Testimony before Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

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Good afternoon.

It is an honor to appear before this Committee to comment on the role of gender-based analysis plus in the policy process.

I am a Professor and Director of the Institute for Gender and the Economy at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management. In this role, I promote the use of rigorous academic research to inform policy and practice. To prepare for this testimony, I reviewed the scholarly literature as well as government audits and reports on GBA+.

I would like to start by emphasizing that the introduction of GBA+ into government policy analysis has been an essential step forward in assuring that policies, regulations and programs are advancing greater equity in Canadian society which has been further reinforced by the Canadian Gender Budgeting Act and the Gender Results Framework introduced in the 2018 Budget. Canadians can be proud that intersectional gender-based analysis is recognized by the Canadian government as a key competency in support of the development of effective programs and policies.

The promise of GBA+ is that it can not only measure and evaluate policy impacts but also inform policy priorities, shape policy and program design, and guide implementation. Yet, despite considered attention to GBA+, there continue to be opportunities for improvement as it has yet to achieve its promise.

My review of the literature and audits suggests that although GBA+ is supposed to be used across all government departments and agencies, it is inconsistently applied (with 40% of departments not having a formal GBA+ policy), and often used only late in policy design and evaluation. Only 39% of departments perform it at the critical problem definition stage more than 60% of the time. By only applying GBA+ late in the process, policy makers miss out on opportunities to use intersectional gender-based insights to identify policy priorities and shape policy design. Instead, GBA+ tends to be used to identify impacts after the priorities and policies are established and then to suggest some incremental modifications around the margins that could mitigate gendered, racial or other impacts. Thus, the true potential of GBA+ is missed.

Why might this be?

First, the staff charged with GBA+ may not have the skills or the time to use GBA+ in the most appropriate ways, and there is a lack of oversight and engagement by senior staff. While the government and the Canadian College have augmented training, tools and guidance since 2015, the capacity of departments to do GBA+ has still remained a challenge. Much of the training is focused on the technical and administrative processes for GBA+ such as how to fill out the appropriate forms for budget submissions but not on how to engage in GBA+ for policy prioritization and design. At the Institute for Gender and the Economy, we conducted a stakeholder analysis associated with the development of our own Gender Analytics training program and found that many people within the government did not have the knowledge about how to undertake GBA+.

Second, some of the challenge in assuring effective GBA+ is in the lack of quantified data. The collection of disaggregated data on diverse groups has been slow. However, getting better quantitative data will not automatically lead to better policy. Scholars who have studied GBA+ have pointed out that the current implementation of GBA+ does not include a process for a critical reading of policy or a consideration of how problems are defined. A focus only on numbers may divert attention from consultations with and support of feminist, community, Indigenous and social justice organizations who have originated—and are keepers of—GBA+ knowledge. It risks turning GBA+ into a seemingly "neutral" and bureaucratic methodology without recognizing the ways that power is embedded in the process.

Third, intersectionality is not yet effectively applied. The "plus" focuses on *adding* race or income or disability or Indigeneity to gender rather than considering them simultaneously to understand the ways policy impacts (either negative or positive) can be amplified or dampened because of these intersections. Further, gender is often treated as a binary without recognizing the diversity of gender in nonbinary, Two-Spirit, intersex and transgender peoples.

So, what could be done to improve? Some recommendations that come from this overview include:

First, reframing GBA+ as central to policy and program planning rather than an add on requirement and monitoring departments and agencies in their appropriate use of GBA+, including making sure the "plus" of intersectionality is foregrounded.

Second, building capacity in GBA+ including at the most senior levels, not just in service of administrative procedures for completing budget submissions but in how to use GBA+ to set priorities, question assumptions, design policies and programs, and monitor impact.

Third, engaging more deeply with—and financially supporting—grassroots and academic organizations that hold GBA+ knowledge, involving them in both data collection and the co-design of policies and programs.

Finally, investing in better collection of intersectional data through Statistics Canada and other mechanisms, while at the same time recognizing that quantified data is not the only important input to a good GBA+ analysis.

In conclusion, GBA+ holds great promise, but it will be least effective if it is only used as a policy evaluation tool. Its true power will come when the insights generated lead to innovative policies that can overcome many of the impasses faced by efforts to achieve greater equity in society to date.

Thank you very much. Merci beaucoup.