

What can intersectionality tell us about women's experiences?

Intersectionality reveals the limitations of using “women” or “men” as rigid or homogenous categories of analysis. It highlights diversity within groups that might otherwise be overlooked.

When examining an issue like women's underrepresentation in politics, for example, intersectionality reminds us to consider the breadth of factors that may create barriers to entry, such as mobility or care work and domestic responsibilities. Each of these factors must be understood and considered in planning so that solutions are not inadvertently designed in ways that benefit only those who come from particular backgrounds.

An intersectional response to this issue requires asking questions like:

- *In what ways can the political process be inaccessible to those wishing to participate?*
- *What types of obstacles might be faced by women who are minorities or members of historically marginalized groups?*
- *How can the pathways to formal political participation be broadened to benefit from more diverse perspectives and representation?*



Putting it into practice – legislating on violence

When assessing draft legislation or policies to address violence against women (or men), it is worth considering that gender is only one of many elements that shape the experiences of those affected and their capacity to seek support. For instance, reasons survivors may not report violence can include immigration status, psychological trauma, economic dependence on an abuser, isolation in rural areas, or past experiences with the criminal justice system.

Grassroots women's organizations are often well-placed to provide context to law and policymakers about prominent barriers to obtaining support. Holding a consultation or welcoming submissions from civil society through a review process could yield critical knowledge that strengthens the proposed solution by addressing some of the underlying causes of inequality. This could also ensure that the proposed solution does not reinforce the status quo, place an unreasonable burden of responsibility on survivors, or create additional risk for those experiencing violence.

Checklist for applying intersectionality

In your review of legislation...

- ❑ How is the defined problem or target(s) of the bill experienced differently by different social groups? Has a situational analysis (interaction between individuals and institutions) been undertaken? What about a historical analysis?
- ❑ Are the complexities of people's lives accounted for in the bill, or does it rely closely on "either/or" thinking about social identities and experiences?
- ❑ When considered in relation to other legal frameworks in your country, would the new law serve to transform inequality or will it uphold the status quo? Could it have specific results for, or consequences on, marginalized groups?
- ❑ Could it interact with other laws in a way that entrenches or exacerbates patterns of discrimination, either directly or indirectly? If so, can this be avoided through additions or deletions?

In your assessment of budgets...

- ❑ Has the national budget gone through participatory and meaningful consultations with diverse groups of citizens?
- ❑ Was an intersectional gender lens applied at all stages of the budgeting process? If not, what type of technical support would be necessary to put this in place ahead of the next budget debate?
- ❑ When allocating resources to programs, have targeted beneficiaries groups been consulted in order to maximize impact?
- ❑ Are further resources necessary to provide training to those responsible for implementing government policies or programs in line with human rights principles (e.g. in the health, justice, and education sectors)?

In your oversight role...

- ❑ Are government programs informed by data disaggregated by sex and other relevant factors such as age, ethnicity, (dis)ability, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation?
- ❑ Could quantitative sources (e.g. statistics) be complemented by qualitative evidence from focus groups or oral testimonies?
- ❑ In the design and provision of services, does the government recognize the full spectrum of potential obstacles to access?
- ❑ How is the success of government programs evaluated? Whose experiences are taken into account?

In your constituency representation role...

- ❑ Are the town halls or forums you organize accessible to all community members? E.g., can the location be safely reached by public transportation? Is it wheelchair accessible? Is childcare provided? Are interpretation / translation needs met?
- ❑ What opportunities exist to integrate the voices and perspectives of historically-marginalized individuals into your decision-making processes?
- ❑ Is the diversity within groups that have been traditionally excluded also taken into account?
- ❑ Are the same dominant groups always around the table in your consultations? If so, how can new perspectives be integrated?

