

USING
FEMINIST
EVALUATION
METHODS IN
WPS
CONTEXTS



**WPS ACTION
PLAN
ADVISORY
GROUP MEETING
(FEBURARY
2022)
SUMMARY
REPORT**

SEPTEMBER 20 2022

PREPARED BY
THE WOMEN, PEACE
AND SECURITY
NETWORK-CANADA

**WPS ACTION PLAN ADVISORY GROUP
MEETING (FEBRUARY 2022)
SUMMARY REPORT**

Thank you to all the meeting participants, especially those who chaired discussion groups and took notes.

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This report has been reviewed by Government of Canada officials working on CNAP implementation.

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Abbreviations

CNAP	Canada's National Action Plan on WPS
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GBA+	Gender Based Analysis Plus
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
NAP	National Action Plan
PSOPS	Peace and Security Operations Program
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WPSN-C	Women, Peace and Security Network-Canada

Background

Canada's current National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) (2017-2022) or CNAP mandated the establishment of the WPS Advisory Group, co-chaired by PSOPs/GAC and the Women, Peace and Security Network-Canada (WPSN-C).¹

The WPS Advisory Group holds two general meetings annually: spring and fall, in addition to 'special' meetings.

Past meetings:

- December 2021: Special meeting on [emerging themes in the WPS agenda](#)
- September 2021: Regular [meeting](#), discussing the 2019-2020 CNAP progress report;
- December 2020: Regular [meeting](#), focusing on government implementing partners;
- November 2020: Special meeting on [disarmament](#);
- June 2020: Regular meeting focusing on five themes;²
- January 2020: WPS and GBA Plus.

The objective of this meeting was to discuss and share information on feminist evaluation methodologies and their application to WPS initiatives, and within the context of the CNAP.

Ideally, feminist initiatives use feminist methodologies to monitor and evaluate progress. While there is an emerging consensus on the component parts of feminist evaluations, there is no general consensus of a definitive definition.

Dr. Donna Podems has spent decades looking at feminist evaluation approaches. She currently advises GAC and a number of civil society organizations. Dr. Podems³ has articulated the following principles:

1. **Acknowledge** and take into account that evaluation is a political activity; evaluator's personal experiences, perspectives, and characteristics come from and lead to a particular political stance.
2. **Contextualize** evaluation because knowledge is culturally, socially and temporally contingent.

¹ The [WPSN-C](#) has both organizational and individual members. It focuses on monitoring Canada's WPS commitments and supports exchange and learning among Canadians on WPS issues.

² Supporting and protecting women peacebuilders; Programming and other forms of support for the WPS Agenda during COVID-19; Implementation of the UN Secretary General's Appeal for a global ceasefire; Peace and security in Canada: What does implementation of the WPS agenda look like at home?; Action Plan reporting and mid-term review: Strengths and areas for improvement.

³ Donna Podems (2018). [Making Feminist Evaluation Practical](#)

3. **Generate** and use knowledge as a powerful resource that serves an explicit or implicit purpose.
4. **Respect** multiple ways of knowing.
5. **Be cognizant** that research methods, institutions and practices are social constructs.
6. **Frame** gender inequities as one manifestation of social injustice. Discrimination cuts across race, class, and culture and is inextricably linked to all three.
7. **Examine** how discrimination based on gender is systematic and structural.
8. **Act** on opportunities to create, advocate and support change, which are considered to be morally and ethically appropriate responses of an engaged feminist evaluator.

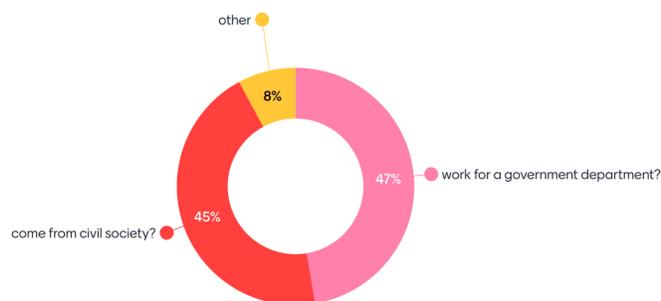
Global Affairs Canada is currently experimenting with feminist evaluation methodologies. For example, the formative evaluation of Women’s Voice and Leadership funding envelope used a feminist approach and the Department has developed guidance on feminist evaluations.

There are few examples of feminist evaluations of WPS National Actions Plan. This meeting will explore how feminist MEL tools and approaches can be used in both WPS initiatives and to review implementation of the CNAP.

There were 52 participants in the meeting, including:

- WPS focal points from across CNAP-implementing departments, and other interested staff;
- Staff from the Office of the Ambassador for WPS;
- WPS Champions;
- Representatives from Indigenous organizations; and
- WPSN-C members.

Do you...



(Figure 1: Responses by participants via Menti.com)

The Meeting

The meeting was divided into two major parts: an introductory panel and small group discussions. It was conducted under the Chatham House Rule.

Panel: feminist monitoring and evaluation experiences

The panel was moderated by Katrina Leclerc (WPSN-C). The panelists were Anna Du Vent (Oxfam Canada) and from Global Affairs Canada, Silvia Grandi and Archana Bhat.⁴

The panel explored a variety issues including:

- *What are feminist evaluation methodologies?*
 - Oxfam has developed a guidance note on feminist monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (see the references at the end of this document).
 - Feminist evaluation is more about process than methodologies.
 - The panelists highlighted the importance of participatory methodologies, being cognizant of power dynamics, approaching the exercise with humility, being explicit about where knowledge comes from;
 - There is consensus that there are many ways to conduct a feminist evaluation.
 - The panelists highlighted the importance of learning, i.e., there is no one perfect, ideal, gold standard of feminist evaluation that everyone must live up to.
 - It is possible to have evaluations with multiple aspects that are consistent with feminist principles
- *Examples of using feminist evaluation methodologies:*
 - Global Affairs Canada started experimenting with feminist evaluation methodologies with the releast of the FIAP. For example, they conducted a field level case study in Colombia, drawing on the expertise of local evaluation consultants. They have also worked with feminist researchers at the University of Ottawa to develop a feminist tool to measures results for use in the Middle East program, knowing in addition to feminist tools, feminist processes are also needed.

⁴ This section of the report has been reviewed by the speakers to ensure that they are comfortable with this public summary.

- o GAC's flagship program, Women's Voice and Leadership, provided an opportunity to take a deliberate feminist approach. The formative evaluation that is now in the concluding phases used a feminist evaluation framework. There were extensive consultations to develop the scope and focus of the evaluation, use of local feminist researchers, and participatory sense-making workshops to validate and test emerging findings.
- *Are feminist approaches always the most relevant?*
 - o It was suggested by one panellist that feminist approaches may not always be appropriate and it was important to support evaluators using various options.
- *Challenges*
 - o With respect to time and resources, participatory methods take both. Not just on the part of the researchers, but they can also demand more time from organizations. Is it fair to ask small organizations to participate in extensive processes?
 - o The desire to be transparent can lead to anxiety. Opening up windows into internal processes can make people uncomfortable.
 - o There are debates and discussions within evaluation communities about feminist MEAL methodologies and processes. Many people believe that evaluations should strive to be 'objective' and feminist approaches challenge whether or not this is possible.
 - o Feminist processes involve different skills (facilitation, for example) and not all evaluators have these skills.

In international assistance initiatives, there are often power imbalances and differing perspectives among funders and recipients. These require navigation and joint learning.

Small Group Discussions

Participants were randomly divided into small groups in order to explore the ideas presented in the panel and share experiences.

Suggested guiding questions were:

- What resonated with you from the panel discussion?
- Have you used feminist evaluation methodologies? What have you learned?
- Are there key lessons on using feminist monitoring and evaluation methodologies in the next WPS National Action Plan?
- What would you like to explore further? What intrigues you? What questions do you have?

However, the groups were encouraged to explore the topics they found the most interesting. The rapporteurs' notes have been edited slightly for readability and length.

Group 1

Issues discussed by the group:

- There is interest in deeper explorations of feminist MEAL and understanding how it might be interpreted by Indigenous communities.
- There was discussion on whether or not a feminist approach was the same as a 'gender'/GBA+ approach? Is 'gender' more all encompassing and intersectional than a feminist approach? If it is narrow, then the principles could be constraining. It was noted that there are different definitions of feminism and many feminist use an intersectional approach. In fact, there are critiques of GBA+ that it is too narrow to be considered feminist. Many feminist activists talk about power, inclusion, diversity, etc.
- In looking at the next National Action Plan there is interest in bringing a more inclusive approach, including 'queering the WPS agenda' and moving beyond a 'binary' approach. For example, in the GAC campaign to support 'peace by her', during Pride month Embassies and Missions were encouraged to support 'peace by them'. There is also interest in integrating anti-racism perspectives. The world and our approach has changed a lot since 2016 when the last NAP was drafted.
- A group participant working in programming noted that an important reflection from the panel was that each small step was important. "We are working to have women-led programming, and usually hire consultants to work with women's organizations. We want to do things together with women's organizations. It is quite time-consuming and sometimes donors get freaked out because they want an evaluation right away. This is expensive on the human side because to talk to people you need people; and donors are not warm on staff salaries. We need to check back in everything we do to make sure we are approaching how we want to work. It is easy to fall back into old habits and do things in the way that was historically viewed as most efficient."
- What can be learned from consultative exercises and applied to evaluation processes? A representative from an Indigenous organization noted that consultations with grassroots Indigenous women are important but it can be difficult to engage them in research. They have multiple and urgent demands on their time. There are debates on compensating people for their time - GAC, for example, doesn't pay for honorariums. It's important to reach out to gender diverse people, youth, elders, intergenerational caregivers, etc. It's very important to have staff who are well-connected. We are upfront about creating an

environment of safety, trauma-informed and culturally safe. Culturally-sensitive and relevant evaluation tools are key.

- Is it possible to bring a feminist lens to all evaluation methodologies? For example, what would a large, quantitative, *feminist* survey look like? Does simply including issues of importance to women make it feminist? One option is to have more open questions, allowing people to fill in their own perspective. Another option is to have ways for people to engage collectively when completing surveys.
- One of the lessons learned with the previous NAP was that the quantitative indicators were rather cumbersome and the story they are telling is not always clear. They are subject to interpretation.
- Resources are key to high quality feminist evaluations. It takes time, money and expertise to do good evaluations.
- The role of the evaluator is critically important. One participant noted that shifting from the role of interrogator to facilitator has been a pivotal step for their organization. “We were taught to be impartial and neutral but need to deprogram that.” It’s normal to have conscious and unconscious biases and there needs to be awareness of these influence evaluators, researchers, donors, and participants. How are these biases transcended?

Group 2

Issues discussed by the group included:

- It is important to ask whose time and energy and resources is GAC drawing from when conducting evaluations? Is this time being compensated?
- Data collection can be more limited as long as the overall process is holistic.
- Examples were shared where the data collection didn’t take the most time - it was the design and interpretation phase that was most time-consuming. The speaker noted that they added more time, effort and resources to the evaluation in question, but that it was proportionately valuable to the findings and evaluation report because they included the views of more stakeholders. An additional two months were added, however, to the evaluation timeline.
- It is important to be rooted in key principles for the evaluation and to prioritize. Which voices are paramount and how will they be shared in the report?
- How does the evaluation capture experiential data and lessons beyond just counting. Qualitative insights can be richer but is it enough to convince people that this is a worthwhile process.

- A key principle is ensuring perspectives of women's organizations are well-represented.
- Avoid extractive processes. Make the evaluation organic especially when you're re-engaging the same people repeatedly.
- Pay for transportation, data, and internet of the people participating in the evaluation. This is very important in COVID times.
- Some of GAC's rules (no honoraria) are actually a challenge and those policies should be re-evaluated.

The group discussed: what would you like to explore further? What intrigues you? What questions do you have?

- How do evaluations do justice to all the perspectives collected?
- When participants aren't compensated, what's the impact on results, especially if it is recognized that affected populations are dealing with multiple challenges?
- There are power dynamics in the donor/evaluator positioning.
- What are the implications when there is a massive disruption and the baseline data is no longer relevant (COVID, coup, outbreak of conflict)?
- How well is GAC willing to resource evaluations? Additional resources enable deeper and richer explorations.

The group concluded with general reflections:

- Intersectionality and principles for protection need to be integrated into feminist MEAL approaches.
- If harm is caused through the process, it must be reported in order to ensure transparency and avoid yet further harm. For example, people might put themselves in harm's way in order to receive protection grants.

Group 3

The group noted interesting 'take-aways' from the panel:

- There's a feminist approach but no agreed methodology.
- Time, resources, and capacity are needed to conduct a feminist evaluation.
 - Who will fund this? Everyone (donors and civil society) needs to work together to prioritize this approach.
 - It's important for everyone to be advocates in their own roles.
- Why are we not ensuring feminist principles are applied consistently - to all evaluations?

- Discrimination is structural and feminist approaches address this. How do we track macro level changes when indicators are generally for short-term changes?
- There isn't a gold standard for applying feminist principles. Perhaps moving the dial at all is progress as we shift from "aware" to "transformative".
- There is also a need to gain a better understanding of how to bring feminist approaches to environments that aren't always receptive.

The group had several thoughts on these insights can this be applied to the next CNAP:

- Participatory methods and feminist methods are connected. GAC shares an understanding that participatory methods are integral to a feminist approach.
- An activist stance is key to a feminist approach, yet implementing it can be difficult given the perceived tension with evaluations are supposed to be objective and neutral. But there can be discussion of what are we calling an "activist stance"? Is it the usual recommendations for program improvements or is it about the inequality that it opposes? Some group members have been exploring this concept and noted that they have learned it from feminist evaluation experts. This is the notion that feminist evaluations are actually activist, and don't merely suggest activism through its recommendations. It actively supports the activists or is activist in and of itself.
- Feminist methodology is about the whole process. It's not about just the results, it's about the intent and methodology.
- How do we dismantle real and perceived power dynamics? How do we apply WPS in Canada? How do certain structures really harm women and girls in Canada? Feminist MEAL has to dismantle power structures and consider the power dynamics.

The group also had some general points:

- Collaborative participatory processes are inherent or integrated within feminist process. Collaboration can give rise to new power dynamics.
- Key for the whole process to be feminist from intention to result.
- It is important to consider the role of time and financial constraints as they relate to power dynamics and the ability to ensure that feminist principles are consistently applied.

Book recommendation: **Feminist Evaluation and Research Theory and Practice.**
Edited by Sharon Brisolaro, Denise Seigart, and Saumitra SenGupta

Group 4

- Sometimes the “gold standard” is neither possible nor desirable, depending on context. We shouldn’t discount the value in simply moving the dial progressively forward, particularly under short timelines and in very challenging environments.
- There is frequent confusion and lack of consistency in terms of terminology – Government officials often understand terms such as “feminist” (or “gender equality”) to mean a focus women’s and girls’ rights. This is a missed opportunity to influence power structures and understand a diverse range of contexts. For example, the experiences of survivors of accidents linked to landmines and other explosive hazards (who are often men and boys) should be actively sought out.
- Multiple feminisms -- maintaining a decolonial perspective is critical, and we need to consistently ask ourselves the question “whose feminism?” by actively seeking out a diverse range of perspectives and realities from local communities, Indigenous communities, etc.
- Civil society members reinforced the need to see Canada’s feminist foreign policy in writing. How will understandings of diverse feminisms tie into the document?
- GBA+ provides a useful, existing tool for examining power inequities through a feminist, intersectional framework, although it is not always fully understood or effectively employed. Such tools only serve their purpose if there is a willingness and capacity to use them. In order to advance much-needed institutional shifts, a strong focus on learning and accountability is required.
- CNAP accountability – reporting tends to be dense and challenging to absorb. Bringing a participative approach to the CNAP reporting process would be valuable, as would focusing on stories in order to better communicate the relevance of WPS to a domestic audience. Likewise, domestic civil society organizations don’t necessarily frame their work through a WPS lens. How could a more formalized role for civil society help to improve CNAP3?

Group 5

Group members shared their reflections of the panel discussion. Views included:

- The importance of incorporating feminist principles into evaluations without being too dogmatic about methodologies.
- Partners may feel feminist approaches do not apply to their activities, which could result in some hesitation. Some group members have experienced reluctance from partners when asked to develop qualitative indicators.
- The lived experiences of women do not translate to quantitative.

- It is important to not only rely on the experts to build monitoring and evaluation paradigms and frameworks. Stakeholders also have a lot to offer.
- The importance of definitions (e.g., gender-responsive, gender-sensitive) and agreement on common terminology was highlighted, recognizing that there are biases, stereotypes and assumptions.
- It is an evolving methodology and is often context-specific.
- Women are different in their needs, and we have been hampered by the male-assumed research.
- Rather than focusing exclusively on the methods, it is essential to also focus on the process (i.e., facilitative, participatory).

Group members further shared what additional questions they had for the panelists:

- Group members were curious to learn of the panelists' approach to evaluating a project from steps A to Z with concrete examples, as well as their views on the value-added. A feminist approach to evaluations can sometimes be met with skepticism or resistance.
- Group members would have asked the panelists to elaborate on the arguments used to demonstrate to partners that one can be objective *and* take a feminist/activist stance.
- A feminist approach may not apply to all contexts or types of projects. For example, projects related to mine action are technical in nature. Best efforts can be made to incorporate gender equality in evaluating the project's outcomes; however, the main objective of the project is to clear mines.
- Albeit gender equality may not be the primary objective of the project, feminist evaluation approaches can still be incorporated.
- Using feminist methodologies are facilitated in contexts or countries with strong capacity among locals such as think tanks.

Group members discussed their experiences with feminist evaluations:

- Some had experience applying a gender and conflict resolution lens to evaluations.
- Others encountered challenges in developing indicators in the areas of health and nutrition.
- Applying a feminist approach to monitoring and evaluation processes is best done in small projects as trying to apply it *en masse* could lead to failure.
- In addition, it can be difficult to convince partners of the benefits of applying a feminist approach to evaluations. The term feminism has a negative connotation in some cultures and may not be accepted in certain societies. In those cases, the term may need to be phrased differently. When collecting local data, it is suggested to consult the experts on how best to approach the term.

Group 6

The group discussed a range of issues and raised various questions, including:

- The difficulties in applying feminist MEL, not just for those running the project, but the stakeholders as it is challenging and time consuming. Feedback from stakeholders is often missing and not always possible within the timeframes and resources that have been allocated. It is really crucial to pay them to participate.
- How to strike the balance between being participatory and inclusive and NOT be burdensome? As funders it is crucial to be conscious of the power imbalance.
- Can processes be aligned to avoid duplicate data collection, dual evaluations, and double monitoring? By repeating work, we lessen participation, because the community thinks they have already participated but they have not. Internally and across external work and engagement we need to be more efficient with processes. This is difficult for some at Global Affairs.
- Women's Voice and Leadership Programs allow for Feminist MEL as they have flexibility and longer timeframes. They have been designed with that intent. The WVWL baseline took one year to develop, while other projects have six to eight months. How can we transfer and translate lessons learned from WVWL to other programs?
- The RBM frameworks are stringent – how do we apply Feminist MEL to them when you have to do everything related to RBM and reporting and THEN are expected to do feminist MEL without overloading staff. There is great need for a conversation about bringing RBM and Feminist MEL together.
- Could we be flexible and add MEL as an activity to the project? That is, add it and cost it as part of the project? It is difficult when there is an expectation for 40-50 outcomes and outputs in GAC project submissions.
- One participant suggested co-creating the Monitoring and Evaluation framework at the beginning of the project together with an expert in Feminist MEL.
- One participant noted that no methodology is inherently feminist versus not inherently feminist, Everything has the potential to be adapted consistent with feminist MEL. There is no one magic feminist method to apply in projects. People are always looking for this, but it does not exist.
- What would CSOs like to see in the next NAP? Reporting should be used more as a learning tool. Government departments should learn not only from their own work, but get together and learn from each other every year. They should stock, report to Parliament, AND learn year to year internally and externally. The format and report has to be changed. It could be simplified to help educate and engage Parliamentarians and the public.

Final Plenary

Given time restrictions, the moderator opened the floor for reflections, rather than having report backs from each group:

- A moderator from one group noted that the group spent a significant amount of time discussing the type of feminism that is discussed. It is necessary to add decolonial perspectives to feminist methods. The group talked about the differences and convergences of feminist approaches and a GBA+ approach in the Government of Canada.
- A member from another group noted that participatory and collaborative approaches were discussed as completely necessary for a feminist approach. But collaboration can often give rise to new power dynamics. They stressed that the whole process needs to be feminist from intention to results. They had a good discussion of what it means to have a feminist stance and different meanings for different sectors. The group also discussed how to measure macro changes when evaluation is short term. “We discussed power dynamics of who has and can give more time and money.”
- A participant noted that their group spoke of the development of CNAP 3 and the midterm review. They discussed feminist MEAL and noted that we need strategies to avoid reaching out too much for participation as these demands can stress communities out. There is a need for alignment between all the asks and for coordination to and make sure civil society and donors are communicating to avoid overload.
- Another participant noted that their group included both women’s rights organizations and people who design evaluation processes and there was a useful discussion. The impact of programs and assessing harm through programs was discussed. There is a need for honest evaluation for reflecting on challenges and negative impacts on programming. Lack of capacity and resource intensiveness was brought up, with the question of “what’s enough?”
- The Women’s Voice and Leadership program was identified as an important example for design and interpretation and the role data plays.
- There were discussions about compensation for time spent on evaluation process.
- One participant noted the challenges of working in conflict affected contexts: despite a beautiful design, external issues (a conflict, a coup) can blow everything out the window. We have to learn how to pivot in those cases. There are lessons for what happened in the COVID pandemic.

- In the chat a participant noted “we had an interesting discussion re how to bring RBM (results-based management) and Feminist MEAL closer together to better align so that they are not separate / competing components.”

Background Reading

Gender Associations (2021). *Mid-Term Review of Canada’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*. (Available from the WPS team in PSOPs.)

Genesis Analytics/Equality Fund (2021). [Feminist Approaches to Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning: Overview of Current Practices](#).

Alexandra Santillana (senior evaluator at *Global Affairs Canada*) together with Fabiola Amariles and Ana Isabel Arenas (consultants at *Learning for Impact*) (2020). [We never stop learning! Principles from feminist participatory evaluation in Colombia](#)

Shraddha Chigateri and Shiny Saha (2016). [A Resource Pack on Gender Transformative Evaluations](#) Institute of Social Studies Trust (with support from the Ford Foundation and IDRC).

Oxfam Canada (2020). [Feminist Monitoring Evaluation, Accountability and Learning](#).

UN Women (2020). [Good Practices in Gender Responsive Evaluations](#).