



FORTIFYING CANADA'S LEADERSHIP

Safeguarding and Advancing
Sexual and Reproductive
Health and Rights **Amidst**
Global Challenges

FUTURE PLANNING INITIATIVE REPORT ON THE
SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS
Strategic Convening October 2nd and 3rd, 2024



FUTURE PLANNING INITIATIVE

ADVOCATING FOR CANADIAN LEADERSHIP ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Fortifying Canada's Leadership: Safeguarding and Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Amidst Global Challenges

Future Planning Initiative Report on the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Strategic Convening
October 2nd and 3rd, 2024

Prepared by Lindsay Robinson

The Future Planning Initiative is a coalition of six Canadian civil society organizations working globally and domestically to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights. Member organizations include: Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health, Cooperation Canada, Inter Pares, Global Canada and Oxfam Canada.

As the preparer of this report, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights gratefully acknowledges the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin nation where Action Canada's central office is located and where this convening took place. Action Canada team members live, work, and organize on the unsurrendered and treaty territories of many Indigenous nations; nations who have, and continue to, steward the land known as Canada from time immemorial. It is vital that we center our work towards reproductive justice in reconciliation and decolonization.

Thank you to FPI members for the strategic leadership in bringing together this convening and to Brianna Parent Long as the lead organizer of the retreat, as well as to facilitators Nora Sheffe and Jane Van Ryn, and to the logistics support team of Ana Lara Zarco, Shejuti Farook and Quinn Lazemby, and to speakers, panelists, panel chairs and our volunteer breakout group leaders.

Thank you to Canadian and international organizations, UN agencies, and Global Affairs Canada for taking the time to attend this important event and for their excellent contributions.

This report presents recommendations emerging from discussions and presentations that occurred during the FPI Retreat on October 2nd and 3rd, 2024 and do not necessarily represent the views of all participants.

For more information, please contact: info@actioncanadashr.org

futureplanninginitiative.ca



BACKGROUND

The Future Planning Initiative (FPI) is a coalition of six Canadian civil society organizations (CSOs) committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) globally and domestically. Member organizations include Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health (CanWaCH), Cooperation Canada, Inter Pares, Global Canada, and Oxfam Canada.

The 7th FPI retreat convened key stakeholders from government, global health, human rights, feminist, and international development sectors to address pressing global challenges to SRHR and strategize for the future sustainability of our movements. This retreat aimed to achieve the following:

- » Take stock of the current status of Canada's SRHR commitments to uncover key challenges and opportunities for advancing SRHR both domestically and globally.
- » Develop actionable strategies and best practices to safeguard existing commitments, counter the influence of anti-rights movements, and champion a human rights-based approach to SRHR that reflects and incorporates diverse perspectives.

Spanning two days, the retreat offered a vital platform for collaboration, bringing together diverse stakeholders to find shared values and locate common goals to advance SRHR for all. Through workshops, interactive discussions, and knowledge-sharing, participants explored opportunities to strengthen accountability, address barriers to progress, and develop cohesive strategic interventions. This convening strengthened connections and promoted unity between stakeholders amidst growing polarization and global challenges. It reinforced collective efforts to solidify Canada's position as a global leader in SRHR and gender equality.

Against the backdrop of intensifying global challenges, participants embraced the retreat as an opportunity to anchor the discussion in a dual ethos of **hope** and **defiance**. Hope was positioned as the active, radical practice of reimagining the future, challenging existing limitations, and investing in transformative change. Defiance was expressed not as mere resistance, but as an enduring commitment to justice, solidarity, and protecting hard-won gains.

ICPD AT 30

A Milestone Marked by Mounting Opposition

The 2024 FPI retreat took place during the thirtieth anniversary year of the landmark 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), providing an opportunity to celebrate this pivotal moment in the global consensus on SRHR, human rights, and comprehensive healthcare. The ICPD Programme of Action (PoA), adopted by 179 governments, signaled a paradigm shift towards people-centered approaches that affirm sexual and reproductive health (SRH) are fundamental human rights.¹ Over the past three decades, the ICPD's vision has been reinforced in international legal frameworks, development policies, and health systems around the world. Comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) care has come to be recognized as critical not only for preventing unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and maternal deaths, but also for affirming the dignity and autonomy of all individuals² and actualizing a full range of social, political, civil, economic, and cultural rights.

Yet despite these advancements, global realization of SRHR remains profoundly uneven—and thirty years later is facing a resurgence of threats to the progress achieved. Participants at the retreat, reaffirmed that to uphold these rights, SRHR must be universally accessible, fully integrated into health systems, and delivered with quality, equity, and respect.³ Participants emphasized that while political mobilization and global consensus has been advanced in areas like maternal mortality, other core aspects of SRHR, such as abortion access, contraception and family planning, and comprehensive sexuality education, remain highly contested and increasingly targeted in global negotiations. Many people, especially women, girls, and marginalized communities continue to face entrenched barriers to accessing care, exercising autonomy, and living free from violence and discrimination.⁴ In this context, participants stressed the urgent need to defend the gains of the past 30 years and to confront these mounting threats with renewed political commitment, global solidarity, and collective action.

Rising Global Threats to SRHR

Global progress on SRHR is no longer merely stagnating, rather it is being actively rolled back. A convergence of crises, including the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of authoritarian regimes, deepening socio-economic inequalities, democratic erosion, and ongoing humanitarian emergencies, has created fertile ground for anti-rights, anti-gender, and anti-choice forces to reassert control over people's bodies, choices, and lives. These intersecting challenges threaten to unravel decades of hard-fought gains in global SRHR.

1 UNECE. (n.d.). *Population and development*. <https://unece.org/population/population-and-development>

2 Sully et al. (2020). *Adding it up: Investing in sexual and reproductive health 2019*. New York: Guttmacher Institute. <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/adding-it-up-investing-in-sexual-reproductive-health-2019>

3 World Health Organization. (2022). *Critical considerations and actions for achieving universal access to sexual and reproductive health in the context of universal health coverage through a primary health care approach*. Geneva: World Health Organization. <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/357614/9789240052659-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

4 Sully et al. (2020).

The 2022 reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States, ending over 50 years of constitutional protection for abortion, was a stark reminder that even deeply entrenched rights are vulnerable to political regression. However, the reversal of *Roe* was not isolated incident but reflect a broader, transnational backlash led by well-funded and strategically organized anti-rights movements. Similar retrenchments have occurred in all regions of the world. These anti-rights and anti-gender actors operate across borders, working to undermine SRHR and gender equality at national, regional, and global levels. These actors deploy increasingly sophisticated strategies, including increasingly a disruptive presence in multilateral spaces and appropriation of rights-based language to promote so-called “traditional values,” “family values,” “sovereignty,” and “freedom.” By exploiting disinformation, fearmongering, and moral panic, they seek to reframe public discourse and obstruct policy progress, casting SRHR as illegitimate, foreign, or threatening to social cohesion.

Compounding this ideological pushback is a troubling trend among donor countries that have reduced their official development assistance (ODA), particularly in areas related to gender equality and rights-based programming. For instance, the United Kingdom has cut SRHR funding by over 30%,⁵ and the Netherlands has announced €1 billion in cuts to its development budget over five years.⁶ These financial contractions are occurring alongside efforts to weaken key multilateral institutions. Funding reductions for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other global bodies have undermined their capacity to uphold human rights norms, monitor violations, and facilitate inclusive, coordinated action on SRHR. Participants warned that this erosion of multilateralism has allowed anti-rights actors to expand their influence with less scrutiny and fewer counterbalances. Civil society’s ability to hold governments accountable and to shape global SRHR agendas is being constrained, just as coordinated resistance is gaining momentum. In response, participants emphasized the need for urgent and strategic action. Canada, in particular, was called upon to leverage its influence to reinforce multilateral systems and ensure SRHR remains a core pillar of its international assistance, human rights, and foreign policy commitments.

Feminist advocates and UN experts alike have issued repeated warnings: this global backlash is not a temporary shift, but a sustained campaign that threatens to dismantle decades of progress. Even in countries with comparatively stable legal and political environments, the following lessons are clear:

SRHR gains are not irreversible. Even broadly supported SRHR frameworks can be dismantled under regressive political conditions.

Progress must be actively defended, and advocacy must remain continuous. Legal victories require ongoing vigilance, resourcing, and movement-building.

SRHR work requires bold, forward-looking vision. Defensive strategies alone are insufficient. Advancing a transformative, intersectional, and brave feminist SRHR agenda is essential in the face of coordinated resistance.

- 5 Guttmacher Institute. (2025, May). *Just numbers? The impact of UK international assistance for family planning and HIV, 2024*. <https://www.guttmacher.org/2025/05/just-numbers-impact-uk-international-assistance-family-planning-and-hiv-2024>
- 6 Government of the Netherlands. (2024, November 11). *First development budget cuts announced; overhaul of grants for NGOs*. <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2024/11/11/first-development-budget-cuts-announced-overhaul-of-grants-for-ngos>

Taking Stake of Canada's Commitments Amid Crisis

In the face of escalating global backlash and increasing threats to democratic governance, Canada has positioned itself as a global leader in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Central to this leadership is the Government of Canada's 10-Year Commitment to Global Health and Rights (10YC), launched in 2019. This commitment pledges \$1.4 billion annually by 2023, with \$700 million earmarked specifically for SRHR—a historic investment that has set a global benchmark for long-term, targeted funding in areas that are often underfunded, stigmatized, or politically contested.

What distinguishes Canada's SRHR approach is not merely the scale of investment, but the strategic prioritization of historically neglected areas, including:

1. Safe abortion and post-abortion care;
2. Comprehensive sexuality education;
3. Family planning and contraception;
4. SRHR advocacy and reform and;
5. Sexual and gender-based violence.

Participants affirmed that these priorities align with long-standing feminist demands and are essential to addressing structural inequities in access to care and advancing rights-based, people-centered global health systems. Canada's domestic model of integrating abortion into its broader public healthcare system was repeatedly cited as a powerful example that Canada should actively advance in its global SRHR advocacy. However, participants also stressed that strong policy commitments must be matched by effective implementation and system-level accountability.

Operationalizing the 10YC

While participants celebrated the commitments under the 10YC, concerns were raised around the accessibility, transparency, and effectiveness of Canada's funding practices. They stressed that global leadership must not only be evaluated by the scale of investment, but by how those funds are distributed, tracked, and used to create transformative change.

Participants called for fostering of SRHR champions across departments and political parties who can sustain political momentum and navigate shifting policy landscapes. They also emphasized the importance of transparent and detailed public reporting. Currently, the lack of disaggregated data, especially in the five neglected areas, limits the ability of advocates and implementing organizations to evaluate progress, identify gaps, and ensure accountability. Operational challenges were also highlighted as major barriers to effective implementation, including:

- » Prolonged delays in finalizing contribution agreements;
- » Compressed project timelines that limit meaningful implementation;
- » Rigid compliance and reporting requirements, particularly onerous for smaller organizations and;
- » A lack of core, flexible, or unrestricted funding that would enable organizations to respond adaptively to community needs.

One organization shared a particularly illustrative example: after waiting over a year for a GAC-funded contribution agreement to be finalized, they were expected to deliver a three-year project in just two years. Such constraints not only jeopardize the quality of service delivery, but also strain partnerships, reduce impact, and erode trust between funders and implementers. Participants emphasized the urgent need for predictable, long-term, and flexible funding, as essential for sustaining meaningful SRHR progress. At the same time, participants acknowledged that GAC's shift toward seven-year funding models represents a meaningful and sustainable improvement in addressing these long-standing challenges.

Participants also underscored that grassroots and community-based organizations, which are often best equipped to deliver culturally grounded and locally relevant SRHR programming, are disproportionately burdened by these administrative hurdles. Lacking the institutional infrastructure to absorb funding delays or adapt to shifting timelines, these organizations are especially vulnerable to the consequences of disruption, underfunding, and procedural complexity.

Participants voiced concern that smaller, under-resourced organizations, particularly those from the Global South, remain sidelined in global spaces despite bringing crucial local knowledge and lived experience. For Canada to lead meaningfully on SRHR, participants argued, it must use its diplomatic and funding influence to support inclusive, accessible, and well-resourced civil society participation. This includes fostering equitable power dynamics, amplifying marginalized voices, and aligning domestic and international commitments to advance reproductive justice globally.

Moreover, participants expressed concern about a growing disconnect: while governments increasingly rely on civil society to fill service gaps and lead political advocacy, they are not sufficiently resourcing or protecting these same organizations—particularly amid escalating threats from anti-rights actors. Participants underscored that civil society organizations must not be viewed solely as implementers; they are frontline rights defenders whose long-term sustainability is essential to the resilience and success of SRHR movements.

Developing actionable strategies and best practices to safeguard SRHR

Understandings the Landscape

Participants reminded each other that institutions are not static, they are built and continuously reshaped through collective action. In this context, CSOs play a crucial role not just in holding power to account, but in actively reimagining and influencing institutional frameworks toward greater justice and equity. To do so effectively, Canadian CSOs must deepen their engagement with both domestic and international political systems, identifying strategic levers of change across all levels. A clear consensus emerged on the need to shift focus from short-term policy wins toward long-term institutional transformation. Participants stressed that building sustainable progress requires advocacy strategies that are proactive, not reactive, and that foster accountability beyond one administration or party.

To this end, participants warned against the risks of siloed advocacy, whether by issue, sector, or political affiliation. Isolated approaches weaken movement resilience and make it easier for opposition forces to divide and marginalize progressive agendas. Instead, participants called for deliberate cross-movement solidarity and the building of cross-party political support for SRHR. Gender equality, they noted, is often strategically targeted by anti-rights actors as an entry point to roll back a broader range of rights, including SRHR, LGBTQIA+ rights, sex workers' rights, and racial justice. As such, SRHR advocacy must be firmly grounded in a broader human rights framework and reaffirmed as an indivisible right that is deeply interconnected with healthcare, education, climate justice, humanitarian action, and economic equity.

Participants also emphasized the need for the SRHR sector to become more effective in articulating and measuring its impact. There was a strong call for improved communication of advocacy outcomes and programmatic effectiveness across diverse policy arenas. In particular, participants encouraged engagement in underutilized or overlooked policy spaces where SRHR priorities can be advanced through unexpected channels. One key example raised was advocacy around Canada's support for initiatives like the Global Tax Treaty, which could have far-reaching implications for enhancing fiscal space and investment in health and social systems in the Global South.

Engagement with donors was also identified as a vital area for improvement. Participants urged CSOs to be bolder and more candid in their assessments of practices that are and are not working. Representatives from Global Affairs Canada echoed this, encouraging organizations to maintain strategic consistency rather than shifting priorities solely in response to political fluctuations. Participants, in turn, stressed that effective donor engagement should include calls for more flexible, equitable, and locally driven funding practices that better support transformative change on the ground.

Reclaiming the Narrative and Building Shared Vision

In an increasingly hostile and polarized global environment, participants emphasized the urgent need to highlight shared values through compelling, unified narratives. Throughout the retreat, participants engaged in dialogue to map areas of sectoral convergence, identifying shared language and values that could serve as the foundation for more ambitious collective goals. These points of alignment, they agreed, are critical not only for strengthening coalitions but also for expanding the reach and impact of SRHR advocacy across diverse communities and political contexts.

A central concern raised was the growing influence of anti-rights movements and their deliberate manipulation of human rights discourse. These actors increasingly co-opt the language of rights to manufacture false dichotomies of framing SRHR as being in conflict with economic development, cultural authenticity, or national sovereignty. This strategic reframing undermines public trust in democratic institutions, weakens multilateral systems, and fractures collective support for SRHR. While anti-rights actors are often loud and strategically organized, participants noted that they do not represent the majority. Their power lies in amplifying public disillusionment and distrust, not in presenting viable or widely supported alternatives. To counter this, participants called for the SRHR sector frame SRHR not as niche or divisive, but as foundational to human dignity, thriving communities, and sustainable development.

Participants stressed the importance of reclaiming narrative control through intentional, values-driven engagement. Constantly responding and reacting to misinformation and moral panic, rather than expressing our values and goals, risks reinforcing opposition frames and exhausting limited movement resources. Instead, participants called for a strategic reorientation that prioritizes coherence, alignment, and a bold, forward-looking vision. As one participant put it, this moment demands not fear and anger, but hope and defiance. Despite the growing influence of opposition forces, participants expressed optimism that the movement can withstand backlash, particularly with the support of sustained government partnerships and solidarity across civil society.

To build momentum, participants emphasized that public engagement must be more than a communications tactic. It must be a strategic tool for rebuilding public trust and holding governments accountable. Meaningful engagement requires tailored, values-driven messaging, empathetic dialogue, and a commitment to connecting with audiences across ideological divides. Reaching beyond the echo chamber is essential to counter disillusionment, foster mutual understanding, and show that international assistance contributes to strong, inclusive social protection systems that benefit all communities.

Cultivating Sector Wide Collaboration and Relationships

Participants emphasized that the FPI marked a significant shift in how SRHR is approached across the sector. For many, the convening provided a rare and valuable space to connect across organizational mandates, values, and priorities, disrupting the sector's longstanding tendencies toward fragmentation, competition, and siloed work. While participants welcomed this opportunity for open dialogue and collective strategy-building, they also made clear that dialogue alone is not enough. There was a strong and shared desire, particularly among Canadian CSOs, to build more meaningful, sustained, and intentional alliances, coalitions, and collaborative spaces.

Participants acknowledged that the current fragmentation of the sector has led to unnecessary redundancies, programming gaps, and missed opportunities for coordinated advocacy. Many reflected on past political challenges in which the SRHR movement lacked the "connective tissue" necessary to respond quickly and with a unified voice. They emphasized that collaboration must go beyond symbolic partnership: it requires coordination, shared responsibility, and trust. One participant noted that effective advocacy does not mean every organization is doing everything, rather it means leveraging one another's strengths strategically. To avoid repeating past mistakes, participants called for the development of a collective action plan that maps out complementary roles, identifies shared priorities, potential advocacy spaces, and guides coordinated responses to emerging threats. Crucially, participants noted that strong relationships, especially those with Global South Partners require time, care, and resources to build and sustain. Yet too often, this work is underfunded or deprioritized. Equally important is ensuring that these relationships reflect equitable power dynamics.

Despite these challenges, there was a strong sense of optimism in the room. Participants agreed that complete alignment on values or tactics is not necessary for effective collaboration or coalition-building. What matters most is a shared long-term vision and common goals that can unite diverse actors in collective action. Participants called on the sector to remain focused on this common goal, to seek out unconventional partnerships and new entry points, and to embrace collaboration as an essential strategy for building a stronger, more resilient movement.

MOVING FORWARD

In the face of mounting global threats and renewed momentum within the SRHR sector, participants identified the following priority actions as essential next steps to strengthen Canada's global leadership and advance civil society strategy:

- » Collaborate with cross-party and cross-departmental champions to sustain political momentum and position SRHR as a non-partisan priority, firmly rooted in Canada's longstanding foreign policy commitments.
- » Advance a whole-of-government approach that embeds SRHR across foreign policy, development assistance, and public health strategies.
- » Publicly celebrate and build upon the progress made under the 10-Year Commitment, reaffirming Canada's role as a global SRHR leader.
- » Move beyond reactionary advocacy by developing bold, values-driven messaging that frames SRHR as foundational to thriving communities, human rights, health equity, and human dignity.
- » Prioritize equitable partnerships that center local expertise and leadership, ensuring grassroots and smaller organizations have access to advocacy spaces and dedicated funding streams.
- » Advocate for simplified and accelerated funding mechanisms to reduce administrative burdens and enable timely, adaptive support for community-based and under-resourced organizations.
- » Support local knowledge production, including community-led data systems and evidence generation from Global South partners.
- » Build cross-sector alliances, including with climate, education, and economic justice movements, to amplify the intersectional impacts of SRHR.
- » Establish consistent coordination mechanisms (e.g., monthly convenings) to align strategies, foster collaboration, and minimize duplication across the SRHR sector.
- » Explore the establishment of a funders' forum on SRHR to shift donor practices toward long-term, flexible, and trust-based funding that values local leadership.
- » Promote creative, inclusive approaches to impact measurement that reflect community-defined outcomes and demonstrate the broader success of SRHR advocacy and programming.

