



Climate Change, Intersectionality, and GBA+ in British Columbia

Summary Report

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1. Introduction

How climate change impacts diverse populations, including those who are marginalized, is not always obvious. This project draws on a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) lens to examine how considerations of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, age, and mental or physical ability (among other identity factors) intersect to influence how different populations in B.C. are affected by climate change.

Using a GBA+ approach is important as existing inequities are amplified by the impacts of climate change, putting marginalized populations at higher risk. Marginalized populations often face multiple, overlapping inequities which can worsen during and after major climate-related events. For example, lower income populations are disproportionately impacted by major climate disruptions, whether this is a wildfire or a flood, (as well as other significant events such as COVID-19) if housing, jobs, access to education etc. are impacted.

To address gaps in knowledge on the social impacts of climate change in B.C. and to focus on those who are most marginalized and why, this work draws on findings from a literature review, 21 key interviews with topic experts and spatial data correlations on sub-populations. This research also included an Indigenous advisory circle that was convened to comment on the larger report, from which this summary is derived.¹

¹ This is a summary report. The full project report is available by contacting ClimateReadyBC@gov.bc.ca

2. Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)

GBA+ is an approach that identifies people’s diverse social identities and complex living realities. The lens is intended to bring attention to the role that structural forces play in producing and reproducing discriminatory policies and practices, institutions and systems which lead to the marginalization of certain populations and identities.

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that guides GBA+. Intersectionality reflects on how issues of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, age, and ableism interact with each other and can lead to systemic marginalization and discrimination. Intersectionality is a theory, method, and tool from critical race theory and Black feminist thought. When meaningfully implemented, intersectionality addresses privilege and oppression. Introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality builds on generations of Black women’s insights and is presented as a theory and method to critique anti-discrimination law, antiracist theory, and politics.²

Indigenous scholarship is helping decolonize GBA+ thinking and practice. For example, *Red Intersectionality*, highlights how Indigenous women have been thinking about intersectionality in relation to colonization, other related forms of social discrimination and impacts on cultural continuity and connection to land and water.³ This project was informed by work in B.C. and Canada to include considerations of cultural relevance, such as the Métis Approach to GBA+. A Métis Specific Approach to GBA+ emphasizes cultural relevance, recognizes that culture and gender are inseparable and uses

an Indigenous (Métis) worldview to define equity and take into account women’s roles historically. It also takes into account the ongoing impacts of colonization.⁴ The Métis approach to GBA+ echoes one of the key messages suggested by the Indigenous advisory circle that advised on this work, around the importance to begin with an acknowledgement of the colonial legal context within which climate change work continues to take place.⁵

Using a GBA+ lens helps policymakers identify how power structures are interacting with one another rather than treating them as separate, unrelated forms of discrimination. As an intersectional tool, GBA+ helps reach beyond stereotypical representations of marginalized populations and offers steps towards building more equitable responses to climate change through governmental policies, programs, and services.

2 Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989: 139–168; Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1991) Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, and Violence. *Against Women of Color*. Stanford Law Review, 43-61: 1241–1300; Carbadó, D., Crenshaw, K., Mayse, V., Tomlinson, B., “Intersectionality: Mapping the movements of a theory” (2013) *Du Bois Review*, 10:2 p 303-312

3 Clark, N. (2016). Red Intersectionality and Violence-informed Witnessing Praxis with Indigenous Girls. *Girlhood Studies*, 9(2), 46-64. doi:10.3167/ghs.2016.090205

4 Women of the Metis Nation 2019 “Metis-Specific Gender Based Analysis Plus Tool” <https://en2.metiswomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Metis-Specific-GBA-Tool.pdf>

5 A summary report from the Indigenous advisory circle can be accessed by contacting ClimateReadyBC@gov.bc.ca



“[We need to be] providing financial support, not just money for small projects like community gardens, but providing funding ... in rural areas that can help people learn how to strengthen capacity and resilience.... [and] from an asset-based perspective, how they could adapt.”

– Interview Participant

GBA+ Using a Strengths-Based Lens

Beyond analyzing risks to communities and sub-populations, GBA+ can (and should) also be used by policymakers and governments to recognize, understand, and build on the **assets and strengths** that exist and are contributing to personal, social, and community resilience.

- » Systemically marginalized populations, including women and gender-diverse populations have unique **assets and strengths** that they bring to preparing for and responding to climate change.
- » Community capacity building does not happen on its own. It is best **led by local people** who understand their community and the needs and assets of the populations who live there.
- » Asset-based capacity building needs to be well-resourced and supported by local leadership.

3. Key Findings

Systemically marginalized communities have typically contributed the least to climate change but are disproportionately negatively impacted by climate-related events, such as wildfires, extreme heat, flooding and extreme weather. In order for climate change adaptation policies, plans and programs to promote equity, it is necessary to address interacting forms of discrimination, such as racism and poverty. The following findings show areas where impacts are felt most significantly, and outlines issues that are critical to be considered in all adaptation work.

1. Housing

- » Housing is a **key determinant** for how impacted and how adaptive a sub-population can be to climate change (just as housing is a key determinant for poverty).
- » Those that are ‘housing insecure’, and are either without a home or between homes, are at greatest risk to be exposed to physical impacts from climate hazards (i.e. wildfires, floods, heatwaves) and also face significant challenges in recovering and adapting to climate impacts.
- » Major climate-related events (i.e. wildfires and floods) also impact the level of available housing stock in a community. In communities with already low vacancy rates, this creates problems with housing supply, often for low income people. There is also the issue of housing stock, in regard to dampness and mold experienced after a major flooding event, for example.



“There’s an opportunity for [climate] policy in the social realm; if we are going to be taking care of the most vulnerable communities because of climate change, then let’s advocate [to get] the most vulnerably housed in B.C. —let’s start there.”

– Interview Participant

2. Health

Mental Health

- » The trauma from experiencing a significant event like a wildfire or flood can have long lasting mental health impacts, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- » An increase in mental health challenges can lead to other social impacts such as breakdown of relationships and increases in substance use, crime, and domestic violence.
- » There is a need for more mental health supports during and following climate-related events and a greater connection to be made between climate change impacts and ‘mental health infrastructure’ development (understood as the social systems like counselling and family support organizations).
- » During major climate-related events, women’s roles in the family often require them to keep the family calm and together, offering emotional support for children, while also dealing with their own stress and anxiety.
- » Disasters exacerbate the use of drugs and alcohol; substance use (and impacts of this) can extend for a long time after a climate event, such as a wildfire or floods.

Physical Health

- » There are numerous physical health risks associated with climate impacts. Interviews from this project highlighted:

Wildfire smoke

- Pregnant women are more at risk from wildfire smoke; exposure to wildfire smoke can result in lower birthweights.
- Indigenous peoples are at a greater risk from wildfire smoke because they are more often on the land.

Extreme Heat

- Extreme heat disproportionately impacts elders and seniors and can also have negative impacts on pregnant women.
- Evidence shows single men who live alone are more vulnerable during heatwaves. Women tend to be better socially connected.

“I want to really strongly state how we need to start thinking of our environment as part of our mental health infrastructure.”

– Interview Participant

“[During] the wildfires, in the crisis stabilization unit, I saw a huge increase in people that were having a breakdown, break up of marriages; addictions and depression increased significantly.”

– Interview Participant

3. Gender-based Violence and Safety

- » There is an increase in demand for transition house spots during floods, fires, and heatwaves.
- » Many of the transition houses (for women fleeing intimate partner violence) are not designed to accommodate a warming climate. For example, in the Fraser Valley, they have been facing challenges in keeping transition houses cool during heatwaves as the houses do not have air conditioning and windows and doors must remain closed for women's safety.
- » Adaptation strategies—such as cooling or evacuation centres—are often not designed to consider the needs of marginalized populations like women at risk of violence. Women may not go to these public spaces and risk endangering themselves and/or their children.
- » Disruptive events, like fires and floods, can change social dynamics in communities. Often early in a crisis, the community bonds together to 'get through it', but later (often when people are starting to burnout) there can be tensions between sub-populations and sub-regions that have been more or less impacted.

“Our victim services workers saw huge increases in the number of domestic violence cases they were involved in [during wildfires]”

– Interview Participant

“Transition houses had a lot of women reaching out to them during fires, floods.”

– Interview Participant



“When you lose your home, [you’re] unable to do your work, kids can’t go to school; the whole disruption changes the social patterns in communities.”

– Interview Participant

4. Economic Livelihoods

- » Women tend to work lower paid jobs or be more casually employed with lower benefits; overall, lower socio-economic status makes a population more vulnerable to the impacts from climate change as they have less adaptive capacity. Interviews highlighted that Women of Colour and newcomer women are even more likely to work lower paid jobs.
- » During heatwaves or when communities are impacted by wildfire smoke, homecare workers (who are primarily women and often Women of Colour or newcomer women) are often required to provide more care (i.e. more frequent checks) but also juggle their own families and domestic responsibilities.
- » When there is a disaster and children can no longer be in school or need more support, often it is women who take time away from work and tend to experience increased domestic responsibilities and decreased economic stability. Some wondered what the long-term consequences will be for gender and economic equality, if there are more of these types of disasters expected in the future, **mirroring the gendered impacts of COVID-19.**
- » Wildfire and floods impact rural, often resource based and agricultural communities, more than urban centres. These events have significant impacts on the local economy and jobs in these regions.



“Poverty is racialized and gendered. Women are disproportionately in poverty and racialized women are even more so.”

– Interview participant

5. Food Security and Traditional Foods

- » Many Indigenous peoples rely on traditional harvests from the land and water for food and medicine such as fish, berries, and plants. Beyond physical nourishment, this connection to land is cultural, social, and spiritual.
- » Climate impacts such as heat, fires and floods can impact the ability of Indigenous peoples to get onto the land and to harvest traditional foods and medicines.
- » Climate change is also impacting biodiversity and the health of ecosystems that sustains traditional foods.
- » Climate-related events disrupt the food supply, making food in rural communities even more expensive and limited.



“Climate change impacts land and waters in a way that is reducing biodiversity. [It impacts] access to traditional medicine, harvest, and food because of changes in migration patterns. This impacts culture at multiple levels —access to traditional harvest is part of social interactions, sharing the bounty; it’s spirituality, in addition to nutrition.”

– Interview Participant

4. Key messages

There are tangible ways for policy makers, interested actors, and community partners to reduce the impacts of climate change. This includes working to more fully incorporate GBA+ and intersectional principles into thinking and planning. Below, key messages from this work are summarized to facilitate change.

1. Improve upstream planning and preparedness for a resilient B.C.

Policy and strategy need to move beyond emergency planning and invest in building the institutions and infrastructure needed to create systems-wide change, across more than one system, for climate action *and* a more equitable society.



- » Seek opportunities for climate change adaptation to maximize co-benefits and reduce co-risks for health and wellbeing, safety, resilience, equity, and a commitment to decolonization and cultural safety.
- » Centre and commit to decolonization, further acknowledging the *Indian Act*, and how it has oppressed Indigenous peoples in relation to climate change, such as confinement to reserves that are also more exposed to climate impacts, like floodplains.
- » Invest in strategies and programs that strengthen community capacity building, using asset and place-based approaches that build on and invest in local human and social capital, particularly in rural, remote northern, and Indigenous communities.
- » There is a need for upstream housing strategies and poverty reduction policies so when climate and environmental disasters occur, residents in all parts of B.C. are housed and in a socio-economic position to confront wildfires, drought, extreme heat, and flooding.

2. Create multi-stakeholder dialogue to collaboratively develop a robust conceptual framework to address equity and climate change



Develop a coherent framework that can meaningfully integrate and examine social equity and impacts of climate change for marginalized populations, including in risk assessment and adaptation planning.

- » Identify and articulate clear guiding principles to ensure this work is equity-informed and define what equity principles mean practically for climate change adaptation in B.C.
- » Explore the definition of ‘marginalized’ as multi-dimensional and not just related to socioeconomic factors or location. Broader definitions will encourage policy that works across sectors.

3. Strengthen gender equity in emergency management and more broadly, including in leadership positions



There is a gap in perspectives, as emergency management is largely technically focused and male dominated. Gender equity in emergency management is critical to ensuring the social and gendered impacts from climate change are considered and addressed.

- » Recruit diverse women (including non-binary people, People of Colour, Indigenous women and Two-Spirit peoples, and disabled women, etc.) in leadership roles related to managing and responding to the risks from climate change (i.e. emergency management, natural resources management, forestry).
- » Support training programs for diverse women and non-binary people to enter the field of emergency management.
- » Work with provincial representatives in the emergency management field (i.e. Emergency Management B.C., Health Emergency Management B.C.) to explore how Indigenous women and Women of Colour can be more engaged and represented in leading responses to climate-related events.

4. Strengthen equity in data collection and analysis



There is a need to build an evidence base for who is most impacted by climate change. While there is ample data on the physical effects of climate change, there is less socio-economic indicator data to compliment scientific and technical research. A strong evidence base is critical to identify what action needs to be taken within health authorities and at various levels of government.

- » Include quantitative *and* qualitative data when describing the impacts from climate change, including participatory action research and stories of the lived experience of those that have been most impacted and are most vulnerable.
- » Collect gender and race specific qualitative and quantitative data.
- » Design specific approaches for engaging with Indigenous peoples and communities to track and analyze data.
- » Draw on a Two-eyed Seeing or a walking on two legs approach to uphold Indigenous ways of knowing. One definition of Two-eyed seeing, is “to learn to see Indigenous ways of knowing from one eye while seeing using Western ways of knowing using the other eye. Conceptually it is about using the strengths, gifts and insights from both ways of knowing to gain a fuller and more-rounded perspective on issues and ideas.”⁶
- » Support collaboration across disciplines, departments, sectors, and ministries to bring an intersectoral lens.

6 Bartlett C, Marshall M, Marshall A. Two-eyed seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey bringing together Indigenous and mainstream ways of knowledges and ways of knowing. *J. Environ Stud. Sci.* 2012;2(4):331-340

5. Improve and plan for ongoing engagement processes



Populations and communities that are most at risk need to be meaningfully engaged in assessing climate change risks, but also in developing the strategies and plans that will prepare our communities and the province to respond to these risks. An equity-informed approach would also include ‘procedural equity’ (i.e. ‘nothing about us without us’). Specifically, recommendations include:

- » Ensure consultation and engagement involves those most impacted by climate change, including those living in poverty, People of Colour, diverse women and 2SLGBTQIA+ populations. This requires continued partnerships, and processes for going to these communities and reflecting their voices in collaborative planning processes. It also involves centering Indigenous leadership, and Indigenous women and Women of Colour being supported in their leadership.
- » Work in partnership with the organizations across the province that already have trust and relationships with these diverse populations.
- » Meaningfully engage people that live in rural, remote, and northern communities as they have the most lived experiences with many climate impacts.
- » Seek out opportunities for **integrated planning** at local levels in order to tackle climate change and social justice issues together. Ensure that Indigenous communities and local authorities are **sufficiently resourced** for this purpose.
- » Seek to align and coordinate local efforts with provincial frameworks to ensure coherence with best practices.

6. Provide tools to create culturally safe emergency response environments for Indigenous peoples



“With best intentions of a rapid response, there are times when there might not always be consideration for cultural nuance. In an emergency situation, you want to make sure people are physically safe; you’re not thinking about the other impacts. Maybe this speaks to advanced planning and preparedness and being mindful of engaging these more vulnerable populations...applying an equity lens, engaging at multiple levels/plans that are context-appropriate and culturally sensitive.”

– Interview participant

In emergency situations, the focus is on keeping people physically safe from fires, floods. However, the social supports (such as evacuation centres, counselling, and family support) may not be culturally safe or appropriate for Indigenous peoples, despite best intentions. In rapid response, the cultural nuances required for safety can often be unattended to.

- » Conduct an assessment of existing emergency response procedures and protocols for cultural safety.

7. Support Indigenous communities to move from planning to implementation on climate change preparedness and adaptation



Many Indigenous communities in B.C. have done a Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP). While these plans provide a strong foundation, what remains is a desire for implementation and actionable items to be realized. For example, in their 2018 report, Chief Maureen Chapman and George Abbott described the gaps in addressing Indigenous perspectives on climate change.⁷ They suggest the need to improve knowledge sharing between local populations and First Nations and emphasize that the planning and implementation around climate change should include considerations of health and wellness in relation to Indigenous peoples.

- » Work in partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations to address their priorities and take an asset-based approach to identify the strengths and assets in Indigenous communities to respond to climate change (not only risks and vulnerabilities).
- » Work with Indigenous communities to build capacity by providing resources to hire Indigenous peoples to do this work and develop/ implement strategies and plans for their communities.
- » Ensure Indigenous leadership at all levels of government and in climate action work provincially.
- » Provide resources to move from planning to action. Ensure these resources are continuing, outside of one-off or annual grants, to build a strong foundation for Indigenous-led, place-based adaptation.
- » This includes the need for culturally safe and trauma informed upstream policy reform in the context of the impacts of climate change on Indigenous communities and urban Indigenous peoples in B.C.

⁷ Abbott, G., & Chapman, M. (2018). Addressing the New Normal: 21st Century Disaster Management in British Columbia Report and findings of the BC Flood and Wildfire Review: An independent review examining the 2017 flood and wildfire seasons. Retrieved from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/embc/bc-flood-and-wildfire-review-addressing-the-new-normal-21st-century-disaster-management-in-bc-web.pdf>

8. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

British Columbia is the only jurisdiction in Canada that has signed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples legislation.

- » Provincially, B.C. must consider the implications of this for how to engage with Indigenous peoples in assessment and response to the risks from climate change. Beyond this, there is a need to move from planning to implementation. This includes the inclusion and recognition of the diversity of Indigenous peoples, including Indigenous peoples who reside in urban areas.



9. Support cross-sector/disciplinary planning and action

Collaboration does not just happen on its own. It needs to be supported. A coordinated response to adaptation policy and practice development means that social and environmental policies that have been addressed separately (by different government departments and agencies and by different levels of government) need to be integrated. This cannot happen without more collaboration between the sectors that addresses climate change (typically environmental) and social engagement.

- » Engage provincial government ministries responsible for climate change and social policy in regular ongoing learning and knowledge transfer activities, such as workshops, to generate shared understanding, language, and common vision for ‘transformational adaptation’ that can both address climate action and social equity.
- » Create partnerships/collaborations with other provincial organizations, like NGOs, that work at the intersection of climate change, social justice, health, and/or poverty reduction.
- » Consider collaborative structures and processes to support cross-ministerial, intersectoral learning, planning, and action.





5. Conclusion

Power structures and systemic forms of discrimination such as racism, colonialism, misogyny, classism, and ageism, among others, amplify the experiences and impacts on marginalized peoples including during climate-related events. This project has begun to provide an understanding of how multiple identity factors intersect and impact an individual and/or group's experiences of climate impacts in B.C. It contributes to work taking place by organizations and communities across the province and in other jurisdictions.

Part of this work is factoring colonialism and cultural safety into the assessment of the impacts of climate change. There is a need to further develop programs, policies and practices using a GBA+ approach to help address inequities and promote diversity in approaches to climate change in B.C. A need remains for more data and resources to better understand the impacts of climate change on Indigenous, racialized and Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (2SLGBTQQIA+) people and communities, reinforcing existing calls for more robust equity-informed data to be gathered provincially.

This summary report is a part of a journey that the Province of B.C. is undertaking to address data gaps and create actionable items regarding the unequal distribution of the social impacts of climate change. Taking an intersectional GBA+ approach will require new methods and ways of thinking across sectors, disciplines, and jurisdictions. Given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and parallels in how the virus has led to further marginalization, lessons learned have relevance for continued action to support equity-generating policies, strategies, and supports across B.C.

To access the full reports from the project
“GBA+, Intersectionality and Climate Change in BC,”
please contact ClimateReadyBC@gov.bc.ca