in Canada and in the Indo-Pacific region about the IPS, including opportunities on both sides, existing free trade agreements, opportunities for engaging the media and the public about available opportunities (e.g., Business Council of Canada members often work with the media to cover business events).

Long Term

Align foreign policy pillars

- Ensure coherence in foreign policy to maintain credibility in the Indo-Pacific region and use the IPS experience as an example for future Canadian strategies in other regions, and potentially for learning in the global community.
- Leverage Canada's reputation to facilitate inter-country and cross-cutting conversations (e.g., climate change, environment)
- Promote ethical labor practices by Canadian companies operating in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Encourage broad-based support on Canadian engagement on international development in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Earmark a portion of multilateral funding for civil society organizations operating in the Indo-Pacific region to make and emphasize connections between the IPS and the FIAP.

Build engagement to last

- Leverage and optimize diaspora remittances to the Indo-Pacific region, possibly with a government matching system (for example, learning from experiences between Quebec and Haiti).
- Embed long-term funding in the Strategy (over ten years instead of five).

What Key Points are Missing from the IPS?

Clarity

- Clarity on the overall IPS goal, and in particular on the goal and target of the third strategic objective on people-to-people connections. Specifically, which people-to-people connections is the IPS talking about?
- Clarity on the role of the private sector regarding partnerships and its responsibility to improve workers welfare, disaster risk reduction, climate action, etc.
- Clear approach to building solid relationships with India and China.

Coherence and interconnections

- Explicit linkage between development and trade and connection with the FIAP, with attention to human and youth rights, democracy and civic space protection, disability inclusion, sexual and gender-based violence, and gender equality.
- Intersectionality perspective.
- Emphasis on corporate responsibility, transparency, accountability, and reciprocity in cooperation.
- Explicit reference to reciprocity and bidirectional relationship between Canada and the Indo-Pacific region.
- Clear connections between peace, crises, and development.
- Investment in conflict prevention.

Collaboration with civil society writ large

- Meaningful funding allocation for civil society organizations.
- Reference to remittances from Indo-Pacific diasporas in Canada and action to improve food security.
- Reference to benefits from leveraging the experiences of diaspora communities in Canada and people in Indo-Pacific countries as a key element to better understand contextual specificities (e.g. Western states historically entered Mongolia to teach already successful women entrepreneurs how to be entrepreneurs in a country where the communist history had forged equality amongst men and women but led to males being less educated than women).

Monitoring approach

- Clear framework to monitor the IPS implementation.
- Explicit progress indicators on key items such as political participation, economic participation, gender equality and increased opportunity across societies.

What Will a Successfully Implemented IPS Look Like?

There are true partnerships

- Canada is seen as a committed and reliable partner in the region, with sustainable partnerships established between actors in Canada and Indo-Pacific countries.
- Locally-grounded initiatives are promoted, with support to grassroots initiatives and local communities over corporations.
- Trade relations are enhanced between Canada and the Indo-Pacific region, with increased trade volume, wealth and economic growth, and each country meaningfully advancing as a result.

There is policy coherence

- There is coherence and consistency between the IPS and the FIAP.
- The IPS embeds an intersectional and collaborative approach promoting soft power (over military interventions), human rights, and human security.
- The IPS is “politics-proof”, meaning that there is support for IPS implementation across Canadian political party lines and irrespective of the party in power.

There is transparency and meaningful participation

- There are regular consultations around the IPS (e.g., annual pulse checks), both bilaterally to promote more cooperation with individual countries (with country missions engaging with local partners) and regionally to leverage regional networks and expertise.
- There are consultations in-country with country experts, including local governments.
- There are mechanisms ensuring transparency, accountability, and longevity of partnerships.
- There are broadened exchange spaces for civil society, academic collaboration, knowledge transfer, and development practitioners.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Recommendations

The event participants had a lot to say about the articulations of the Strategy and ways to foster the meaningful implementation of the third IPS strategic objective, *Investing in and connecting people*, maintaining the linkages with the other four IPS strategic objectives related to peace and security, trade and investment, sustainability, and partnerships. Based on the discussion detailed above, we extracted key insights and organized them first as cross-cutting recommendations for implementation, then around the five strategic objectives.

3.1.1 Cross-cutting recommendations

Ensure the protection of human rights

In implementing the IPS, Canada should remain true to its commitment to human rights. This could mean appointing an Ombudsperson focused on the human rights implications of trade agreements and labor practices, for example. It also means integrating human rights into conversations on democracy, civic space, and media freedom, while being cognisant of sensitivities around the use of language focused on human rights.

Ensure policy coherence across foreign policy, trade and official development assistance in the region

Policy coherence should be central to Canada's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, and indeed the IPS experience could be used to inform Canadian strategies and approaches to policy coherence in other regions of the world. Canada's engagement in the region must involve enhanced coherence between Canada's foreign policy, official development assistance (anchored in the Feminist International Assistance Policy, FIAP), and private sector and trade promotion policies and strategies.

Build a learning orientation into IPS implementation

The government should maintain a learning orientation in the implementation of the IPS, including by comparing Canada's approach with other countries' engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, and developing indicators to measure progress on implementation.

3.1.2 Thematic Recommendations

• Peace and security: Expand efforts to ensure effective initiatives at the nexus of peace, humanitarian crises and development

The government should expand its efforts to design and fund effective initiatives at the nexus of peace, development, and humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific region, maintaining coherence across all Canada's foreign policy pillars to enhance stability and resilience in the region.

- **Trade and investment: Support market development with diverse partners**

Canada should support market development efforts in and between the Indo-Pacific and Canada, supporting diverse Canadian entrepreneurs (e.g., Indigenous, women, small and medium enterprises) in building networks in Indo-Pacific markets, profiling business opportunities in Canada for entrepreneurs from the region, and promoting ethical labor practices across the Indo-Pacific region.

- **Investing in and connecting people:**

- o **Advance equitable, contextually driven partnerships**

The Government of Canada should advance equitable partnerships that address colonial approaches to international cooperation, including by fostering Indigenous-led climate action, strengthening local business development from the ground-up, adopting gender lens investment strategies, and engaging in mutual education and exchange of expertise.

This requires urgently addressing travel restrictions and visa bottlenecks for visitors from the Indo-Pacific region and recognizing the great diversity of the Indo-Pacific region and avoiding “one-size-fits-all” approaches.

- o **Support civil society as active partners in IPS implementation**

It is essential to acknowledge and foster civil society’s role in connecting people. There is currently limited funding allocated for Canadian CSOs to work in the Indo-Pacific region, and very limited opportunities for organizations from the Indo-Pacific to be supported, including through funding, and to bring their own strategies to the table.

- **Sustainability: Demonstrate true commitment to climate leadership**

The IPS presents Canada with the opportunity to demonstrate leadership in the fight against climate change, making it a cross-cutting issue in the Strategy implementation. This could involve improving the understanding of nature-based Indigenous-led solutions, enhancing collaboration with Small Island States, and building strong allyship allowing for collective responses to climate emergencies.

- **Partnerships: Demonstrate Canada’s value proposition and priorities in the region**

Canada should further demonstrate its value proposition in the region by clarifying its priorities (by key countries and issues). The government should also reflect on how to ensure that Canada’s engagement in the region, including on international development is positioned for multi-partisan, consistent engagement in the region.

3.2 Next Steps

In her closing remarks, Patricia Peña, Assistant Deputy Minister for International Development Partnerships and Operations at GAC, restated the importance of partnerships for effectively delivering international assistance globally. This is an area where Canadian CSOs have demonstrated and continue to showcase excellence, integrity, and innovation. This is also why Cooperation Canada is committed to continue engaging with GAC on regional strategies and their alignment with Canada's feminist agenda. The rich conversation in the panel and groups highlighted the wealth of experience and connections that can be leveraged to ensure a successful IPS implementation and robust, long-standing, and mutually beneficial relationships between Canada and Indo-Pacific countries.

An immediate follow-up to the national consultation is the series of regional roundtables to be organized by the Inter-Council Network of Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. The above recommendations call for continued collaboration with the business sector to ensure that sustainable benefits are accrued for local communities from trade activities. In that regard, there are opportunities for Cooperation Canada and civil society to bring valuable insights to government agencies and industry associations engaging in the Indo-Pacific Region, e.g. FinDev, Export Development Canada and the Business Council of Canada.

Cooperation Canada is also well positioned to contribute to efforts by [Employment and Social Development Canada](#) to document and monitor how Canada is achieving Sustainable Development Goals abroad. Overlaying the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the IPS over the next five years is an opportunity to demonstrate Canada's global leadership and make concrete and meaning changes in people's lives.

Finally, as highlighted in the recommendations, there is significant work to be done to align, or demonstrate alignment between the IPS and FIAP. Building on its engagement with Women and Gender Equality Canada around the Commission on the Status of Women in recent years, and working with members with deep expertise in women's rights and gender equality, Cooperation Canada could facilitate conversations connecting the IPS with the FIAP, especially given the multiple 2025 milestones, including the sixty-ninth CSW session marking Beijing plus 30, the G7 Presidency, and the five-year countdown to the expiration of Agenda 2030.

About Cooperation Canada

Cooperation Canada brings together Canada's international development and humanitarian organizations and advocates for them by convening sector leaders, influencing policy and building capacity. Together, we work with partners both inside and outside Canada to build a world that's fair, safe and sustainable for all.

Land Acknowledgement

Cooperation Canada acknowledges the historical and ongoing oppression and colonization of all Indigenous Peoples, cultures, and lands in what we now know as Canada. The land on which Cooperation Canada's office is located is the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabe People. We believe that social justice in Canada and globally depends on reconciliation with all Indigenous peoples, including the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, who are the original guardians of the land we are grateful to be sharing.