

ASSESS AND PREPARE: TOOLS 3.2–3.6

Developing an understanding of how certain key issues impact affected communities is the first step in implementing effective and appropriate gender-sensitive community and user engagement strategies. This includes gaining insights into:

- **Gender dynamics:** How do the differences in men’s and women’s roles within the community impact their ability to engage in or benefit from infrastructure project design, services, and community development initiatives?
- **The company’s influence on community gender dynamics:** In what ways might the potential or presence of the infrastructure project change gender roles and relationships in the community? In what ways might the company work to strengthen the role of women? In addition, what are the potential negative impacts on gender relations caused by interventions, for example on women’s economic or social status? Among the negative consequences could be issues such as increased incidence of gender-based violence. How can such impacts be avoided?

While infrastructure projects offer opportunities to strengthen the role of women in a community, the project (or potential project) also could have a negative impact on gender relationships or norms. Gaining this understanding early and continuing to monitor gender impacts will help you design and implement activities to promote an enduring social license, yielding positive impacts for women, men, and the community as a whole. Given the dynamic nature of communities and community relations, continuous assessment, monitoring, and evaluation of company progress on gender and the project’s impacts on gender norms in the community is absolutely essential. This applies to new projects and projects already underway.

It is important to note that men and women are not homogenous groups. When collecting data and/or performing consultations, be sure to include women and men from varying socioeconomic levels, castes, religions, ethnic groups, ages, literacy statuses, marital statuses (single, married, widowed, divorced), and disabilities. Among married women, also be sure to note whether a marriage is polygamous. Lack of awareness of varying types of marriage structures¹³ may inadvertently result in the marginalization of some wives over others, such as, for example, if one wife is included in consultations or benefit sharing but additional wives in the marriage are not accounted for.

¹³ Projects, especially those in rural and remote areas, may be hosted by communities with strong existing traditions that present challenges to gender equality; for example, the marriage of girls at a young age or polygamy. While cultural change is a long-term process beyond the scope of an infrastructure project, awareness of these contextual issues is important for infrastructure companies to avoid inadvertently making the situation worse.

To ensure the most accurate and up-to-date picture of the community situation, attending to such distinctions—and disaggregating the data based on them—throughout the assessment phase will be critical.

This section offers tools to help community engagement teams and/or independent gender experts affiliated with infrastructure projects:

- Review the company's community and user engagement activities to assess the extent to which gender is an explicit theme and data is gender-disaggregated in assessments and projects.
- Evaluate women's participation in and benefit from the company's consultations and community and user engagement activities by reviewing:
 - To what extent women actively participate in negotiations related to project design, use of local labor force, and community involvement in monitoring and evaluation of the project's impacts.
 - The number of women who receive benefits from community development initiatives compared to men, and the extent to which these initiatives are designed to meet the needs of both women and men.
 - Any gender differences in terms of negative project impacts.

The tools provided here can supplement the community assessment tools typically used by companies, with additional steps that can help integrate gender into assessment strategies. If project assessments have already been completed, the community engagement team must determine whether the assessments have adequately addressed gender, or if they need to undertake separate gender assessments.

The Role of Assessments

Integrating gender into baseline community and social impact assessments is essential to offer insight into gender roles, relations, and influencing institutions within the community and the potential project impacts on those roles, relationships, and institutions. It ensures a more thorough understanding of the community that will be your neighbor, partner, and perhaps customer for potentially decades to come over the life of a project.

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The assessments form the foundation for the design of community engagement activities. They ensure that the benefits from community activities are shared equally throughout the community and that they support economic and social development—both as a direct result of the project and indirectly, independent of operations. Carefully constructed assessments can uncover key insights about community priorities and vulnerabilities, directing community engagement activities to the most important issues. In turn, this will help community engagement teams execute activities that are embedded in the project cycle, beginning with planning, through implementation, and into the closure stages of the project.

In short, the assessments create tremendous value for community and user engagement teams and the company itself. The information gathered—and the relationships formed during the assessment process—can open the door to wider engagement in processes such as:

- Project design, payment and tariff structures, and strategic planning
- Allocation of royalties, community development funds, and other opportunities for benefit sharing
- Design of community development initiatives such as education opportunities and health facilities