



GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS PLUS: **RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT FOR** **EQUITABLE OUTCOMES**

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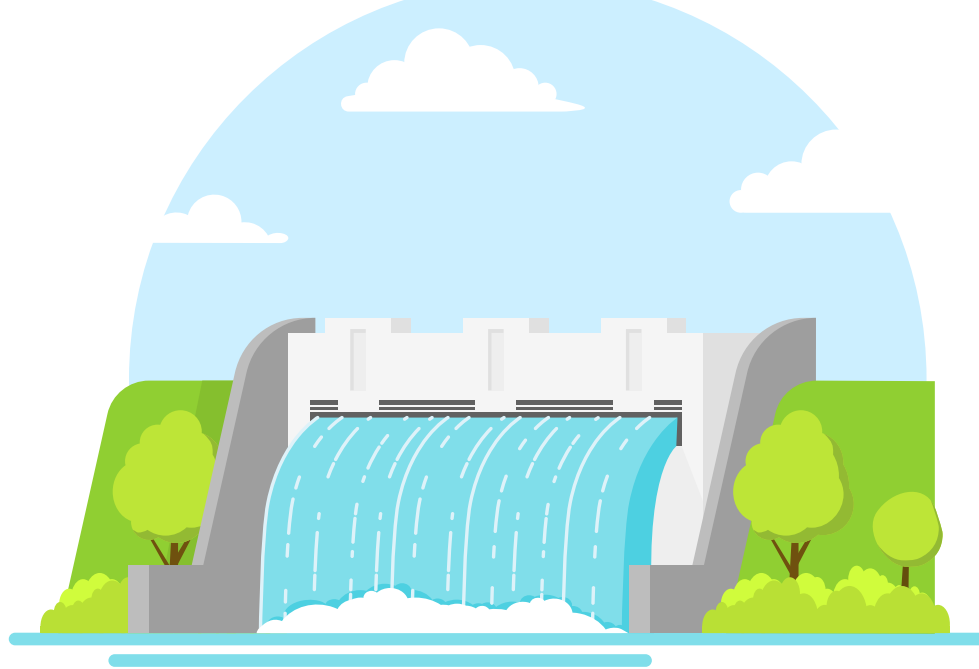
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I INTRODUCTION

Natural resource and industrial development projects do not affect people equally. While projects like mines, pipelines and dams can create jobs and other economic benefits, they also often pose serious environmental, social, cultural, safety and health risks. Decision-makers talk of ‘balancing’ projects’ impacts and benefits, but effects are rarely equitably distributed among individuals, groups or communities. History has taught us that marginalized groups disproportionately bear the burden of resource and industrial development while also facing greater barriers to accessing the perks that may flow from it. Communities who are in closest proximity to resource projects usually face the greatest impacts, and the benefits may be concentrated among certain populations, such as those in higher income brackets and who are located in major cities. In this way, development can reinforce inequities rather than help address them.

For example, a mine in northern Canada may cut off access to harvesting grounds for Indigenous women, and introduce girls, young women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people in the area to heightened risk of sexualized violence. At the same time, most of the jobs may go to non-Indigenous men from cities

and towns hundreds or thousands of kilometres away. Likewise, a hydroelectric dam might flood fishing grounds and result in heightened methylmercury levels in fish, predominantly impeding pregnant or breastfeeding women’s ability to rely on fish as a traditional food source, while mainly benefiting ratepayers in major urban centres on the other side of the province.

There are also considerable impacts of natural resource development on men and masculinities, ranging from the impacts of “[rigger culture](#)” (a culture of hyper-masculinity, sexism and intolerance associated with oil rig worker camps) to the loss of traditional roles, such as hunting practices, with the onset of cumulative impacts and habitat loss.

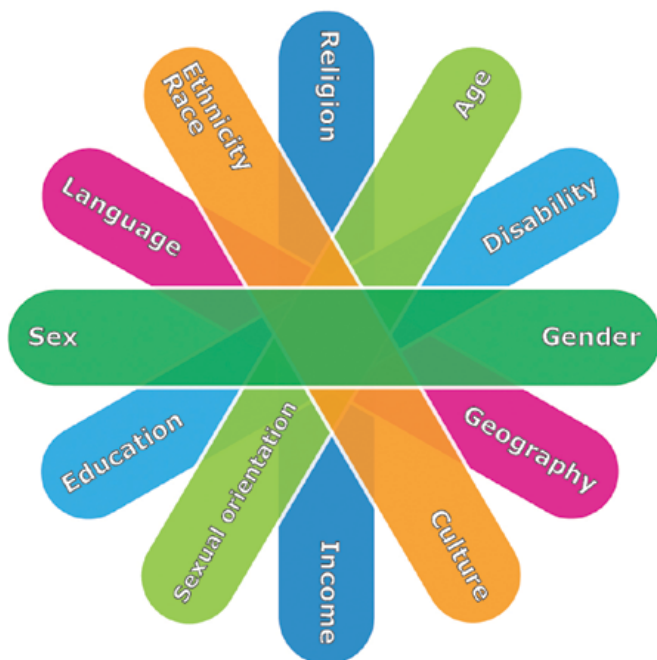
To help identify and address these inequalities, in 2019 the Canadian government introduced a new requirement to consider the “intersection of sex and gender with other identity factors” in impact assessment and energy project reviews under the [Impact Assessment Act](#) (IAA) and [Canadian Energy Regulator Act](#) (CERA). When these laws were first introduced, the provisions respecting sex, gender and other identity factors generated much attention

and some confusion (and in some cases, [outright sexism](#)). While the IAA and CERA are the first assessment and regulatory review laws in Canada to enshrine such specific language respecting the need to consider impacts along intersectional identity lines, gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) is hardly new to Canadian decision-making.

Canada first introduced a gender-based analysis lens in 1995. While it did not apply to impact assessments, federal departments did [commit to applying gender-based analysis](#) to inform the development of legislation and policies. That commitment to gender-based analysis was renewed in 2015, when it was expanded to gender-based analysis plus.

A GBA+ lens is highly relevant to impact assessment and other decision-making processes but remains poorly understood and lacks effective implementation in Canada. This information booklet unpacks what GBA+ is, why it matters, and good practices for incorporating it into impact assessment and review processes. Intended for impact assessment participants, communities, governments and proponents, it offers an introduction to the practice of GBA+ analysis and provides resources for more in-depth explorations into how to effectively apply a GBA+ lens.

GBA+ is a tool for assessing how intersecting identity factors, including gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability impact how policies, plans, programs and decisions are experienced.



◆ This figure illustrates some of the factors which can intersect with sex and gender. Source: Government of Canada, [Policy on Gender-Based Analysis Plus: Applying an Intersectional Approach to Foster Inclusion and Address Inequities](#)

WHY IS GBA+ IMPORTANT?

GBA+ is intersectional because it is a way of looking at the distribution of impacts, benefits, risks and uncertainties along various identity lines, including how those effects relate and can be compounded. While an impact assessment focuses on project and cumulative effects, GBA+ must also take into account underlying systems that create and reproduce inequities in society to understand how a specific project may perpetuate these inequities, and what may be done to begin to undo them. In other words, GBA+ looks at how intersecting identities correspond to how people are affected by development and policy differently, and how those impacts can be reinforced and entrenched over time. Not specific to examining women's issues, GBA+ looks at other identity attributes, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and age, that reside outside of gender-specific analyses. It also pays particular attention to broader social structures and systems of power that shape people's experiences in different circumstances, including sexism, masculinities, colonization, racism, ableism, ageism and various social institutions (e.g., justice, health, education).

GBA+ should be applied in any decision-making process, but impact assessment is particularly well-suited to not just considering, but also addressing the distribution of effects. As a planning tool, impact assessment identifies alternative approaches to a particular proposal, as well as alternatives to carrying it out (such as not proceeding with the project). Adjustments to project aspects like timing, location and design can help mitigate or avoid negative impacts and enhance access to benefits for key groups. Done right, impact assessment also allows for deeper and ongoing engagement than regulatory reviews, meaning more opportunities to identify

the desired distribution of impacts and benefits. Through assessments, proponents and authorities can work with communities and groups to develop safeguards and enhance access to opportunities, while communities may have more control over information-gathering and analysis, building trust in the process.

As a result, GBA+ can lead to better, fairer projects that have greater social buy-in and help undo societal inequities. Of course, GBA+ in impact assessment and regulatory reviews is not a panacea. Some issues are too deeply embedded in societal structures for a single project to meaningfully address. Additionally, all decisions entail trade-offs, including among how different alternatives may help or harm people along identity lines. Regardless, it is crucial that GBA+ begins to inform decision-making now and into the future, and transparency will be key to identifying what the trade-offs are, any unacceptable trade-offs, how decisions are made, and residual impacts and issues that remain to be addressed outside of assessment processes.



I HOW PROJECTS AFFECT PEOPLE DIFFERENTLY

Violence

Particularly in remote communities, projects can significantly heighten the risk of violence towards women and marginalized groups, especially when development results in sudden large influxes of (mostly male) workforces. That fact is well-documented in Canada, including by the [National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#), [Northern Health and the Provincial Health Services Authority of BC](#), the [Manitoba Clean Environment Commission](#), the [Firelight Group with Lake Babine Nation and Nak'azdli Whut'en](#), and the [Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network](#). Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited people particularly face increased sexual harassment, assault and domestic violence connected to industrial and natural resource development.

The requirement to consider GBA+ in impact assessment and regulatory reviews is an important opportunity to address these risks and avoid them, for example by siting work camps away from communities, making camps “dry camps,” intentionally addressing workplace culture, and implementing any other safeguards identified in assessment and review processes.

We call upon all resource-extraction and development industries to consider the safety and security of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, as well as their equitable benefit from development, at all stages of project planning, assessment, implementation, management, and monitoring.

—National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019, p.165).

Housing and cost of living

If proponents do not provide worker housing (such as in camps), sudden population influxes, especially in smaller communities, can place considerable strains on housing availability, leading to rising housing costs and reduced availability. Housing shortages disproportionately impact women, especially single mothers, and those impacts are compounded by other identity factors such as Indigeneity, racialization, disability and so on.

Additionally, housing insecurity exacerbates other risks, such as [risk of violence](#), and mental and physical health impacts. Rising housing costs can shut women out of the housing market, further entrenching economic inequities and reliance on rental units. Children are also particularly vulnerable to boom and bust cycles and resulting housing insecurity.



Of course, housing solutions need to be more nuanced than simply housing workers in a camp. As the [Firelight Group, Lake Babine Nation and Nak'azdli Whut'en](#) note, some workers may be Indigenous people returning to their communities, and the relationship between fly-in, fly-out projects and housing availability is not fully understood. Impact assessments must consider all angles and information and identify solutions that will work best for the communities impacted in the particular circumstances.

Health

There are multiple sources of potential impacts on health that might disproportionately impact women, and do so along other identity lines. BC Northern Health has identified fifteen [key social determinants of health](#) that can be impacted by natural resource extraction and development in northern and rural communities, including food security, pressure on health care systems, social relationships, mental health, sexual health (along with sex work and sex trafficking), and self-determination and self-governance.

For example, pollution, habitat loss and destruction resulting from industrial and natural resource

projects may create barriers to [hunting, fishing and harvesting](#), which can disproportionately impact Indigenous women. Additionally, influxes of workers strain health care facilities, and boom and bust cycles make it difficult to recruit and retain health care workers. Reduced access to health care services not only disproportionately impacts women, but as Northern Health notes, it can also seriously impact the elderly.

In-migration related to industry projects can increase the number of individuals that are drawn into sex work in small communities near mines, pipelines and other developments. This has largely been attributed to the influx of hundreds to thousands of temporary workers who are often young, male, and single, have high disposable incomes, and spend long stretches of time in isolated camp settings.

—Aalhus et al. (2019, p. 25)

It is also well documented that those population influxes, typically predominantly of men, negatively affect women's and 2SLGBTQIA+ people's sexual health. Increases in sexually transmitted infections, sexual assault, and teen pregnancy all rise in the context of natural resource development in Canada.

Additionally, rotational shift work can lead to mental health issues such as stress and loneliness for family members on both sides of the equation: workers may struggle with being separated from family and friends for weeks at a time, while partners and spouses bear the burden of single-parenting and maintaining households without consistent emotional and physical support.

Economic benefits and impacts

In addition to the number of jobs a project may provide, impact assessment should look at who those jobs might go to, and barriers to diverse and under-represented populations' ability to access those jobs. For example, lack of childcare; absence of safe and secure facilities such as change rooms, showers and toilets; and workplace culture may prevent women or non-binary workers from obtaining or remaining

in industrial and natural resource jobs. Assessments should also look at whether jobs are permanent, skilled and well paid, and the [dissemination](#) of skilled versus unskilled, permanent versus temporary, and high versus low-wage jobs along gender and other identity lines.

But the economic implications of natural resource development and other projects are about more than just jobs. For example, the [Manitoba Commission](#) found that cumulative changes to the physical environment due to hydroelectric development in northern Manitoba dramatically transformed Indigenous communities' economies away from being self-supporting to dependent on transfer payments. Boom and bust cycles and rapidly-changing socio-economic roles and dynamics also [disproportionately affect women](#) in ways that are compounded by Indigeneity and other identity factors.



| MAKING GBA+ COUNT

Early and inclusive engagement

Ensuring the representation of diverse populations in impact assessments is key to ensuring inclusive engagement. At the earliest stages and throughout assessments, practitioners should identify and engage diverse populations within potentially affected communities. Engagement may include, but is not limited to, women's groups and organizations, men's health initiatives, Indigenous organizations, various age groups (youth, working-age, seniors and Elders), 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, people with disabilities and newcomers to Canada. Ensuring representation of diverse groups requires accessible and appropriate information and engagement activities that are held at appropriate times and in accessible places.

Accessible and appropriate information

When planning engagement activities, practitioners should try to use means of communication favoured by the target audience (e.g. radio, social media, print media). It is also important to consider who might not have access to certain communication tools, and how outreach can be tailored to reach the widest possible segment of the population. Local organizations, community centres and informal groups can provide guidance on how to widely circulate information to their memberships.

Ensuring that assessment and project information is easily accessible also means communicating in non-technical and inclusive language, including using gender-inclusive and culturally appropriate terminology and style. Therefore, in addition to all project information and assessment studies,

authorities and proponents should provide easily-understood summaries of key information. Information should also be translated into the languages spoken in the local and regional assessment areas, particularly for Indigenous communities or communities with high proportions of newcomers.

Appropriate timing and location for engagement activities

The day of the week, time of day, and season are important considerations for planning engagement activities. People working nine-to-five jobs may be most available during evenings and weekends. However, those in shift work, low-income or minimum wage positions, and those with parenting responsibilities—positions and responsibilities disproportionately taken up by women—may be less available at these times. Providing multiple opportunities for engagement at various times, as well as offering childcare services, can make engagement more accessible for these groups.

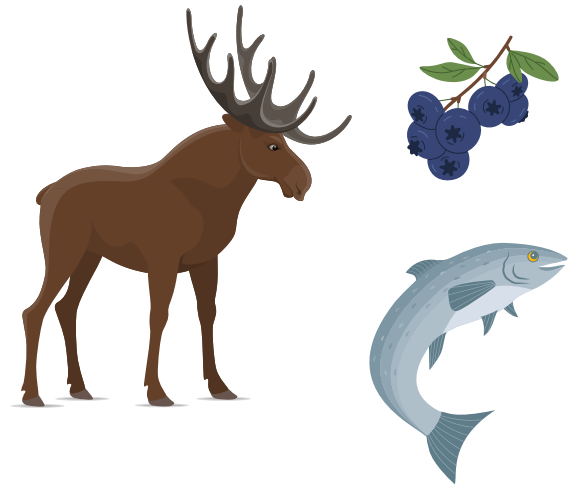
The time of year in which engagement activities occur should also be considered. People in many Indigenous communities, for example, participate in seasonal land-based activities, such as hunting, trapping, fishing, and berry picking, and may not be available during these periods. Such activities may also be gendered, with men and women participating in different activities at different times. These seasonal activities and timings differ from community to community, so key community contacts can provide guidance on how to adjust engagement timings to account for these.

It is important to ensure that the physical locations of engagement activities are accessible to diverse populations. Engagement is most accessible if opportunities are held in familiar spaces within communities or on the land. Those locations should be selected in consultation with target audiences, particularly when it comes to engaging Indigenous peoples. Ideally, locations will be accessible to specific groups, such as people with disabilities (e.g. wheelchair accessible) and people without personal transportation (e.g. held within low-income neighbourhoods or those with significant senior populations).

Respectful and culturally-safe engagement

While representation of diverse populations is an important factor for building inclusive engagement opportunities, it alone does not guarantee that diverse voices can meaningfully influence outcomes and decision-making. Impact assessment engagement processes may, for example, be implicitly built upon masculine and Western norms, resulting in the inadvertent exclusion of diverse knowledges, values, and experiences. It can also trigger traumas, such as intergenerational trauma experienced by many Indigenous peoples due to colonialism and racism, including the impacts of residential schools and ongoing land dispossession.

Truly inclusive engagement requires reflection on power dynamics, historical and contemporary inequalities, and actions that ensure diverse knowledges, values and experiences are viewed as valid and are meaningfully included in decision-making. In particular, it requires co-designing engagement processes and letting communities lead, especially when it comes to Indigenous communities. Ideally, engagement plans are developed in collaboration with rights-holders, stakeholders, and the public, ensuring that participants have an opportunity to



shape how dialogue takes place and set the terms of engagement. Some groups may prefer to be engaged through separate processes. For example, women may feel freer to actively participate in engagement discussions when only other women are present, and Indigenous women may feel freer to share their experiences and knowledge in spaces held exclusively for them. A [study](#) sponsored by the Canadian government recommends using respectful language to rebuild relationships, pointing to the need for further resources such as this to inform how to undertake intersectional and gender-sensitive engagement and reviews within impact assessment processes.

Impact assessment should look at a comprehensive range of locally-significant values that communities and the diverse groups within them wish to maintain, including potential cultural, emotional, mental, and spiritual impacts associated with the proposed project. Such impacts are experienced in diverse ways and assessing these more intangible potential impacts requires highly participatory qualitative methods (e.g., site visits, workshops, World Cafés, participatory mapping, sharing circles, arts-based methods, informal discussions, cups of tea and storytelling). The use of participatory methods can also reduce power imbalances between community members and assessment

practitioners and facilitate the co-production of knowledge. Designing and implementing inclusive and participatory engagement activities requires team members with GBA+, cultural safety, and qualitative research training and expertise.



CASE STUDY: NORTHMET COPPER-NICKEL MINE

An analysis of the environmental impact statement (EIS) and other public documents relating to the NorthMet copper-nickel mine impact assessment in Minnesota found that groups across intersections of gender, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status were differently (dis)advantaged by the structure of public engagement activities. In this case, the decision-making agencies invited written submissions and held public hearings for feedback on the draft EIS. The hearings were held in the evening and often a significant distance from potentially affected communities, including Indigenous communities. This meant that meetings were most physically accessible for those with nine-to-five work schedules, those without child-care responsibilities, and those with personal or work-provided transport (e.g., bus transportation provided by a construction workers' union). Due in part to these factors, the hearing audience was overwhelmingly middle-class, white and male.

Importantly, institutionalized norms embedded in the hearing structure also created difficult-to-see (dis)advantages for certain groups. According to the study's author, the hearing process relied on "masculine and bureaucratic norms of presenting fact-based arguments and evidence rather than political or moral claims. Thus, power operates through assumptions in the EIS process that risks can be objectively measured, quantified and minimized through technical means—assumptions resting on patriarchal and Western-scientific ideas" (p. 8). Three-minute opportunities to make short, fact-based statements to a panel of government officials and large audience favoured those comfortable in such spaces—a factor also influenced by race, class, gender, and education. Without taking such dynamics into account, engagement processes will miss important opportunities to meaningfully include diverse voices and consider a full range of potential risks and impacts within and across communities.

Community-led versus proponent-led assessments

Even where highly participatory approaches are applied, project-affected communities and the diverse groups within them often remain wary about the extent to which conventional assessment processes will meaningfully reflect their key concerns and priorities. Additionally, community members may not feel comfortable sharing sensitive information in proponent or government-led processes. As a result, practitioners should discuss with key groups whether community-led studies may be appropriate, and what supports or resources communities need to carry out those studies.

Community-led impact assessment is a suite of approaches that facilitate assessment by communities and typically occur outside of or in parallel to proponent-led processes. Community-led assessments can help realign power dynamics between project developers and communities, by relocating impact assessment within local decision-making structures and locally-significant values. These community-centred approaches can also enhance community confidence that assessment outcomes will reflect local priorities, and so potentially increase trust and participation in the assessment processes. Community-led assessment combined

with GBA+ may be more likely than conventional engagement and assessment processes to capture the ways in which a proposed project may impact diverse groups. Effectiveness will be further enhanced when such processes are directed by vulnerable groups. Where available, proponents should recognize and consider the findings of community-led assessment processes, with explicit attention to insights relevant to GBA+.

[Community-based impact assessment] and community-led consultations, which feature elements of—and can be further enhanced by—GBA+ and intersectional commitments, may help to address the persistent exclusion of often-invisible communities.

—Levac *et al.* (2021, p. 224)



Including Indigenous and community knowledges

The *Impact Assessment Act* requires assessments to consider Indigenous and community knowledge alongside Western science. Incorporating different ways of knowing into GBA+ considerations is critical to achieving a fulsome understanding of the underlying social, economic and health conditions of diverse groups, as well as potential project and cumulative impacts along identity lines. For example, the Public Health Agency of Canada's social and ecological determinants of health have been criticized for failing to reflect the influence of colonization on creating certain determinants, and for fundamental incompatibilities between the framing of ecological determinants and Indigenous world-views. Ensuring that GBA+ analyses are rooted in Indigenous and community knowledge systems as well as Western science can enrich the understanding of underlying vulnerabilities and how projects may compound or enrich those vulnerabilities.

Weaving GBA+ throughout impact assessment

Because projects' impacts, benefits and risks affect people differently, a GBA+ lens needs to be applied throughout the assessment rather than simply appended to it. As a result, the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada requires proponents to disaggregate data by sex, age, ethnicity and other identity factors, and to apply a GBA+ lens to each aspect of the impact statement. Also, as noted above, a GBA+ lens should look both at how impacts, benefits and risks are distributed along various identity lines, as well as how those effects intersect. As a result, a separate section summarizing all GBA+ findings, including interactive effects, should be included in impact statements and assessment reports. Findings are relevant throughout projects, well beyond the writing of an environmental impact statement, and might include independent monitoring processes.



Reviewing and analyzing information

Impact assessment requires more than simply information gathering. Ultimately, it is about analyzing and reviewing the information submitted by all parties, making informed decisions, and being transparent about trade-offs. Authorities like the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada and assessment review panels must draw conclusions about the information before them, and the IAA requires review panels to make recommendations to decision-makers. In turn, those decision-makers ultimately decide whether projects are in the public interest and if so, what conditions to attach to approvals.

Ideally, decision-makers would apply a transparent framework to decisions that is explicit about how decisions are made and how trade-offs are handled, including in implementable conditions that require regular monitoring follow-up. In the absence of federal guidance, practitioners should be explicit about how they have drawn their conclusions in applying a GBA+ lens. Decision-making frameworks should be developed in collaboration with Indigenous peoples and with the meaningful engagement of affected communities.

These frameworks should:



Clearly set out the assumptions, data and methods used



Abide by a code of ethics that respects relevant protocols



Explain the information and comments received



Identify clear goals, objectives and desires communicated by participants



Identify any trade-offs among these objectives



Identify risks, gaps and uncertainties



Respect data security and privacy issues

| CONCLUSION

The discourse surrounding natural resource and industrial development has long emphasized the notion of balancing benefits and impacts, including to promote sustainability. However, as illustrated throughout this guide, the reality is far more complex, particularly in dealing with issues related to GBA+. Marginalized communities consistently bear the brunt of natural resource development projects' adverse effects, facing heightened risks to their environment, safety, health and cultural integrity. Meanwhile, economic benefits often accrue unevenly, favouring certain populations while exacerbating existing inequalities and environmental racism.

In response to this entrenched pattern, the Canadian government's initiative to integrate gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) into impact assessments represents a crucial step towards addressing these disparities. Given the longstanding federal commitment to GBA and GBA+, this step forward is in many ways overdue. By acknowledging the intersecting identities and systemic structures that

shape individuals' experiences, GBA+ offers a holistic framework for evaluating project impacts and benefits. Moreover, it underscores the imperative of inclusive engagement processes, ensuring that diverse voices are not only heard but actively shape decision-making.

But to be effective, implementation of GBA+ demands ongoing commitment and collaboration across stakeholders. A barrier to meaningfully addressing gendered inequities, for issues that are sensitive such as racialized sexual violence, is that these conversations can be deemed "[too hard](#)." This guide is intended to promote transparent frameworks, informed by community input and Indigenous knowledge, as essential for navigating the complexities of project evaluation and decision-making. Through such concerted efforts, we can strive towards more equitable and sustainable development, where the burdens and benefits are shared more fairly among all members of society.



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