



# Commonwealth Foundation

**Gender and its intersectionality:  
Guidelines for programming and engagement in  
governance**

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## **1. Gender and its intersectionality: definition and principles**

### **1.1. Rationale**

With the aim to integrate gender in all areas of the Foundation's work, the principle of intersectionality has been identified as a key programme strategy. This document provides an understanding of intersectionality and its application to the Foundation's focus in supporting people's participation in governance.

### **1.2. Intersectionality: a definition**

Intersectionality refers to how people in all their diversity embody multiple identities, face intersecting oppressions and suffer differently from the same structural and institutional power imbalances. It offers an analytical lens through which one can see and understand from various angles where/how various levels of power and privilege interface and cross in a given context

The term was first devised in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw in a bid to address the marginalisation of black women with its roots in critical race theory and black feminism. It has since evolved to encompass diverse social identities, power dynamics, political and social identities as well as related issues.

The intersection of identities produces different experiences for different people. While some identities may be more privileged due to their class, race or gender, others may experience inordinate discrimination. An intersectional approach does not refer to the accumulation or sum of the burdens of different oppressions but is aimed at revealing the multiple forms of exclusion and understanding the advantages or disadvantages that may arise at the point where these are combined and converge either simultaneously or at once. Intersectionality has advanced to build interdisciplinary bridges.

### **1.3. Gender and its Intersectionality**

Although there are prevailing categorisations, especially with regards to gender, race, and class expressing that women who are poor or racialised have different experiences, the idea of intersectionality extends further. Individuals cannot be strictly forced into rigid categories. The idea of intersectionality takes into account the 'full context' and shifts from binary thinking about power, going beyond inclusion to highlight the quality and multidimensionality of people's experiences.

In applying this to gender equality work and inclusion, it demonstrates that one voice cannot effectively speak for the experiences of people with intersecting identities. Intersectionality presents the fact that discrimination has evolved and appears not only in overt form but has become rather subtler, systemic, multi-layered, institutionalised, and environmental. When experiences are examined, they can be seen to emanate from multiple facets that may include processes, institutions, and structures and as such strategies to address them require an equally multifaceted approach. It is also important to utilise a historical approach that traces the root of problems, revisit and bring it forward in order to discover the systemic and structural oppressions that affect individual lives and ultimately lay out the full picture.

Essentially, there is a need to understand how identity and interlocking discrimination is positioned in policy making and how this relates to systemic discrimination considering the

Foundation's engagement with policy institutions to ensure they are effective contributors to development.

**Intersectionality requires:**

**a. Understanding intersections of marginalisation/discrimination**

An understanding of this is core to identifying the actual impact on access to opportunities and rights and the effect of policies. An in-depth understanding of the individual identities and their specificities which includes their priorities, vulnerabilities, needs, and the intersection of gender with these identities. However, in ensuring the understanding of identities, it is not a prerequisite that every study should include an exhaustive combination of social identities.

**b. A different thinking about equality, power, and identity**

Intersectionality requires that we give up simplifying assumptions and embrace more complexity while in the same vein paying close attention to issues of power. There should be a focus on the points of intersection, the dynamic processes and structures that define access to rights and opportunities.

Determining the identity markings (context-specific) with the consideration that there is an interface and interlocking of identities (and not prioritising determined identities). For example, your sexual orientation, your class, your ethnic origin, your age. This should be driven by what the specified contexts are without dictating or assuming. It should also be noted that these interfaces of identities are dynamic, meaning they can change and evolve with time and in contexts.

Extending beyond the identity markings to focus on addressing power imbalances is crucial as it is at this point that social change takes place. This is on the premise that moving beyond these identities, individuals can experience both oppression and privilege at the same time and in different ways.

**c. Thorough analysis and deeper intellectual efforts in comparison with other approaches to gender**

Deeper intellectual efforts in intersectionality mean that we should not restrain our choices or approaches but should explore other paradigms such as visual methodologies (e.g. documentaries, vlogs), and ethnographic studies (cultural exploration). Intersectionality has been described as a work-in-progress and in line with this, we should on an on-going basis endeavour to push the boundaries and take the approach to unexplored places.

**d. Understanding the nuances of exclusion while being context specific.**

Knowledge and experiences vary in different societies and contexts with some powerful influences becoming accepted as a cultural norm and considered legitimate. Contextualisation is therefore important in this regard.

**1.4. Guiding principles for Inclusion**

- 1.4.1.** A deep understanding of the various and diverse contexts as well as recognising the power imbalances inherent in all aspects of the Foundation's work is critical

- 1.4.2. Ensuring equal voice and inclusion in terms of narratives and agendas prioritised (i.e. what groups are represented which groups are missing). Engagements should go beyond the dichotomy of men and women to ensure diverse and multi-level representation.
- 1.4.3. The Foundation's role is that of a facilitator and catalyst (with an awareness to not further dominant northern-based discourses, narratives, norms).

## **2. Mainstreaming gender equality**

### **2.1. What is gender mainstreaming?**

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy to ensure that gender equality concerns are considered seriously by decision makers at all levels and are an integral part of all planning, budgeting and programming decisions. Gender mainstreaming recognises that:

- gender equality is not a 'women's issue' but everyone's issue
- the nature of inequality is often systemic and structural
- women historically tend to be disadvantaged relative to men
- gender differences can also result in men being disadvantaged
- neither women nor men should be treated as a homogenous group
- governance policies and programmes affect men and women differently and that they have specific needs

### **2.2. Why is gender mainstreaming important to accountable, responsive and effective governance and good projects?**

Gender mainstreaming with an intersectional approach contributes to more responsive government and better service provision because it takes into account the interests and needs of both women and men while delving deeper than the ever-present category of gender to ensure consideration of other factors that interact with it. These interests and needs can often be different, requiring different approaches and services.

The intersectionality approach to gender mainstreaming ensures that varied interests of each gender forms the basis of interventions and services thereby ensuring greater inclusivity and larger reach than if these interventions and services were solely based on rigid categories of men and women.

Systemic and structural inequality can be understood better and countered with an intersectional lens. In some instances, governance processes such as legislation and policymaking are generalised for a gender group and create advantages for some and disadvantages for others. Inequality is therefore reinforced.

### **2.3. What are the main challenges to integrating gender equality in programme initiatives and projects?**

- Competing priorities and limited resources within partner agencies or organisations. Considering the many challenges currently facing the government and civil society sectors, gender equality may not be perceived as a priority.
- Insufficient understanding of gender equality as a component of participatory governance. Many governments, civic voice collectives and other stakeholders in governance such as media and academia perceive gender analysis and mainstreaming as donor driven concepts rather than as tools for effective planning and service provision.

- Insufficient understanding of gender equality components vis-à-vis intersectionality. It is important for many governments, civic voice collectives and other stakeholders in governance such as media and academia to have a nuanced understanding of and utilise an intersectional approach to gender so that more people are included and for greater impact. This would result in a move towards substantive gender equality as opposed to formal equality.
- Policy environments may be responsive to gender equality issues, but often they are yet to be fully operationalised. Government officials or civil society leaders may not be aware of their responsibilities under the policies or have the technical skills, resources or authority to integrate gender considerations into legislation and development programmes.
- Traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched even among well-educated professionals in the public and non-profit sectors. Many gender roles have religious and cultural roots and must be addressed with understanding and sensitivity.

#### 2.4. What will be the observable results of gender mainstreaming with an intersectional approach in Foundation-supported efforts?

- Women and men participate equally in the planning and implementation of Foundation-supported capacity development and programming initiatives and both women and men have increased learning or capabilities in targeted competencies.
- Participants in Foundation supported capacity development and programming initiatives have increased awareness of and sensitivity to intersectionality and other gender equality issues.
- Strategies, skills and tools from the Foundation and partners’ experience in gender sensitive planning, implementation and monitoring are ‘transferred’ and shared with stakeholders.
- Partners have increased capacity to mainstream and integrate gender equality promotion in organisational and governance planning and programming.
- Foundation and partner programmes and services more effectively meet the specific as well as varied needs of women and men in their communities.

#### 2.5 Key questions for the Foundation to consider when planning a project

1	Is the Foundation engaging diverse identities and multi-level representations of men and women in all the planning processes of the project?	‘Yes’ indicates that there is inclusion and the perspectives of different categories of men and women are not omitted.  ‘No’ presents the risk of omitted categories and partial representation of men and women.
2	Are there barriers or constraints to equal participation of all categories of women in the planning and implementation of the project by the partner? If so, can these constraints be overcome?	‘Yes’ implies that the project should not be implemented until there are concrete strategies to overcome the barriers and constraints. These should be included within the project profile, work plan and in the TORs for any consultants hired.
3	Will the short-term and long-term results of the project benefit/meet the varying needs both women and men equitably?	‘Yes’ implies that there will be no unplanned negative impact on either women or men.  ‘No’ suggests the project should NOT be implemented without major modifications. In

		cases where a project is designed to benefit women more than men in order to correct gender imbalances, this does not mean that the project will negatively impact men and will need to be re-designed.
4	Will the project contribute to enhancing capacity to integrate gender in planning and programming? Will gender equality awareness activities be integrated into the project?	‘Yes’ to either of these questions implies that this project provides an opportunity to build capacity around gender mainstreaming. Strategies to capitalise on this opportunity should be included in the final design and work plan
5	Have gender indicators been selected with which to measure the project results?	‘Yes’ indicates that the project has included the appropriate gender indicators.  ‘No’ suggests these should be identified.
6	Is there adequate information/knowledge on the power structures within the context of the project?	‘Yes’ affords greater understanding on which groups are privileged or not.  ‘No’ suggests that these should be recognised.

## 2.6 Key Questions for partners

1	<p>Participation of women and men in project identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the project consulted diverse categories of women and men on the problem or issue that the policy or project seeks to address as well as in the development of the solution?</li> <li>• Have women’s inputs influenced the design of the project?</li> </ul>
2	<p>Collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender-related information as part of project development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the project collected relevant sex-disaggregated data and other gender-related information from primary and secondary sources and used this in the problem analysis?</li> <li>• Does the data reflect differentiated vulnerabilities</li> </ul>
3	<p>Conduct of gender analysis and identification of gender issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the needs of diverse categories of women and men considered in the situation analysis?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are gender issues identified (i.e. identification of gender gaps in situation of women and men, their access to resources, and how this is likely to affect participation in the project or their access to project benefits, and if there will be any possible social problems?)</li> <li>• What key power imbalances define marginalised vs less marginalised groups</li> </ul>
4	<p>Gender equality goals, outcomes and outputs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do project objectives explicitly refer to women and men? Is women's access to and opportunity to benefit from initiatives targeted as well as men's? Does project goal address the needs and concerns of all categories of women and men?</li> <li>• Does the project have gender equality outputs or outcomes?</li> </ul>
5	<p>Matching of strategies with gender issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the strategies match the gender issues (including improvement of women's participation) and gender equality goals identified? Will the interventions reduce gender gaps or inequalities?</li> </ul>
6	<p>Supportive project management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is project leadership supportive of gender equality goals?</li> <li>• Is project management team knowledgeable on gender and intersectionality?</li> <li>• Has adequate gender expertise been made available throughout the project?</li> <li>• Are the project staff members technically prepared to promote gender equality or integrate Gender and Development (GAD) in their respective functions? Is there an individual or group responsible for promoting gender equality in the project?</li> </ul>
7	<p>GAD implementation process and procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do project implementation documents incorporate a discussion of GAD concerns? IF APPLICABLE: Are project pilots required to have explicit GAD objectives?</li> <li>• Are intersectionality concerns and issues incorporated in the implementation documents?</li> <li>• Does the project involve women and men equally or equitably, in various phases of the pilots/sub-projects?</li> <li>• Are all project documents gender sensitive? (i.e. uses gender neutral language; does not contain gender stereotypes; uses examples of men and women in case studies. The key to the use of gender neutral language or otherwise should be determined by the context as there are instances where using gender neutral language makes a particular gender invisible; for</li> </ul>

	<p>example, mostly using the word ‘people’. On the other hand, gendered language in some instances is seen as reinforcing bias).</p>
8	<p>Project monitoring system includes indicators that measure gender differences in outputs and outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the project have defined gender sensitive outputs and outcomes?</li> <li>• Does the project monitor the inputs, activities, and results using GAD indicators?</li> </ul>
9	<p>Project database includes sex-disaggregated and gender-related information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the project support studies to assess gender issues and impact? Or, is the data being collected to assess the project’s impact on women and men?</li> <li>• Do project reports include sex-disaggregated data, cover intersectionality and gender equality concerns (i.e. information on gender issues and how addressed?)</li> </ul>
10	<p>Gender equality and women’s empowerment targets being met</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the gender equality targets in the project implementation plan being met? To what extent?</li> <li>• Are these results sustainable?</li> <li>• Has the project helped develop the capacity of partners/beneficiaries to implement gender-sensitive projects?</li> </ul>