

Draft Framework
“Gender Balancing: Restoring Our Sacred Circle”
Assembly of First Nations
March, 2007

Introduction

Despite the adoption of the principles of GBA since the early 1980’s and 1990’s, inequalities still exist in Canada. Discrimination continues and violates women’s human rights creating unsafe environments for women and their children. The harm done to families is perpetuated through the generations, leaving communities further impoverished but also reinforces other forms of violence. And the inequalities are that much greater for Aboriginal women in Canada. In fact, First Nations women continue to face barriers where they are unable to fulfill their potential and this is due in large part to the discriminatory legislation such as the Indian Act, Bill C-31 and Matrimonial Real Property Rights that continues the cycle of poverty.

The Assembly of First Nations believes the need for GBA continues but in a form that makes sense to the cultural diversity within communities. AFN is working within a First Nations context that includes a cultural worldview to restore and remember historical gender balanced roles between men, women, boys, and girls. An enhanced Gender Balanced Analysis (GBA) will be developed with the input from First Nations communities in order to develop new concepts and mechanisms while incorporating a First Nations traditional worldview of gender balancing that also meets today’s complex realities.

The approval and completion of a draft culturally relevant GBA Framework already endorsed by the AFN Women’s Council, the AFN Executive Committee and soon brought forward for resolution by the Chiefs-in-Assembly will work to ensure that First Nation’s women’s needs and realities are included at the start and are not just an add-on to major developments. The intent is to implement the GBA Framework within the AFN by late 2007, and to ultimately begin training within the regions, including training with First Nations communities and organizations. The AFN-GBA Framework-may become one key solution in “targeted strategies to advocate and support First Nations family wellness.” The culturally affirming AFN-GBA is a critical teaching tool to assist us in remembering, restoring and renewing the life giving ways of our ancestors. The GBA framework is also a culturally sensitive tool that takes us on a journey to restore, renew, and balance the vital roles of men and women that once made our families strong and our nations vibrant.

Rationale

Gender-based analysis (GBA) is an analytical tool that uses sex and gender as an organizing principle or way of conceptualizing information. It brings forth and clarifies the difference between men and women, boys and girls within the context of their social

relationships and life experiences. It identifies how social conditions affect women's and men's (and girl's and boy's) health status and their access to, and interaction with, the health care system. GBA provides a framework that should be overlaid with a diversity analysis that considers factors such as race, ethnicity, level of ability and sexual orientation.

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) represents status First Nations both on and off reserve. As well, the AFN Renewal Commission recommendation 19/2005 identifies the need to include women's perspectives in AFN decision making and to ensure that women are not disproportionately adversely impacted by policies, measures and programs.

During the Commission,

Many presenters believe that AFN Renewal should reintroduce First Nations values as the core of the AFN's identity...including women's perspectives in AFN decision – making and undertake a review of policies and procedures to identify and remove barriers to the effective participation of First Nations women in the AFN in addition to reviewing and approving the gender analysis framework...

AFN Renewal Commission - Report of Recommendations 2005

AFN is working directly with Health Canada to address health issues of First Nations peoples in Canada. And, the development of a First Nations-specific gender balanced approach would assist Health Canada in gaining insight into the methodologies and framing of issues from a First Nations perspective. The AFN through the development of a specific GBA framework would enhance the ability to interact with Health Canada in addressing gender and diversity issues within a determinants of health and population health approach.

The development of a First Nations Gender Balanced Framework promotes the inclusion of a gender balanced approach in the research, policy and program development work mandated by First Nations leadership and engaged in by the Assembly of First Nations Secretariat. Presently, there remains a gap in analysis on gender issues creating current policies and programming developed for First Nations to be gender-blind. An opportunity is open to outline a GBA diversity lens specific to First Nations that can best address the health needs of First Nations men, women, boys and girls while taking into consideration the extensive social conditions that impact health experiences and health outcomes.

Background

Before and After Contact

First Nations historically maintained a balance between the roles of men and women in their communities before European contact. This complementary relationship between First Nations men and women contributed to their self-sufficiency and ability to thrive in challenging natural environments. First Nations had strong egalitarian societies and structures that included governing systems and natural laws which offered critical checks and balances and helped to maintain balanced partnerships between men and women.

For example, many nations/communities had traditional clan systems that facilitated systems of law and order, equal justice and voice and each sex was valued and respected. Balanced roles were akin to a strong governance system that included the voice of women since it was they that “shaped the thinking of all its members” and a strong social order “came from the quality mothering of children” (Jeanette Armstrong).

First Nations women were respected and cherished for the role they held in their community since it was they that gave birth to and raised the next generation of leaders. Strong leadership begins with a strong foundation and it was the women who ensured that the proper checks and balances were in place. The traditional roles of women as educators and ‘keepers of the culture’ included responsibilities for the establishment of all norms in the economic, political, spiritual and social landscape. Women were seen as having leading roles and exerted their influence “from using their right to appoint, chastise, and dethrone peach chiefs” either directly or indirectly through male representatives (George Beaver).

Equality and balance was the norm before the advent of colonization when foreign foods, (religious and other) practices and institutions were introduced which forced this balance to be altered. Missionaries arrived with the goal of converting First Nations away from their spiritual practices. Yet Christianity held the patriarchal notion that it was the men who hold the “authority and where children and wives are to be disciplined”. This of course was contrary to First Nations values of a collective well-being and “where individual autonomy was respected and children were sacred” (Evelyn Zellerer). Karen Anderson shows how the French missionaries influenced First Nations men to believe that women were “inferior” and of “lesser worth than men” despite the traditional notion that a healthy society could not exist without “the contributions of both sexes” (Karen Anderson). The denigration of First Nations society occurred rapidly and in one generation change occurred. Impacts were seen in disease, loss of families and communities, and specific forms of violence on all First Nations peoples, including women and children.

Traits of First Nations Reality

After European contact and within a decade of the founding of Canada, the *Indian Act* was developed and implemented to regulate and control the conditions under which First Nations live. Additionally, the assimilation policy was introduced to convert First Nations away from their cultural practices as a means to building a homogeneous Christian society. Part of the assimilation policy included mandatory enrolment of First Nations children in residential school. The residential school had been contrived specifically to enable missionaries to interfere with the development of First Nations children even though their parents had stressed repeatedly that they wanted education, not assimilation. Residential school disrupted the family unit to the point that parents became strangers to their own children and the disconnection has carried on for generations with the loss of parenting skills and an inability for many to bond with their families, communities and traditions.

Further to this, other social policies imposed by the Canadian Government led to a cycle of dependence and coping strategies included self-destructive behavior as poverty became more pervasive. Its impacts on individuals included addictions, violence and suicide. Violence, where traditionally never tolerated by First Nations people, has become a frequent occurrence. Yet these impacts of poverty have been more unsettling for First Nations women and their children. Today, First Nations women are among the poorest in their communities and targets of discrimination, not only by the broader society, but also by First Nations communities.

Today's policies and legislation continues to impose a foreign governance structure that results in First Nations women being excluded from leadership and decision-making in their communities. This set-up continues the rift and imbalance of roles (and benefits) between First Nations men and women. Policies and legislation that still include the *Indian Act* and Bill C-31 does not recognize its contribution to the hidden violence and distress it plays on First Nations women and their children. In the present day, women, children and men have different experiences in the family, in the workplace, and in First Nations communities.

Women, children and men are affected differently by social and economic policy initiatives and budget exercises. [For example](#), Matrimonial Real Property is a pressing human rights issue that affects all First Nations people but especially First Nations women (and women with disabilities) and their children as they do not have the same protections, laws and institutions to enforce their rights as women in Canadian society. More First Nations women than men end up living in urban centers due to a lack of services (especially housing) in their communities. A lack of housing on-reserve means that women who cannot stay in the family home are forced to leave the reserve often with their children.

Recently, a companion report to the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Women, *Indigenous Women Stand Against Violence* found that: "*For Indigenous women, gender-based violence is shaped not only by gender discrimination within Indigenous and non-Indigenous arenas, but by a context of ongoing colonization and militarism; racism and social exclusion; and poverty-inducing economic and "development" policies.*" These phenomena are interactive, they reinforce one another – and shape Indigenous women's experience of violence. First Nations women, especially, as a group are affected differently by policy decisions than are First Nations men. As a result, there is a critical need to take gender into account when analyzing problems and in developing solutions.

Gender budgeting initiatives allow policy units, departments, stakeholders to assess the differential impact of specific policies on women and men (girls and boys). For this reason, the Assembly of First Nations is promoting the need for a better balancing of roles and positions exercised by First Nations men and women on both a national and international scale. In this regard, the AFN Charter and Renewal Commission Report recognize the need for equality of men and women as a guiding factor in its work and to reinforce this principle the AFN promotes the gender-balanced approach. Applying a

gender lens to all AFN policymaking including the collection of gender-disaggregated data and the development of gender sensitive indicators in education, housing, water and health, as examples, will be instrumental in the elimination of gender inequities.

The Need to Adopt a Gender Balanced Approach- The Path of Healing

This year, the Assembly of First Nations undertook an important exercise of studying our history: Knowing where we have been, what we have been through and where we are going (see Appendix 1). Developing a gender balanced approach will ensure our unique histories and relationship with the Crown are considered when working towards achieving sustainability in First Nations communities. Sustainability becomes a part of First Nations movement towards reclamation of our cultural ways that includes self-sufficient and prosperous lives. Sustainability also means First Nations are given access to resources that are both equitable to those received by other Canadians, but that also fulfill the obligations of the Crown for the historical and social injustices faced by First Nations during and after colonization. As First Nations, we hold unique Aboriginal and Treaty rights that we have never surrendered to any government.

Canada through its *Federal Plan for Gender Equality*, advocates the need for a gender-based analysis to be conducted in the development of policies and programs that impact First Nations and Canadians overall. What we do not often hear however, is the need to adopt a *gender-balanced* approach. Gender re-balancing is more aligned with First Nations traditional approaches to healthy living in our communities. It emphasizes the interconnections among all elements of our natural and social environments.

A Gender Balanced Approach (a Framework) can assist in addressing a suite of issues arising from the *Indian Act*, for example these may include but is not limited to addressing: poverty and violence, including spiritual, ecological, and economic violence, incarceration and matrimonial real property rights, in addition to citizenship and jurisdiction issues, collective rights, legislation, land and treaty rights, and First Nations governments, etc. First Nations must have a voice in making decisions that will impact their lives and the prosperity of their communities.

First Nations people are now on a path of healing, and First Nations women play a critical role in rebalancing gender roles, renewing our traditions and languages, and strengthening families and communities. As part of a Gender-Balanced approach, we have identified some key values.

- **Holism** - Policies will recognize the whole person, recognizing the relationship of spiritual, emotional, mental and physical health within the individual and the importance of family and community.
- **Voice** – First Nations will be given a voice in decision making and opportunities to participate in processes that supports sustainable communities.

- **Equity** – Sustainable First Nations communities should be provided services and resources to compensate for historical and social injustices, aligned with Aboriginal and Treaty rights. Outcomes achieved should be in line with those available for other Canadians. Equity leads to Equality.
- **Cultural Diversity** – Sustainable First Nations communities must be founded on a respect for cultural diversity. Cultural Diversity is strongly linked to Equity.
- **Control** – Sustainable First Nations communities should be controlled by First Nations themselves, not imposed from the outside.
- **Cultural Identity** – Services and policies will recognize and affirm the cultural identity of First Nations.

As First Nations, we respect our diversity and support each other to achieve real self-determination that will affirm and preserve our unique cultural identity.

Key Questions in Analysis

In the initial phases of policy/ program development, the following checklist of questions (examples) may assist in providing guidance in the day to day work in developing policies and budgets that are fair to both women and men.

- In what ways are both First Nations women's and men' (girls and boys) experiences considered in identifying the issue?
- Does this policy, program, law or regulation affect women predominately?
- How are both women and men (girls and boys) involved and/or affected?
- Does it create a barrier to women's equality?
- Does this budget exercise take into consideration the differential impact of specific policies on women and men (girls and boys)?
- What changes would have to be made to align women's equality with that of men?
- Is diversity being considered? If so how?
- Is the outcome of the policies reflective of First Nations values and inclusive of both First Nations men and women (boys and girls)?
- Will the impacts positively affirm cultural norms within First Nations communities?

The following points are not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, they provide a basis on which to build in subsequent policy initiatives such as: education, languages, housing, water, environment and economic opportunities (as examples) in the goal of advancing an inclusive gender balanced approach in all AFN policy areas.

Policy Development

Considerations and Inputs into the Policy Process

There are a number of documents which outline guidelines and/or requirements for government policies and activities but have also influenced many of the core documents coming out of the Assembly of First Nations. These documents are relevant and impact the Assembly of First Nations policy process that incorporates a gender balanced approach.

International Conventions: Gender equality is a recognized policy of the United Nations and is implied through a range of international instruments:

- UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Beijing's 1995 Platform for Action
- 2006 International Indigenous Women Stand Against Violence, companion report to the United Nations' Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Women

Government Policy Direction: Canada has also developed a Federal Plan for Gender Equality, and committed all federal departments to the promotion of gender equality in all areas.

Constitutional Requirements: The Federal Crown-First Nations Political Accord addresses constitutional requirements of gender equality.

A First Nations Plan: *Make Poverty History: The First Nations Plan for Creating Opportunity* is the national campaign launched by the Assembly of First Nations in the Fall of 2006 to eliminate First Nations poverty and increase the opportunities for First Nations people to live prosperous lives.

Holistic Policy and Planning Model: *A First Nations Holistic Policy and Planning Model: Health Determinants Perspective* provide key policy objectives (health determinants) for First Nations governments. It also provides a good set of societal objectives that the federal government can maximize the positive impacts of new policy development and programming for First Nations people.

Policy Process¹

Stage 1: Define Desired Outcomes

It is not enough to say that First Nations want to eliminate poverty but the desired tangible and measurable outcomes must be defined. For example, an estimated percentage increase annually of new housing every year until all members (including men and women, boys and girls) requiring housing receive proper housing within 5 years. In

¹ Modified from the New Zealand Policy Process model

this way, no one is forced to leave their community. But in order to achieve this outcome, the AFN must influence the policy-makers and funding availability in government.

Stage 2: Identify the Issues and Provide Options

It is essential at the genesis stage of policy development in cooperation between AFN and the federal government that a gender analysis is done to ensure a broad perspective of the issues and its impacts on both First Nations men and women (boys and girls). A number of questions (see questions above) can be asked to assess what the best approach or solution may be taken to mitigate the issue. Issues identified by the communities in this process may include for example, seeking an outcome to return to traditional ways by balancing out the number of First Nation women in decision-making positions (including management), the identification of problems and issues would include the considerations (and perceptions) of First Nations women's and men's roles and responsibilities today. Given women's multiple roles of care-giver and provider and that many women are single mothers what provisions can be put in place to ensure women are able to hold paid positions in addition to ensuring time for family responsibilities? Is it possible to have flex hours in the office or have in-home offices? Is it possible to have dual or shared management between a man and a woman? In this way, both men and women are compensated for their work and a part of the decision-making processes.

A gender balanced approach can assist in ensuring that:

- 1) the full range of options available is identified, and
- 2) any solutions sought are aligned with First Nations values and traditions.

Stage 3: Analyze Options and Make Recommendations

In order to ensure gender issues are incorporated into the gender analysis, criteria must be established which prioritize issues in the *First Nations Holistic Policy and Planning Model: Health Determinants Perspective* (see Appendix 2). This holistic model includes the political, legal, and economic priorities of First Nations people while addressing what is required for sustainable development of communities with the eradication of poverty.

Criteria would also include the social determinants of health that decides the extent to which a person possesses the physical, social, and personal resources to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs, and cope with the environment. These criteria will impact men and women (boys and girls) differently. For example, stating 'culture' as a determinant of health is important but it also must be considered in the context of the specific Nation and a pan-Aboriginal approach must be discouraged since our Nations are not a homogeneous group. A more inclusive definition of social determinants of health for First Nations may include but is not limited to:

- Aboriginal Status
- Early life
- Education
- Employment and Working Conditions

- Lands, Resources, Quality Food, Air, Water
- Food Security
- Health Care Services
- Housing
- Income and its Distribution
- Social Safety Net
- Social Exclusion
- Unemployment and Employment Security
- Gender and Culture
- Individual Autonomy as well as collective well-being
- Stress levels
- Addiction(s)
- Lifestyle Choices

When working on objectives in the short term and the long term, other criteria includes consideration of the fiscal impacts. Although a final option will not always be the ideal, considering the social determinants of health for First Nations in addition to the social and economic benefits will more likely lead to a more equitable outcome for both sexes.

Stage 4: Implement Decisions, Monitor and Evaluate

At the implementation stage within the Assembly of First Nations, it is recognized it is not enough to develop policy by staff. Effective implementation within the AFN requires an outline of: clear strategies and procedures, accountability mechanisms and defined roles and responsibilities for AFN staff, leadership and decision-makers. Moreover, this transparent approach offers buy-in and ownership from stakeholders and key decision-makers within the AFN and in the process.

The monitoring and evaluation of a gender balanced approach is critical in reviewing its effectiveness. A policy is not effective if it only delivers quality outcomes for half the population, or in this case, half the staff. Therefore, there must be adequate indicators built into the monitoring process to ensure real impacts on staff within the AFN are examined.² Monitoring must also be included on impacts on staff (in terms of capacity and workload).

Accountability is also important at this stage with the initial outline of organizational responsibilities, from highest management level and throughout. Further discussion is required how all levels of staff will be accountable to goals and to the implementation of the framework. Some indicators of success will be required in addition to the process committed for monitoring progress. One idea may be to link performance appraisals whereby promotion of gender equality could be included in the “work contracts” negotiated between management and staff.

² As this process moves into the communities, there must be monitoring on the impacts of First Nations community members but for now, monitoring impacts will be “piloted” with the stakeholders and staff connected to the AFN office.

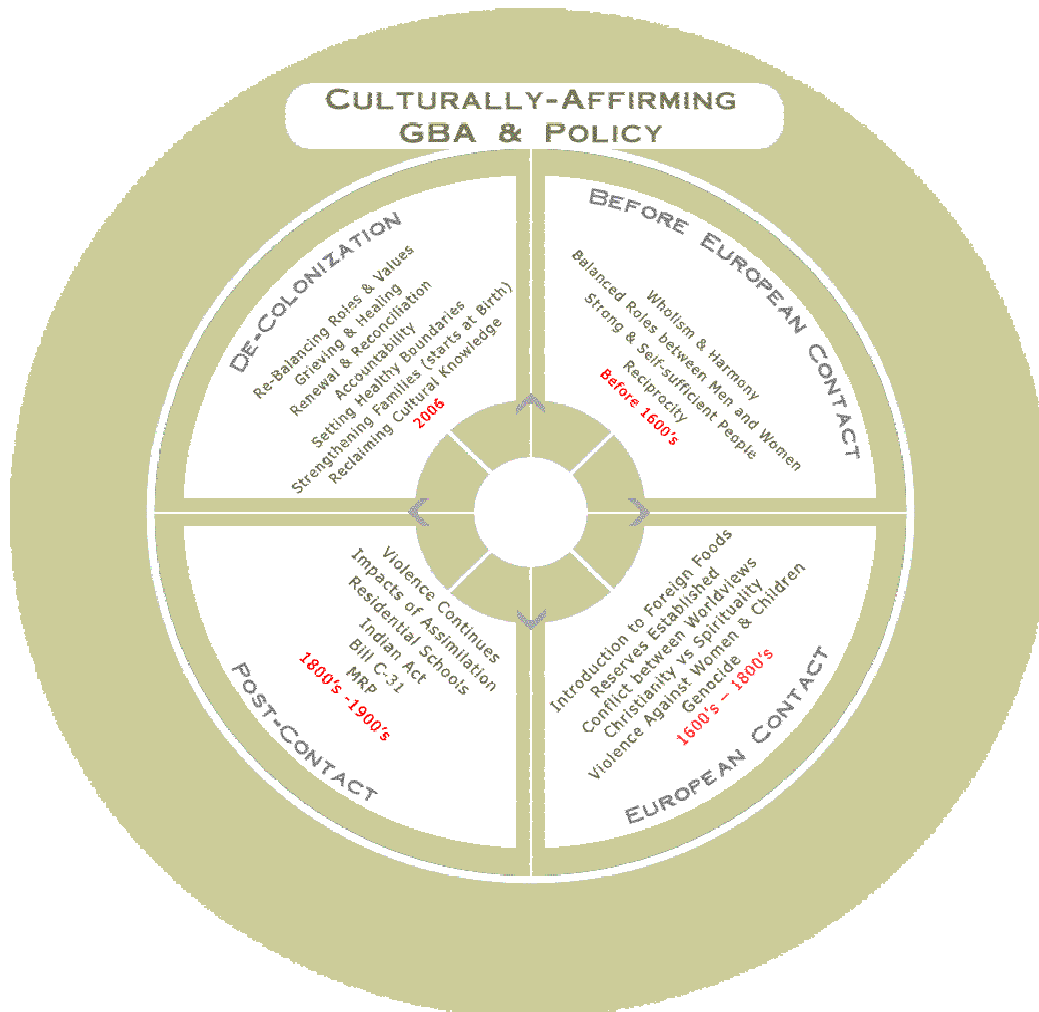
Next Steps in Developing a Gender Balanced Approach

The ability of the AFN to engage in a gender balanced approach will promote issues of gender equity and equality within the organization and will assist in AFN's ability to promote these from a First Nations perspective when interacting with Health Canada and other government departments that develop policy for First Nations people.

An AFN-GBA Framework will be expanded to also include:

- Clear Strategies and Procedures
- Accountability Measures
- Determinants of Health
- GBA from a First Nations perspective:
 - Defining “cultural relevance”; “Equity and Equality”
 - Other Terms (Labels; Culturally-appropriate concepts and not western-based necessarily)
- Input from Elders (male and female)
- Gender Balanced Indicators (with list of key questions expanded)
- Steps to Achieving GBA from a First Nations perspective
 - Areas of Focus include: spiritual/cultural; socio-economic; governance; barriers; recommendations and solutions
- Development of Case Studies to illustrate a gender balanced approach

Appendix 1 Historical Overview: knowing where we've been; what we've been through and where we're going.



Appendix 2 Proposed First Nations Holistic Policy and Planning Model

