



# Expert Roundtable on Gender-based Analysis plus in Impact Assessment

## Meeting Report - Executive Summary

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The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency held an expert roundtable on the application of gender-based analysis to impact assessment on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The goal of this roundtable was to seek advice from individuals and organizations on the issue of gender-based analysis in the context of impact assessment. Participants were from a variety of sectors including non-governmental organizations, academia and Indigenous women's organizations. Each participant brought in-depth and unique experience in gender-based analysis, impact assessment or both.

The workshop objectives were: 1) to gather expert input on key or best practices for the application of gender-based analysis plus to impact assessment; 2) to gather expert input on tools, methods or approaches to applying gender-based analysis plus to impact assessment; 3) to hear from participant experiences with case studies or examples where gender-based analysis plus was applied to projects in Canada. The overarching goals linking these objectives was the synthesis of this information to inform the development of guidance to support individuals involved in impact assessment to apply gender-based analysis plus to understand and mitigate adverse impacts and enhance positive impacts of designated projects.

Participants described the key value of applying GBA+ was that this analysis leads to a more rigorous and accurate description of impacts and this information has the potential to be transformative and promote equity. Participants recognized that there were both barriers and facilitators to applying GBA+ to impact assessment. Participants described key elements for the successful application of GBA+ such as the broad expertise in Canada on these issues, existing tools and an environment that creates mandatory requirements for GBA+. Links with Indigenous knowledge was also viewed as a key to success to support richer analysis as was support for participants and the public to engage in the impact assessment process.

Participants described several barriers to the application of GBA+ in impact assessment such as the need for specific tools that were designed for impact assessment and the joint challenge that GBA+ related issues were not easily distilled into checklists and tools. Participants recommended shared learning around participatory processes, targeted guidance based on individual needs, relationship development, and valuing of diverse ways of knowing; however, trust

# Expert Roundtable on GBA+ in Impact Assessment

## Executive Summary

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was identified as a barrier to shared learning. Participants felt there was a lack of knowledge of Indigenous history and capacity to incorporate Indigenous knowledge within the current regulatory system. This substantial gap limits the meaningful application of GBA+ particularly as it relates to impacts to Indigenous women. The successful application of GBA+ requires a broad expansion of who is considered an “expert” and how to better incorporate marginalized voices. Participants also noted that it is important to involve community experts in GBA+ and provide adequate and comparable resources as provided to external experts.

### What we heard – Key Principles

The broad goal of the workshop was to discuss best practices for the application of GBA+ to impact assessment in order to support the development of guidance. In discussing methods, tools and case studies, participants began with a discussion of foundational principles upon which GBA+ analysis should be based. These principles focused on critical knowledge for understanding this type of analysis and approaches to completing the analysis:

- *Colonization as starting position for understanding impacts to Indigenous people*
- *Rights based: recognize legal frameworks*
- *Prioritize, Collect, Recognize and Value Indigenous knowledge*
- *Trauma-informed/Healing centered*
- *Inclusive*
- *Enabling Action*
- *Transparent*
- *Flexibility in approach*
- *Collaboration at all levels (government, community, proponents)*

### What we heard – Key Practices

Following from these principles the participants proposed key practices that were linked to methodologies of GBA+, feminist, and community-based participatory research.

- **Pursue Excellence:** Participants highlighted that GBA+ is an opportunity for proponents and people involved in impact assessment to be champions and leaders, to show their colleagues, other companies, and partners that this kind of analysis is making their projects more robust.

# Expert Roundtable on GBA+ in Impact Assessment

## Executive Summary

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- **Consider unintended impacts:** Participants described unintended negative impacts of mitigation strategies such as rotational work schedules and open community consultations. Participants encouraged the practice of asking critical questions about what possible risks to participating in engagement and consultation for women in communities may exist and the development of engagement and consultation processes are safe and ethical for all community members.
- **Recognize Indigenous specific context:** Participations centered issues related to Indigenous women throughout the day in recognition that many designated projects in Canada operate near or within Indigenous communities and consequently Indigenous women and communities are often adversely affected. Participants emphasized the need to recognize, value, and integrate Indigenous women’s knowledge in the impact assessment process. This recognition includes a foundational understanding of how colonialism adversely changed the structure of Indigenous nations and the role of women in Indigenous nations. Participants highlighted that there needs to be recognition that current harms are a perpetuation of a pattern of abuse going on since colonialism for Indigenous communities. While addressing the full scope of colonial impacts is beyond the control of one specific project, recognize that this is the foundation that affects many Indigenous communities. Additional key practices included employing a distinctions-based and not a pan-Indigenous approach; meaningfully include elders and youth; acknowledge that impact assessment is part of preserving land and culture.
- **Community focused:** Participants described community-led assessments as a key practice. Community-led assessments support the right of community members to participate in the process and acknowledge local expertise and provide opportunities to use this expertise. Community-based assessment would employ a strengths-based approach and would also include community monitoring of impacts. Community-led assessments should engage diverse community members and move beyond engaging only community leadership. Participants noted that financial support is needed to facilitate this type of engagement.
- **Allocate appropriate resources to enable diverse participation:** Participants noted that there was often a disparity in how participants were compensated as part of the impact assessment process. Consequently, collection of Indigenous knowledge from elders and other ways of knowing should be appropriately funded and participants compensated in ways that are comparable to western science experts. Participants recognized the wealth of Indigenous knowledge that already exists and suggested support for an Indigenous knowledge data center, as a centre of best practices. Participants also indicated that resources are needed to support community readiness. When an impact assessment process starts, often communities are not ready and the

# Expert Roundtable on GBA+ in Impact Assessment

## Executive Summary

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process can be overwhelming. Many communities have to quickly mobilize to respond to information requests and knowledge queries.

### What we heard – Priority Criteria

In support of developing specific guidance and requirements for individuals involved in impact assessment the participants discussed minimum requirements. Participants considered whether it was possible to outline a set of criteria that could be considered as the minimum required to complete a satisfactory GBA+. The participants did not think this was possible for two reasons. First, each project is context specific and the essential criteria may differ by setting. Second, participants indicated that a “gold standard” GBA+ would be rich and detailed, ambitious and would not seek to meet a minimum standard. Specifically, the group indicated that the GBA+ should seek excellence.

The discussion then focused on essential elements that should be considered in a good GBA+. These were not considered minimum criteria but priority criteria:

- Begin with the principle of “first do no harm”.
- Involve Indigenous women in every step of the process. Prioritize Indigenous women’s safety throughout the process.
- Use a culturally relevant GBA+ process that accounts for specific context of designated project (see Native Women’s Association of Canada<sup>1</sup>).
- Empower local women’s organizations or experts to conduct the GBA+ analysis. They are best positioned to have existing relationships with marginalized communities and the trust needed to bring forth their voices and concerns.
- Demonstrate that a community readiness assessment was completed and steps taken to support community capacity to meaningfully participate in process before process starts.
- Report on who is the most at risk in relation to the designated project; plan project to specifically mitigate this risk.
- Demonstrate that the information in the impact statement was validated with community members.

Throughout the discussion, participants spoke of case studies and examples from their own communities or experience

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<sup>1</sup> Native Women’s Association of Canada. (2007). Culturally relevant gender-based analysis: An issue paper. Cornerbrook, NL: Native Women’s Association of Canada. Retrieved 30 Sept 2018 from <https://www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2007-NWAC-Culturally-R>

# GBA+ in Impact Assessment

## Executive Summary

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that highlighted the importance of GBA+ in impact assessment. The participants indicated that if done well, GBA+ analysis can be transformative and lead to better projects.

### Next Steps

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency is using the lessons learned during this expert workshop to develop guidance and tools to support the application of GBA+ to impact assessment. The Agency appreciates the time and input of all the participants in supporting this work.