

Infrastructure bank's \$10-billion growth plan must be green, gender-equal

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With its focus on renewable energy, electric buses and home retrofits, the Canadian Infrastructure Bank's (CIB) new \$10-billion [growth plan](#) is very green.

But it says nothing at all about gender issues.

Given its feminist government sponsor and its own gender-balanced board of directors, the CIB should, instead, be a leader in demonstrating how major public-private projects can be both green *and* gender-equal.

True, traditionally, large-scale infrastructure projects have rarely taken gender factors into account. A kind of throwback, the field is still largely male dominated and mostly gender blind, sometimes resulting in negative impacts on women. Badly lit spaces in and around transit stations, for example, are threats to women riders' safety.

This is not about burnishing the government's feminist brand; it's about the core business of the Bank.

Women constitute important customer segments of commercial banks as well as large parts of the membership of public and private pension plans. And banks and pension funds are exactly the kind of institutional partners sought by the CIB for co-investment.

In general, the most effective economic recovery efforts will generate good jobs for both women and men, because that is what families need. How many of the growth plan's estimated 60,000 jobs will go to men and how many to women, what kinds of jobs will they be, and how long will they last?

In applying a gender lens to infrastructure-project design and implementation, CIB can adapt both proven and new tools. For instance, Status of Women Canada's [Gender-Based Analysis Plus](#) has a long track record of use in many policy areas.

Perhaps even more relevant is the recently developed [Gender Ambition Framework](#) of the multilateral Private Infrastructure Development Group (PIDG), which mobilizes public and private capital for big projects in emerging economies.

This tool offers the Group and its co-investors three options to address gender at the front-end due diligence and risk mitigation stages of an investment: 1) "Do the minimum," by meeting basic compliance requirements and addressing the vulnerabilities and needs of women; 2) "Empowerment," by building the assets, capabilities and opportunities for women; or, the most ambitious option, 3) "Transformation," by addressing unequal power relationships and seeking legal, institutional and societal change. The specific measures of the option selected are integrated into PIDG's formal investment conditions.

Further, much is known internationally and in Canada about providing financing and advisory services to help women-owned or -led small businesses to flourish. Among other roles, such businesses can be valuable suppliers of goods and services to big infrastructure projects, during construction and for ongoing operations.

Beyond women entrepreneurs and workers, there is a growing network of investment funds, both publicly traded and privately held, that specialize in placing capital in businesses whose workplaces are safe and fair for women and men or that make products (e.g. for hygiene or nutrition) that enhance the well-being of women and girls.

Practicing what is known as *gender lens investing*, these funds would look favourably upon green energy, transit and retrofit projects that also create economic opportunities for both women and men.

The CIB growth plan has allocated \$500 million to accelerate project design and implementation. And one of the Bank's strategic priorities is defining and delivering "knowledge and research that is net new to the Canadian infrastructure landscape."

Gender equality is clearly net new for green infrastructure. Efficiently and expeditiously, the Bank should incorporate gender analysis into the project design and implementation process across its portfolio.

It is time to lead.

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