

**TITLE PAGE**

**Title:** “Sprinkle with Gender and Stir?” Gender-Based Analysis Plus in Canada

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## ABSTRACT

In the last decade, much debate has occurred at the international level regarding the innovation of Gender Mainstreaming (GM), its efficacy, and future utility. Similar discussions have taken place in Canada where GM has been operationalized in the form of Gender-Based Analysis (GBA). There is a push to learn from early GM efforts and a renewed focus on creating more responsive mainstreaming strategies. This paper examines and takes stock of a second generation of mainstreaming approaches (GBA+) to advance equity. It analyzes the rationale and processes for GBA+, assesses the strengths and limitations of mainstreaming approaches, and constructively critiques contemporary approaches to gendered policy development.

**Keywords:** Gender Mainstreaming; Canada; Gender Based Analysis Plus; Public Policy

## Introduction

In the last decade, much debate has occurred at the international level regarding the innovation of Gender Mainstreaming (GM), its efficacy, and future utility (Bacchi & Eveline, 2009; Bacchi, 2017; Bustelo, 2017; Cavaghan, 2017; Crespi, 2009; Hankivsky, 2008, 2013; Harcourt, 2016; Kantola, 2010; Lombardo et al., 2017; Mukhopadhyay, 2016; Walby, 2011; Zalewski, 2010). Similar discussions and critiques have taken place in Canada where GM has predominantly been operationalized in the form of Gender-Based Analysis (GBA). In all jurisdictions, including Canada, there has been a push to learn from early GM efforts and to develop and implement a second generation mainstreaming strategies that are more responsive to the needs of differently situated individuals and diverse groups of women and men.

This paper reports on a study that examines one such strategy in the Canadian context, Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+), an analytical tool that systematically integrates sex, gender, and factors of diversity into the policy development, planning and decision-making (Status of Women, 2016). The research included an analysis of academic, grey literature, and policy documents as well as 32 interviews with 44 key stakeholders in 2016. It focused on finding out the rationale for the development, as well as the strengths, and limitations of GBA+. The goal was to determine whether GBA+ is an improvement over GBA and specifically whether the addition of the “plus” is leading to more attention around issues of diversity. Importantly, the research was designed to reflect the expertise and lessons learned by those who shape and directly engage with and apply such strategies in their day to day work – policy actors, academic researchers and non-government organization representatives.

The findings of this study are consistent with earlier research on GBA (Hankivsky, 2005, 2008, 2013; McNutt, 2013; Paterson, 2010), as well as more recent studies examining GBA+ specifically, especially around barriers, shortcomings and necessary conditions for successful implementation (e.g., Manning et al., 2016; Paterson et al., 2016; Paterson & Scala, 2017) and the lack of influence of GBA+ in non-social policy sectors (e.g. Rochette, 2016). However, our research also generated important new findings – the pressing need to build greater conceptual clarity around GM approaches and tools in Canada, the difference that intersectionality can bring to understanding inequalities, the need for creating new avenues of knowledge exchange and to build new kinds of collaborations between the policy, academic and NGO sectors. Additionally,

it points to fundamental structural and cultural barriers that are more difficult to address, but critical to making meaningful advancements in the field. The evidence generated from this research is intended to lead to better and more efficient policy making in Canada. The knowledge is also intended to facilitate an exchange of information nationally and internationally among those who are researching, formalizing, implementing and evaluating innovative approaches to advancing equity in policy.

## Background

Gender mainstreaming (GM) is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Formally adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (United Nations, 1995), it illuminates the significance of gender as a central element of thinking and acting and recognizes its role in power relations and institutions. GM assumes that women and men are differentially affected by policies and aims to integrate such knowledge into all dimensions of decision-making. In Canada, gender mainstreaming has typically taken the form of gender-based analysis (GBA), and the central agency charged with its oversight is Status of Women Canada (SWC).

Since its inception, GBA has been critiqued by all sectors (Hankivsky, 2008, 2013; McNutt, 2010; NWAC, 2007, 2010; Paterson, 2010; Office of Auditor General of Canada (OAGC), 2009). In response, various government plans and recommendation have been put forward in efforts to improve GBA (OAGC, 2009; SWC, 2009). including for example, the 2009 *Departmental Action Plan on Gender-Based Analysis*, the 2012 *House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts Report*, and *Chapter 1: “Gender-Based Analysis” of the Spring 2009 Report of the Auditor General of Canada*, that contained recommendations, focused on challenge functions and evaluation by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Privy Council Office, and Department of Finance, aimed at strengthening the implementation of GBA.

In 2012 Canada introduced a new approach to gender mainstreaming, GBA+. The “plus” in GBA+ acknowledges that GBA goes beyond biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences (SWC, 2017). GBA+ is designed to consider many factors – in addition to gender - like race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability. It has been described as the federal government’s response to the growing diversity of Canada’s population and the need for an evolution in GBA that could address gender along with other identify factors for diverse groups of women and men, girls and boys (FEWO, 2016). GBA+ is a logical development as there is growing recognition that policies are not only biased on gender, but also for example, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality and geographic location (Bustelo, 2017; CRIAW, 2006; Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011; Hankivsky et al., 2012; Lombardo et al., 2017). Indeed, as SWC describes it, once an issue has undergone the GBA+ process, gender may emerge as the most important factor, while in other cases it might be any or a combination of factors that influence a person’s experience of a government policy, program or initiative (SWC, 2017).

Significantly, the plus in GBA+ is an explicit attempt to integrate intersectionality into gender-based analysis (SWC, 2015, 2017). Emerging from the fields of feminist theory and critical race theory, intersectionality is widely viewed as offering a robust method for understanding the significance of intersections of differences (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, age, sexuality, geographic location, ability) and how these result in complex experiences and policy needs

within and between groups in society (Corus et al., 2016; Hankivsky et al., 2011, 2012; Lopez & Gadsden, 2016). While definitions differ, one definition is as follows:

Intersectionality promotes an understanding of human beings as shaped by the interaction of different social locations (e.g., ‘race’/ethnicity, Indigeneity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, disability/ability, migration status, religion). These interactions occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (e.g., laws, policies, state governments and other political and economic unions, religious institutions, media). Through such processes, interdependent forms of privilege and oppression shaped by colonialism, imperialism, racism, homophobia, ableism and patriarchy are created (Hankivsky, 2014, p.2).

To help support its implementation, SWC hosts an annual GBA+ action week and has developed an online GBA+ training course entitled *Introduction to GBA+*. According to SWC (2017), from 2012-2016, over 6,000 federal employees from over 50 departments and agencies completed SWC’s online GBA+ training course.

Since the introduction of GBA+, a series of statements, reports and action plans have been put forward. For example, a Report of the Auditor General of Canada – *Implementing Gender-based Analysis*, released in February 2016, indicated the need to do more to fully implement GBA+ as a rigorous and comprehensive practice across government. A key recommendation was that Status of Women Canada, the Privy Council Office (PCO) and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) work with all federal departments and agencies to identify the barriers to implementing GBA+, and to periodically assess and report on progress. It further recommended that SWC assess the resources it needs to deliver on its GBA+ mandate. Further, the Government of Canada put in place a 2016-2020 Action Plan to enhance the implementation of GBA+ that will ensure decisions about federal policies, programs, and legislation advance gender equality (Status of Women, 2016). And, according to SWC’s most recent *2016–17 Report on Plans and Priorities*, the agency’s organizational priorities include “strengthening implementation” of GBA+.

Perhaps most significant is The Standing Committee on the Status of Women’s (FEWO) June 2016 report which concluded that despite the long history of work on the topic of GBA+, the federal government’s commitment to the implementation of GBA+ is far from being fulfilled and in particular, many previous recommendations have not been implemented. As a result, the commitment Canada made in Beijing to advance gender equality has not been fully realized (FEWO, 2016). The Report made a number of bold recommendations such as to introduce legislation that sets out obligations of federal departments and agencies with regard to the implementation of GBA+, including ensuring that GBA+ is a mandatory portion of PCO, TBS and Department of Finance submissions for all departments and agencies, and the establishment of an Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality. However, no clear action has been taken by the Government, despite a proposed deadline of June 2017.

## Methodology

The research utilized qualitative methods including review and analysis of key policy documents and academic literature and semi-structured interviews with representatives actively engaged in advancing gender equality from three sectors: government, academia and community. Ethics approval was obtained from Simon Fraser University. In some interviews, multiple representatives of an organisation or unit joined during one interview. In total 32 interviews with 44 experts were completed: 11 interviews with 22 government participants; 12 interviews academic participants, and 9 interviews with 10 participants from NGOs. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data was analyzed using a hybrid inductive and deductive approach, first generating key codes and then comparing those to existing literature to help refine or add themes in the interview data (Creswell, 2014). This iterative and reflexive process is designed to produce robust and rich research findings (Creswell, 2014).

## Results

### I. The more things change, the more they remain the same

On many levels, the data generated from the interviews and presented below, is congruent with research and reporting in Canada (e.g., Hankivsky, 2013; SWC, 2015) published prior to our interviews. Our new findings are congruent on what is required for equality promoting strategies such as GBA or GBA+ to be successfully implemented and to have meaningful effects on policy.

**Supportive political environment.** As evidenced from the following excerpts this includes policy champions at the highest levels of government, a supportive middle management, and buy-in among those who are tasked with implementation: *“political buy-in, it has to come from decision-makers, they have to care, but you also need capacity building – that is the bottom up approach”* (academic); *“I think definitely there needs to be a buy-in from leadership and that includes management and middle management”* (NGO); *“I mean from the very top, you know, putting a strong emphasis and value on gender equality, putting a strong emphasis on diversity, on inclusion is essential”* (policy sector); *“And we’re lucky because we have a Prime Minister that doesn’t fear talking about these issues, but I think we need more male champions”* (policy sector). Participants also emphasized the need for adequate financial and human resources to ensure the central importance of the work across government, including those with specialized GBA+ roles.

**Training and education.** Many participants mentioned SWC’s GBA+ online training course. In the words of one participant *“they have loved this online course...it has been instrumental in raising awareness and I was told last week that 10,000 bureaucrats have taken it, which is amazing because if you create a momentum you create a situation where people are able to talk about gender or at least reflect about gender”* (policy sector). Some participants explained the training had become mandatory in their departments and others talked about the fact that it was base learning to which they were trying to develop their own specialized foci: *“so what I’m looking into at this time is to be able to offer an e-session, which would be like an additional annex to Status of Women Canada training. So, we would do their training as the base course and then we’re developing our own module which would you know have... examples, how to apply GBA for different sectors of our work and we would do examples in our tools as well and give a bit of our context in that framing”* (policy sector). Others yet suggested “[Government]

*needs to have more discussion on the plus, including race and overarching class issues...*" (NGO sector). At the same time, a central theme that was repeated over and over is the need for ongoing coaching, mentoring, and follow up to truly create new knowledge and transformation.

**Strong evidence base.** Participants noted that to show the value added of GBA+ improvements around data are required: *"if you don't have the data then it's tough to generate evidence about understanding differences and then building on that question of if there are differences why are there differences (among subpopulations) and what can be done to address them?"* (policy sector); *"we need to have a kind of world in which we have reliable data that actually speaks meaningful to different perspectives, yeah, it's quite a challenge and I would say, we've got to come up with better and new ways of working on that front"* (policy sector). The comments around data are consistent with the reporting of numerous federal organizations to the Standing Committee in 2016 that a key barrier to performing GBA+ is a shortage or complete lack of relevant, reliable data disaggregated by gender and other identity factors (FEWO, 2016, p.30).

The majority of policy participants called for more success stories: *"This is a question we always get, 'okay, can you give me a concrete example of how integrating gender consideration has made a difference in how we've been approaching policy or program development or implementation?'... It's a big, big barrier - we struggle at the federal level to find meaningful examples,"* and *"I think something that we have identified as the need and you know, this came from the Auditor General and we recognize it ourselves is that we need to do better at telling the good news stories and you know actually finding those examples of where GBA really has shaped the output and has improved, programming has improved policy and that sort of thing... and I think if we can tell those stories more, if GBA+ works, and it's improving policy and programs I think that's going to be a huge step in keeping it going."* Improved efforts to share success stories with the goal of raising awareness among the general public, civil servants, departments, and political leaders has been a consistent theme in all review publications to date.

There is an overall impression that a handful of departments (e.g., Canadian Border Services, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, and National Resources Canada) are doing consistently well or innovating. Some policy analysts mentioned that while there are some good example in sectors such as immigration, Indigenous policy and especially the health sector, *"we have to go beyond that and I think this is where more work needs to be done."* Similarly, those outside of the bureaucracy observed that *"we need to bring it [GBA+] to science-based departments, finance-based departments, scientific types of departments"* (NGO sector).

**Accountability mechanisms.** Participants emphasized that GBA+ is generally not treated as a central component of policy analysis, and may be something done at the very end and often poorly. As one government policy analyst described: *"Now you know, everybody is always in a rush and you know, these [GBA+ analyses] weren't well done.... it wasn't quality work at all."* In the words of an NGO representative *"So there are no mechanisms in place to assure it happens, there are no mechanisms in place to ensure that anyone makes any decisions based on what happens. There are no mechanisms in place to check whether or not the policy after it's in place or programming was affected, so zero accountability and very little emotion, I would say."*

**Monitoring and evaluation.** Participants stated that more attention needs to be paid to how GBA+ is operationalized: “...it’s good for me to show people what I’m doing because nobody really sees it... So just to more formally track the GBAs and the influence they’re having on the policy development process...” (policy sector); “we need to be building really robust models for GBA+ in program and project evaluation” (academic sector). A number of government participants suggested that one of the most important evaluation levers could be realized through TBS. According to one participant: “...at least if it is part of how you think about evaluating and putting in place new policies and programs or new piece of legislation... you create some traction, and I think that if it’s built in the policy of this nature, which is you know a very important instrument, available to government, you also help train the next generation of evaluators” (policy sector).

**Status of Women Canada (SWC).** Participants shared a number of opinions about SWC, ranging from the name, ongoing marginalization, and SWC work on advancing gender equality: “It’s a bit of a dinosaur, even the name. Like it’s just a bit of a dinosaur, (academic sector)” and “a lot of people think that it’s a woman rights thing or you know, it’s about women’s issues and it’s not, but the fact that Status of Women Canada is the coordinator for this and the federal government, it kind of gives that impression, right” (NGO sector). Funding issues were also noted. For example, in the words of one academic researcher “They’re drastically underfunded, they have a ridiculous mandate for how little capacity they have” (academic sector). Others praised the work of SWC, despite the lack of financial and human resources and in particular, the “regular meetings of gender focal points across the government and it’s a great way to sort of learn about what other departments are doing, and how these are going. And we have committed in this department to do some of the things that other departments are doing” (policy sector).

Many NGOs, however, do not feel that SWC consults enough with community organizations as expressed in the following excerpts: “...it still feels to us like the grassroots expertise around gender mainstreaming and feminism isn’t making its way into the federal government in a kind of fulsome and easy way yet,” and “...this whole notion of gender-based analysis being applied across departments, and the idea that they didn’t consult with a single women’s organization just blows me away because they said when we’re consulting with academics and experts, and it’s like excuse me, but I’m an expert!” Indeed, over the last decade there has been a decrease in space for nongovernmental organisations to advocate to the government. This is described as a “technocratic turn” by Paterson et al. (2016), which favours bureaucratic expertise to monitor inequality, rather than participatory and consultative mechanisms. Recently, however, there is the beginnings of a re-emergence of attention to the importance of collaboration – at all stages of the policy cycle - between civil society and government departments and agencies, and in particular, to recognizing the valuable expertise and insights NGOs can offer in efforts to advance GBA+ (FEWO, 2016; Paterson et al., 2016).

And finally almost all participants within government, including the following two, discussed that need to delegate responsibility for GBA+ across government to take the pressure off SWC and to ensure systematic across the board implementation and compliance: “I would rather have experts from Social Development, Aboriginal Affairs, National Resources Canada do their own gender analysis or identify the right researchers who can support their work, because there is a limit I think in the one organization [SWC]”; and “I think that central agencies need to play a

*much more firmer role at when they see an MC or Treasury Board submission is coming forward and it didn't take into consideration possible gender impact... they should actually challenge the department and not have it go through."*

## **II. Shifts from GBA to GBA+**

### **Describing the Shift and Deciphering the Language**

When asked about the change from GBA to GBA+, just under half of participants (15/31 interviews) were able to describe or discuss in any detail the shift. This included half of the government and academic participants and one third from the NGO sector.

Of the most important findings of the study, however, pertains to how those working on advancing equality - across sectors - refer to existing approaches and tools. For example, over half (17/31 interviews) of all participants referred to "GBA" throughout their interviews, including the majority of government interviewees (10/11 interviews), despite the official move to GBA+ at the federal level in Canada. Even those working in government asked for clarification on what is meant by GBA+: *"Okay, so when you say GBA+ model, do you mean if we take into consideration the different groups of women and men, is that what you mean?"* This finding indicates that the shift, or rebranding has not fully taken hold within government itself.

For the other half of participants that used the term GBA+, most had a very clear sense of what this approach entailed and how it differed from GBA as demonstrated in the following quotes: *"To me GBA+ is a response to the inadequacies of gender-based analysis in that gender is not the only, it's a cross-cutting theme, but it's not the only identity marker that creates inequities or privileges"*(NGO sector); *"GBA+ is more of the intersectional approach... this awareness that there are other factors besides gender that interact with each other, so I think that would be the biggest difference"*(NGO sector); and GBA+ signals *".. that gender – it's not the only and it's not the most important but equally important to other factors"* (policy sector).

At the same time, in only 16/31 interviews was intersectionality described as part of GBA+. Here it is important to note that government participants had the lowest response rate of a) introducing intersectionality as a term of discussion during the interview and b) responding that it is a part of GBA+ (4/11 interviews) as compared to NGO participants (5/9 and 6/9 interviews respectively), and academic participants (6/11 interviews).

### **Inconsistency across departments**

Another key theme that emerged during the interviews is that currently, as one NGO representative put it, *"you've got different arms of government delivering similar yet different kinds of training, so how can there be a consistency or a uniformity of approach or results."* Others did not see a diversity of training programs as a problem but rather different approaches to reach the same goal: *"I think what different departments call different things, whether it's sex and gender-based analysis, gender and diversity analysis, diversity analysis and that's fine, I think the process we're describing is pretty much the same"* (policy sector). These findings are consistent with what was reported in the 2016 Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, namely that there is no consistency across federal departments and agencies with different terms and approaches being used (e.g. GBA+, GBA, or Sex and Gender-Based Analysis - SGBA).



Despite the differences, government representatives in particular, call for more knowledge sharing in order to better understand what other departments are doing and to learn from practices across various policy sectors. For example, one policy participant shared: *“I’d actually like to see a fair bit more effort put into developing the government-wide network so that we do share best practices more often, because we’re working in a little bit of isolation in this point in time on it. We do work closely with Status of Women but there are other departments that you know, if there were a little bit of a network I’m sure we could pick up some good ideas from them as well. And I know the international development world has a lot of lessons we can learn from, but we don’t tend to reach out to them because we’re doing our own stuff.”*

### **GBA+ a necessary or desired shift?**

More than 50% of the interview participants expressed that the shift to GBA+ was a positive development. A small number, as exemplified in the following, felt it was a significant change: *“GBA is not going to take that where we need to be, so yes, we definitely require the plus part of it to make it actually effective”* (academic sector); *“I actually think that it’s taken more seriously now because it is GBA+”* (policy sector); *“I actually think it’s a little bit of an evolution. We had to start somewhere and so starting with GBA made sense, but we’ve moved past that”* (policy sector); *“When you actually get down to solving the problem, that’s when the plus [in the GBA+] really helps you out”* (policy sector).

Some specifically noted that the focus on intersectionality within GBA+ is key to advancements: *“It seems to be incredibly difficult to work from looking at gender as your primary lens and then trying to get men onboard. I think that the shift to intersectionality opens up the possibility to include men in a much more substantive way and easier”* (academic sector); *“focusing on intersectionality...I think is actually a far more productive way of organizing one’s work”* (academic sector); *“I think for most people who are now starting to move in, even to manage positions, in directing positions, it’s not even, there’s no option not to be intersectional. It’s evolution that’s happening”* (NGO sector). One policy participant stated that integration of intersectionality had everything to do with interactions between government and academia: *“The discussions of intersectionality and probably that flow back and forth between academia and the government have definitely influenced the change to the plus.”* Those working in government often praise the shift but acknowledged the challenges *“I think that was important, Status of Women Canada added that plus thing because prior to that I don’t think people were thinking of it at all. And now they are but it’s still again tough.”*

The sentiment about GBA+ being a positive shift was not, however, shared by everyone. Whereas previously research showed that a barrier to GBA implementation was general assumption that gender pertains only to women, the response to GBA+ differs. The first concern is that GBA+ is too complex. This was described in the following ways: *“we were trying to get people comfortable with gender-based analysis and now we’re going to come up with a new, you know, a new label, a new term, you know. It will just be too confusing, you know, so let’s stick to it without a plus”* (academic sector); *“if gender based analysis already alienates people then how can we even bring in intersectionality”* (NGO sector). Others yet, expressed concern about intersectionality displacing gender or women as a primary focus of analysis. As one NGO representative lamented, *“I think it’s such a sad conversation when people still say “oh well, if*

*we focus on women then we can't focus on race...and things like that. It's just such a non-inclusive approach."*

### **Uncertainty about the impact and value of GBA+**

Concerns about the displacement of gender; however, appear somewhat unfounded if one considers what participants, especially those from academic and NGO sectors shared about their perceptions about the shift to GBA+: *"it seemed I think at the time like a bigger change that it actually was.....Not much has changed – it is still a gender primary approach"* (academic sector); *"It's very much a gender first approach with all of these other things [consideration of other factors] coming later"* (academic sector); *"the GBA+, like is still about gender, so the plus sort of got lost in translation"* (academic sector); *"I'm not sure it was a really significant shift from gender-based analysis"* (academic sector); and *"I'm curious to know, where they come together or don't, and what's sort of the differences are"* (academic sector); and, *"I'm fairly skeptical about the impact"* (NGO sector).

Importantly, the majority of government policy actors did not see any value of changing to GBA+ because they already felt that their GBA work explicitly paid attention to diversity: *"I think in a way it's a little bit hard to actually start to adopt GBA+ because why are we adding 'plus' when it's already part of it, we're already being there, and is already there... I don't think it did represent a seminal shift for us;"* *"it's always been for us, like in their training and everything, it's always been about, you know, the potential differential impact for women and men and the different group of women and men, even though we don't do that or haven't been using that branding, right;"* and *"when I think about sex and gender, I kind of always say well what about age, ethnicity and race? I think everyone recognizes that definitely needs to be considered."*

Many policy analysts, like the participant quoted below, view gender as a logical entry to diversity analysis: *"gender as a lens can be used to explore other societal cleavages, you know, other elements of diversity as well,"* and:

*We use gender as kind of the entry point for much of it and then kind of look at diverse groups and I think that's been a very strong addition to look at the plus side of that. But from a public policy perspective I think it's a very strong kind of entry point because I think it's much easier to kind of promote something that is very clear. I mean men and women have different needs, you can understand that and you know, increasingly we need to look at, you know, gender as not men versus women and that's something that's being considered, but you know, it kind of gives you a good entry point to understand the issue and then as you're kind of going through the analysis you can kind of see how different groups will have more differences, right, you know Indigenous versus you know, immigrant women versus, you know, other women (policy sector).*

### **Political Context**

The majority of participants (20 interviews) reported that the political context and change to a Liberal federal government in 2015 as critical for GBA+ and its future. Government participants were unanimous in this claim, with most stating that the government of the day sets the tone for support of this policy tool. Academic and non-profit participant opinions were mixed, with many

(10 interviews) responding that shift in government has not yet resulted in substantive change or are unconvinced that substantive change is possible in the current context.

Many participants described the challenges of doing equity advancing work under the Conservative government (2005-2015). During this time, different tactics needed to be used by those in government. For example, in the words of one policy analyst *“I have not actively used that term [GBA+] in any of our promotional work in the four years that I have been the GBA champion. What I have been very much advocating and we’ve put a lot of effort into is, as an evidence scientific-based department, what the evidence tells us about population sub-differences and what does it tell us about things that work to address those differences, whereas there is a policy choice that they are significant enough to do something about them. And so that’s a different entry point...”*

Participants also reported that funding was virtually eliminated for women’s organizations, especially in relation to advocacy and lobbying work. SWC regional offices were closed, the mandate of SWC was changed, the words “equality,” “advocacy,” and “action” were removed from the mandate of SWC. Importantly, academic participants stressed that points to government were systematically closed. NGOs became more adversarial and increasingly used different forms of media to transmit messages. In the words of one NGO participant: *“I think certainly for the last eight years we really sort of felt like we’re on the outside hammering to get in, and so that’s meant you know, in our work it’s meant taking a louder and more adversarial position... a louder, more adversarial position in our positions with the media, using the media kind of, and so like we’re on twitter, we’re on Facebook, we have a webpage, sort of using those as ways to raise Canadian consciousness...”*

And while the change to the Liberal government is still fairly recent, it is perceived positively by most if not all participants, and reflected in the following comments: *“the sitting government is finally open to having conversations about gender and intersectionality and different, social justice more generally, right, and that in itself is a huge leap”* (academic sector); *“gender matters for them [Liberal government] and gender is going to matter for the bureaucracy as well”* (academic sector). Government participants in particular noted that they see the government has made GBA+ a priority and is being signalled as a policy to be taken seriously, setting the tone for more meaningful action. For example, *“...You know with the new government... it’s a very strong message, and it is filtering, you know, across the media and down and around, so I think that’s good...;”* and *“...now we have a ‘C’ change, we have a new government that is saying all sorts of things about gender equity.... it’s a change in tone.”* Here, however, is worth noting that the change has not translated into a substantial budgetary increase. According to the 2016 Budget the agency will receive \$23.1 million over five years (FEWO, 2016) which is less for example, than its budget in 2006-2007 of \$24.6 million (FEWO, 2007).

An NGO representative made a very important point that one of the most important considerations for GBA+ work is understanding the full context – in which you are operating in:

*I think you need to understand the climate you’re operating in. I think you need to build relationships, I think you need to work cooperatively, whether that’s formally or informally, and if you do all those things it will be clear, you know, there will be moments when a window opens and you can do something and it can make a real impact. And*

*there will be moments when there is just no appetite or interest, even amongst your own partners, not just your own most obvious allies, it just might not be the moment. And so, I think that sensitivity to the climate in which people are operating both outside the government and inside the government [is important].*

## **Moving forward – reflections on previous recommendations and new directions**

### **I. Key prerequisites for successful implementation**

Study after study and report after report make similar recommendations of what is required for successful implementation – and this is similar for GBA+ as it was for GBA. Among the most important are making training and implementation mandatory across government, as was recommended in the FEMO 2016 Report. The fact remains that only 29 of approximately 110 federal organizations have officially committed to GBA+ through the *2009 Departmental Action Plan on Gender-Based Analysis* and at present, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is the only federal department that is required to conduct and report to Parliament on GBA+. Participants felt that such changes may be underway, as evidenced in the following policy participant quote: *“We are waiting for new marching orders...in terms of how we’re going to demonstrate better practices and better rigor around gender-based analysis.”* The fact remains that the June 2017 deadline proposed by FEMO for implementing legislative changes for example, has come and gone with no concrete action.

### **II. Clarify the difference between distinct approaches**

According to FEMO (2016), there is “widespread agreement...that the implementation of GBA, followed by a move to GBA+, has the potential for significant and positive impact on public policy in Canada” (p.6). In our research; however, the findings are somewhat more nuanced. First, there is a definite lack of clarity about the difference between GBA and GBA+ and in many cases a lack of conviction that there is anything distinctly positive about GBA+. Moreover, it is also clear that there is another approach promoted in the health sector – sex and gender based analysis (SGBA) which is distinct from both GBA and GBA+, but again, exact differences are not fully understood. Second, while GBA+ is intended to integrate intersectionality, it is not wholly consistent with an intersectionality approach. Intersectionality never prioritizes any one category before an analysis is undertaken. Thus, it is inconsistent with GBA+, which is a gender first approach even if it goes beyond gender to consider diverse intersecting identity factors. Prioritizing any one factor in analysis can limit the accuracy with which inequities are grasped across different populations (Hankivsky, 2005, 2013). Arguably then, distinct models generate specific modes of analyses and ultimately lead to different policy priorities and interventions (Bacchi, 2017; Hankivsky, 2012). A key message emerging from our research is that conceptual frameworks that are used in policy work really do matter but are not as well understood as they should be, even by those in the front lines of advancing equity.

### **III. Raising awareness about the value of intersectionality**

Elsewhere Hankivsky has proposed a post-GBA+ discussion (Hankivsky, 2013) that would primarily focus on intersectionality as a tool for advancing equality. However, in the words of a policy participant, there is a very purposeful reason for the GBA+, namely being able to stay grounded in GBA. As one policy participant explained: *“We didn’t want to change the language because it would have been confusing for some...and because the government had just tabled reports, like the Auditor General report...we needed to stick with the same terminology,*

*otherwise it's kind of you know, changing the model to achieve results...*” At the same time, there is some indication that extending an existing approach, e.g. GBA, may have undermined the full potential of the “plus” and specifically the attempt to integrate intersectionality. Elsewhere Manning et al. (2016) have made a similar conclusion that GBA+ has been largely unsuccessful in accounting for social inequalities. And this lack of effectiveness was also reported by the study participants who observed that even under GBA+ the most marginalized women are “*never part of the mainstream discussions*” (NGO sector); and referring to the present strategy, another participant argued that is a mainstreaming tool that does not “*promote intersectionality or diversity in any way*” (academic sector).

Explicit attention to intersectionality can have numerous benefits which need to be better exploited and translated across government. To begin, the intersectional nature of GBA+ can be “good marketing” because it counteracts the view that GBA+ is centred on only “women.” When the focus is only on gender and other identities are excluded in GBA+, “there can be a negative reaction and resistance among the general public and civil servants” (FEMO, 2016, p.16). Second, when policies are intersectionality-informed, they can be more flexible in terms of fitting a variety of contexts and more inclusive because they are better structured to respond to the myriad of social locations and structures that shape inequities (Hankivsky, 2013; Lombardo & Agustin, 2016). As one participant explained: “*...I always think about intersectionality, I don't ever think about gender by itself, because I can't, it does not approach a reflection of the truth*” (NGO sector). Third, intersectionality can direct policy makers to better account for unacknowledged biases and structural power relationships underlying the exclusion of marginalized groups (Manning et al., 2016) which is of crucial importance because “*hidden biases and those hidden systems are going to stay if you don't bring them out*” (academic sector). Finally, there is a cost effectiveness argument to be made in regards to more accurately being able to grasp the complexity of inequity more generally, succinctly summarized in the following: “*I really think it's a fundamental shift we need to make in policy, to use an intersectional approach, because everything would work better if we did. And you know government dollars would be spent better because they would have better results, because they would be inclusive instead of more silos*” (NGO sector).

#### **IV. Engaging Other Sectors and Creating Cross Sectoral Relationships**

Community representatives emphasize their unique insights and expertise in terms of understanding the experiences and needs of the most marginalized populations in Canada. Specifically, they also spoke directly about their expertise with intersectionality, challenging wide-spread notions that this approach is a highly complex, theoretical academic tool. To illustrate: “*CRIAW has been using intersectional feminist frameworks for as long as Status has been doing GBA, and you know, maybe they [Status] need to be asking people that are using it in communities,*” and “*What DAWN does, sort of on the fundamental level, intersectionality is exactly what we're about, I mean that's our raison d'être is intersectionality.*” The critiques of NGOs are in line with previous research that has shown that assumptions are made that expertise within the bureaucracy is the ideal means to achieve change, instead of external expertise (Paterson, 2010).

The study also revealed that much more attention needs to be paid to the critical importance of the academic sector in the work of GBA+, including programs that prepare students for

government work. For example, as one academic researcher argued, “So if it’s [GBA+] not imbedded in the university curriculum in terms of how we’re training people in either Masters or Public Administration or a Bachelor’s of Public Administration programs then you’re also signaling that it’s not an important part of how governments should operate, right?” The focus on the practical aspects of gender equality need not be confined to public administration or public policy programs. As one participant suggested, “But you know, you have this spread of women studies programs all across the Western world, and they’re not linked at all to the practice of gender equity. They spread out you know students that are, it’s entirely theoretical, and we need, you know, we need practitioners. We need people with knowhow on the ground, like urgently...” (NGO sector). These suggestions are congruent with others who have suggested similar foci in the discipline of political science (Mazur, 2016) and more recent recommendations in the FEWO Report 2016, that SWC, collaborate with public policy programs of post-secondary institutions to incorporate GBA+ training in regular curricula.

At the same time, participants emphasized that capacity within government also needs to be improved – beyond training, for example: “...you do need to have these shops, these gender-based analysis shops within departments where, you know, they can do research. They’re the ones who can actually know who’s doing research outside, which academics or scholars they can bring in, you know, to talk about certain things or to consult on certain issues and so on” (academic sector). This links directly to the point made by most participants that better relationships need to be forged between sectors: “It’s involving the community, it’s involving a target population, it’s building stronger relationships and linkages with community groups, academics. I think that is key, you know. It has social justice potential” (policy sector); “as far as what we understand about different groups of Canadians in different contexts, so that there is an opportunity...to better understand not only the nature of the differences but what could work for social justice” (policy sector).

Simultaneously, those in the community argued that creating such mechanisms needs to be supported by appropriate funding and support. As the following participant explained: “I think there really is this notion and so that, in terms of even integrating intersectionality and stuff is that you’re often sort of counting on community-based groups or initiatives...[For] the recognition of that, and it can’t just be recognition in you know, signing something. It has to be.... you know, we’re invited to meetings or things and we don’t, like we literally have to worry about, you know, [paying for lighting]” (NGO sector).

Regardless of what recommendations are suggested and even how well they are implemented, it is important to place into full context the extent to which one sector alone, and in this instance, government sector with its GBA+ policy strategy – can be relied on to make fundamental transformational changes to society especially around advancing equality. This is eloquently described by an academic participant in the following:

*But I also think that our expectations of mainstreaming are maybe inflated, right? It is after all just one tool, and we can’t expect bureaucrats, even if this was the most beautiful instrument that was applied rigorously and monitored and enforced it really is just one site at which we can deal with inequality and social justice, right? So, and you know that’s where you know the state feminism as a literature I think comes in handy because it*

*shows us so clearly that things can't just happened at the level of the policy agency or the bureaucracy, right? You need a thriving women's movement or social movement more generally (academic sector).*

## **Conclusion**

Experience with GM internationally shows that even with a change of government that is supportive and actively promotes the advancement of gender equality and social justice, one cannot stop actively working to advance GBA+, especially among those that may not see the need for such efforts. In the words of a policy sector participant:

*....we cannot let our vigilance drop on those issues and I think it's important that beyond those who are pretty eager and know about this stuff and are very engaged again, it is you tend to have two categories of people and two categories of bureaucrat, those who are very aware and know about this stuff and really want to contribute and they get it... and others who come at it with the sense of 'oh, we live in a pretty equal society and I have the same opportunities as anyone else in society,' and so the vigilance rocks when it comes to developing policies and programs and I think we have to watch for that (policy sector).*

Some participants went even further to suggest that one of the greatest impediments to GBA+ is the paradigm in which government operates and which needs to shift in order for equality to be prioritized. For example:

*Well you know, the only thing I could say, and I don't know what to do about this, but I think there needs to be a definite shift in culture. And again, it comes back to the issue of, you know, I have been involved in gender-based analysis on and off for a long time, like starting in the late 1990's, and I can tell you that when I came back to the file in 2010 I haven't seen a lot of advancement, right, from the early [days], like I was off of it for maybe 10 years, and I haven't seen a lot of advancement on the file. Whereas, you know, people really think that if, you know, that it's a women's thing, right, and so there really needs to be a lot more promotion, that's how I would – yeah, and I think that, you know, while our prime minister is a good example and he, and I think what he's doing is great, but I still think there's a lot of people out there who don't get it (policy sector).*

*I don't think it's just about the money, time, and resources. I think it's also about rethinking the way we do policy analysis within the bureaucracy... I think that if it was less about rules and tools and more about an overarching vision or commitment to equality, you might see changes and actual improvements... ” (academic sector).*

If one considers that after 20 years, the same issues are being discussed in terms of impediments and enablers to effectively implementing GM strategies continues in Canada, even under a government that actively promotes gender equality, and even with a prime minister that maintains his commitment to feminism, such observations are accurate. Reflecting on the failure of the current government to take action on the FEMO 2016 Report, MP Sheila Malcolmson stated the following upon moving that the report be concurred: “If the Liberals really did want to walk the talk, if they really wanted to put their words into action, they would cede to the committee and would want to return to the committee to discuss how to make a gender lens

apply to everything this Parliament does” (Open Parliament, 2017, np). This leaves the fundamental challenge of better understanding how to break down the most fundamental barriers to change and to ensure a culture in politics that is truly committed to moving beyond the status quo to achieve equality and social justice.

DRAFT DO NOT CITE



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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself, how you came to work in this field and in general your experience with GM and related strategies?
2. GM has been in existence as an internationally recognized policy for almost 20 years. How would you describe the development of this approach in your country? What have been important shifts and changes in how GM is conceptualized and applied?
3. In your opinion, what are the forces and influences that led to the development of a new approach to GM in Canada? I.e. integration of gender with other ‘protected characteristics’ in overall equality work
4. In what ways is it [the new strategy] different and/ or similar to earlier GM models?
5. Is the new modality an improvement on previous efforts (why or why not)? FOLLOW UP: What is the potential for the new approach to advance equity, and specifically to address gender as well as other intersecting factors) in the context of policy and politics?
6. What have been the key enablers and/or challenges to implementing the new strategy?
7. What success stories can you share with me in relation to the new GM strategy, especially in non-traditional (e.g., economics, technology, skills and trade) policy sectors?
8. What modifications may be necessary in order to improve the transformative potential of the current mainstreaming strategy?
9. What do you think are the most important mechanisms for influencing politics and policy in terms of advancing equality and social justice? FOLLOW UP: What do you think are the key strategies for making change at the individual and/or institutional levels in relation to advancing equality?
  - a) The way in which equality mainstreaming has not necessarily led to intersectional working/thinking?
  - b) The integration of equality and human rights – has the addition of the human rights agenda enabled or hindered the advancement of equality across gender/intersectionality?