



CONSIDERING GENDER IN SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

This essay serves as an introduction to the special issue on gender in management and impact evaluation. We highlight the consequences for effectively addressing gender relations, the rights of women, and LGBTQI+ individuals as well as the lack of gender-responsive techniques in conventional impact assessment practice and management. We also introduce the special issue, which highlights impact assessment's shortcomings while also showing that doable ways to further integrate gender-responsive techniques exist. Collectively, a key claim made in the contributions is that gender-neutral methods of impact assessment and management may actually worsen existing gender discrimination or even create new forms of it. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and international human rights law, which are based on the core values of non-discrimination, substantive equality, and gender equality, and 'leaving no one behind'. Four themes for more gender-responsive impact assessment and management are highlighted: (1) gender-responsive context analysis; (2) gender-responsive engagement and increased participation of women and LGBTQI+ people; (3) adaptation of tools, methods, and skills for enhanced gender responsiveness; and (4) embedding gender-responsive approaches from the project level to the governance sphere. Without presuming transferability across contexts, the contributions show that such strategies are necessary and possible in diverse global settings.

KEYWORDS: Gender impact assessment gender studies participation responsible business conduct social impact assessment women's rights.

Introduction

This essay serves as an introduction to the special issue on gender in management and impact evaluation. The lack of gender-responsive techniques in traditional impact assessment practice and management is noted in the opening paragraphs, along with the consequences for creating impact assessment procedures that truly address the rights of women and LGBTQI+ persons. We also introduce the contributions to the special issue, which highlight specific instances of impact assessment and management practices that fall short of fully integrating a gender perspective and show how workable, gender-responsive solutions can be developed to address these oversights.

Even though it has been acknowledged that women and LGBTQI+ people frequently bear a disproportionate burden of the negative effects associated with business activities,



particularly industrial activities, large-scale resource extraction projects, and infrastructure development, and are less likely to share in the benefits, this recognition has not consistently translated into gender responsiveness in impact assessment and management. The "conventional" impact assessment practice, such as regulatory or other impact assessments that are not specifically focused on gender, tends to remain gender neutral, which has the effect of missing or incorrectly conceptualizing the experiences of women and LGBTQI+ people as well as the gender relations within families and communities. As a result, incomplete impact evaluations are created and implemented, which leads to inadequate management plans. The contributions to this special demonstrate issue, gender-neutral impact assessment risks perpetuating and exacerbating systemic gender discrimination in societies, or even creating new forms of discrimination. This contributes to detrimental effects for those people adversely impacted by business activities but also demonstrates a failure of government actors to uphold their duties to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights, and of business actors to respect these rights.

While women and LGBTQI+ people are occasionally addressed in impact assessment and management, this typically takes the form of predetermined categorization as members of "vulnerable groups," or by demonstrating that there have been some women-only meetings or that some sex-disaggregated data has been collected; rather than taking a comprehensive gender-responsive approach that seeks to understand gendered roles, structures, and power dynamics, and associated privileging an oppressed group, these approaches are typically more narrowly focused. Instead of incorporating a gender perspective throughout, there may be a "gender" segment in the impact assessment where gender is addressed. Additionally, essentialist approaches to gender are widely used in impact assessment and management (e.g., referring to "the women" as a homogeneous group; maintaining the men-women two-sex dichotomy in order to leaving no room for other genders), patronising (e.g. designating LGBTQI+ persons as vulnerable per se), and instrumentalist (e.g. suggesting that enhanced participation of women may be beneficial for securing a 'social licence to operate'). While some or all of these factors may be the case in given circumstances, in the absence of more in-depth gender analysis that interrogates, questions, and nuances such assumptions, they have detrimental practical implications for individuals, communities, and projects. Gender-neutral or gender-stereotypical approaches not only run the risk of perpetuating systemic gender discrimination and the marginalization of women and LGBTQI+ people in impact assessment and management, but they also present challenges for projects as they fall short of providing a fuller and more nuanced understanding of project impacts and the best ways to address them. If input from gender-responsive assessments is taken seriously and used to create more equitable initiatives, a gender-responsive methodology could instead produce significant insights for avoiding a managerialized approach to gender impacts.

Our goals with this special issue are twofold: (1) to highlight the negative effects that gender-neutral or gender-stereotyped approaches to impact assessment and management have on people, communities, projects, and regulators; and (2) to highlight and examine



some of the useful strategies, tools, and frameworks that stakeholders in impact assessment and management can use to incorporate more gender-responsive approaches, which could also serve as the basis for future research. Collectively, a major theme emerging from the contributions is that gender-neutral approaches to impact assessment and management run the risk of sustaining, reproducing, or adversely transforming social patterns of exclusion and discrimination, particularly those experienced by women and LGBTQI+ people.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and international human rights law, which are founded on the fundamental principles of non-discrimination, substantive gender equality, and "leaving no one behind," respectively, establish different expectations. (UNHRC Citation2011, Citation2019; UNGA Citation2015). These frameworks also unequivocally reiterate the state's obligation to guard against detrimental human rights violations by third parties, including enterprises, and the obligation of corporations to safeguard human rights by taking reasonable care. A focus on substantive gender equality is an essential part of upholding human rights, according to the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights' Gender Guidance, which was published in 2019. It further elaborates that gender-neutral approaches to due diligence, including impact assessment, are insufficient. (UNHRC Citation2019).

The contributions in this special issue show that there are workable strategies, tools, and frameworks that can be used to better account for gender dynamics, including the rights and experiences of women and LGBTQI+ people, and to embed gender-responsive approaches despite the shortcomings in conventional impact assessment and management. The contributions demonstrate that such practical techniques are required and viable in many global settings without assuming transferability between contexts and groups. In addition, the contributions highlight the significance of integrating gender-responsive approaches into both, not least because the latter is frequently decisive for setting the requirements and direction for impact assessment and management for particular projects. Following is a summary of our paper. The terminologies and definitions used to set the background for this paper's and this special issue's focus are briefly explained in the section that follows. This is followed by a summary of the three sets of sources that inform our analysis and arguments: (1) the academic literature, useful tools, and advice related to gender and impact assessment and management (focused on the project level); (2) the case for paying more attention to gender in impact assessment and management as found in specific international human rights law and sustainable development frameworks; and (3) gender mainstreaming literature. (focused on the governance sphere). We introduce the special issue's contributions in the final part, which we categorize into four emerging themes: the requirement for gender-responsive context analysis throughout impact assessment and management processes; (2) the need for gender-responsive engagement and increased participation of women and LGBTQI+ people; (3) the need to adapt tools, methods, and skills across impact assessment for enhanced gender responsiveness; and (4) the need to embed gender-responsive approaches from the project level to the governance sphere. Our discussion is based on scholarly and grey literature, including a few examples



of impact assessment and management tools, frameworks, and guides; our practical experience using impact assessment for sizable extractive projects and development programs; anthropology; human rights; and the contributions in this special issue.

In order to frame the special issue, we give a brief summary of some of the main texts, resources, manuals, and frameworks pertinent to gender and impact assessment in this section. We make the argument for the necessity of more gender-responsive impact assessment and management. We review the research on gender-specific impact experiences and the scant consideration given to gender in traditional impact assessment methods, tools, and guidelines. We primarily concentrate on the project level, requirements for improved gender responsiveness posed by a few relevant normative frameworks on human rights and sustainable development, and gender mainstreaming literature, particularly in relation to the integration of gender in policy and governance frameworks.

In light of the aforementioned instances of the gendered effects of business activities and the shortcomings of conventional impact assessment and management practice in identifying and addressing these, it is crucial to consider the gender requirements specified in impact assessment tools and frameworks that serve as the basis for such assessments. We find that the amount of attention paid to gender as a topic or analytical lens is noticeably limited after reviewing a number of well-known methods, frameworks, and guides for impact assessment. This oversight is important because it clarifies the reasons impact assessment practitioners would not use a gender-responsive approach—since they are not always required or encouraged to do so.

For example, the IFC Performance Standards, which are frequently used in project development and execution, list gender in a somewhat generalized way as one of the intersecting issues to pay attention to (along with climate change, human rights, and water). (IFC Citation2012). Regarding land and natural resource management, consultation and free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), and harassment, specific mentions of women are made. Beyond this, though, the guidelines frequently take a "vulnerable groups" perspective and offer little requirements for taking a gender-responsive perspective or paying attention to the circumstances and rights of women. Intersectionality is not discussed, and references to sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) are only made in the context of job discrimination. Different strategies are used in specific social impact assessment (SIA) advice. One of the first comprehensive regulatory guides for SIA under law, the Australian New South Wales government's SIA guidance, for example, is noticeably absent on the subject of gender: There are no references to gender, gender responsiveness, women and girls, LGBTQI+, SOGI, or intersectionality. (New South Wales Government Citation2017). Although the terms "vulnerability," "sensitivity," and "marginalization" are referenced frequently, notably in relation to engagement, there are no instructions or examples that show how these ideas may be used in actual effect assessments. On the other side, the International Association for Impact Assessment's Guidance for Assessing and Managing the Social Impacts of Projects is a little more helpful. (Vanclay et al. Citation2015). Gender research is referenced in the guidance, including in relation to the community profile, and



an explicit definition of gender analysis is provided as ‘a process used to consider and understand the gendered nature of the implications of a planned intervention on women, as well as of men, in the cultural context of the communities affected’ (Vanclay et al. Citation2015, p. 83). Attention is drawn to the fact that women are not a homogeneous group, but references to intersectionality, or rather the adoption of an intersectional approach or methodology, are lacking. Likewise, beyond a definition of LGBTQI+ in the glossary, integration of attention to LGBTQI+ people or SOGI is absent.

For HRIA tools, the situation has not significantly improved. We find little attention paid to the rights of women and LGBTQI+ persons across three separate instruments, as well as little advice on how to implement a comprehensive gender-responsive approach. For instance, the Danish Institute for Human Rights' Human Rights Impact Assessment Guidance and Toolbox provides some information on gender-sensitive engagement techniques and acknowledges the value of gender analysis in understanding how women interact with the resources they have access to and how they use them (Götzmann et al. Citation2016). However, beyond these brief mentions, neither the specifics of how this might be accomplished nor the consistent integration of gender responsiveness throughout the elaboration of each impact assessment stage are offered (more detailed guidance is only supplied in respect to stakeholder analysis).

Similar to how LGBTQI+ and SOGI issues are expanded within the framework of stakeholder interaction but not throughout the processes of impact assessment. Similarly, the Getting it Right Tool for Community-Based Human Rights Impact Assessment, which Oxfam and its partner organizations frequently employ, elaborates on the necessity of interacting with women and include members of the impact assessment team that have gender expertise. (Rights & Democracy Citation2011). There is no explanation provided for how precisely this would alter the analysis of the assessment and impact mitigation techniques.

Again, there are noticeably no allusions to SOGI or LGBTQI+ people. While giving a helpful example of business complicity in systemic gender discrimination, the HRIA Tool from the non-profit organization NomoGaia just treats gender as one of the subjects for consideration in assessment. (Salcito and Wielga Citation2012).

Although this would undoubtedly be a crucial subject for more research, we give these observations as illustrative instances of how gender is handled in these instruments rather than as a detailed and exhaustive review of the impact assessment tools, guidelines, and frameworks already in use. The handling of gender in traditional impact assessment methods, manuals, and frameworks is at best superficial, according to our first observations. It is significant in particular that:



- references to gender and women appear to occur in relation to a select set of actions or issues, such as consultation or natural resource management, rather than being holistically applied;
- references to adverse impact experiences of women are insufficiently conceptualised within the context of structural gender discrimination;
- while gender analysis may be referenced, how it is to be conducted to inform a comprehensive gender-responsive *approach* across the impact assessment is not elaborated;
- women frequently remain characterised as one of the categories of vulnerable groups; and
- attention to LGBTQI+ people, issues associated with SOGI, and complexities raised by intersectionality are starkly absent.

The papers in this special issue contrast gender impact assessment tools like Oxfam's Gender Impact Assessment Guidance for the Extractive Industries (Hill, Madden et al. Citation2017) and gender-specific tools relevant to impact assessment and management like the IFC's toolkit with the inconsistent, and frequently poor, attention to gender in conventional project-level impact assessment and management tools and frameworks. There are several materials on gender analysis and participatory techniques from the field of development in addition to these project-focused tools and manuals (such as March et al. Citation1999; UNIFEM Citation2009), which could be much more widely applied in project-level impact assessment and management. In short, while relevant tools and guidance clearly exist, as illustrated by the papers in this special issue (and we have also observed this in our own practice) there is inconsistent application of these in conventional impact assessment practice. This urgent area for attention is discussed further below, as well as in a number of the contributions in this special issue.

In our last remarks, we highlight four interconnected areas in need of future study: criticism, theoretical analysis, actionable steps, and collaborative learning. Our early analysis of impact assessment methods, related guidance, and related practice emphasizes the need for a more extensive and sustained critique of impact assessment from many gender and feminist perspectives. Such criticisms could, in turn, serve as a foundation for more theoretical and practical assessments of the institutional use of impact assessment resources and advice, including answers to queries like who uses them? How are they used? Do they function? Then why not, if not? The final analysis will focus on the lessons that project-level impact assessments can apply from the extensive discussions on gender impact assessments and gender mainstreaming.

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