

INTERSECTIONALITY

Our bodies experience the world differently according to the social characteristics or identities that make up who we are:

RACE

ETHNICITY

GENDER

CLASS

MOBILITY

ABILITY

ABLE-BODIEDNESS

SEXUAL
ORIENTATION

ORIGIN

RELIGION

ARE WE
REALLY
THE SAME?

WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

"INTERSECTIONALITY WAS A LIVED REALITY BEFORE IT BECAME A TERM"

Kimberlé Crenshaw

Intersectionality is a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power (K.Crenshaw). Every one of us has multiple and complex identities based on our gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, education, age, sexual orientation, ability, etc. **Intersectionality describes how these identities interact and overlap to create different experiences of power, oppression, discrimination and privilege.** Intersectionality has become a way for activists to name their distinct experiences, and fight for visibility and inclusion.

Originally articulated by K.Crenshaw in relationship to black women who felt invisibilized within the “women’s” movement, **the term intersectionality has “brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them.** People of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse — all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, transphobia, able-ism and more.” (K.Crenshaw)

WHY IS INTERSECTIONALITY KEY FOR MOVEMENTS TO END VAWG?

By naming differences and commonalities, the intersections of personal characteristics, also allows us to find points of unity and common action.

While our experiences of violence and power vary greatly, we also can find much common ground if we take the time to understand each other’s experiences. We can learn from one another; we can work together on solutions; we can stand with each other. As JASS points out, **“intersectionality is the basis for collective liberation.** By acknowledging the full complexity of ourselves and seeing and including others struggling for freedom and equality as part of our own struggle, we find the basis for a much larger alliance for change, and a more transformative, inclusive vision for change. And if we do not build that commitment to intersectional identity and struggle, we risk fighting for change that still preserves the conditions of someone else’s oppression.” **If we do not actively address the subtle, internalized impacts of oppression and the complex forms of social exclusion and violence that women experience, we risk replicating that oppression, and undermining possible alliances and unity in social movements.**

An intersectional approach is vital for our movement-building:

- * Within our organizations and movements:** we need to build truly inclusive movements that respect the distinct experiences that we live and see that as a valuable part of the movement. This includes: recognizing dynamics of power and privilege, building shared understanding of systems of oppression and privilege; creating safe spaces for identity groups without creating isolation; respecting different challenges and contributions; and building strong relationships of trust.
- * In our strategies:** an intersectional approach is linked to power - it shapes our political perspectives and our political strategies. It is the basis for forging strong collaborations and alliances across differences that enable us to take action and make change. Those at the intersections of different forms of oppression have critical knowledge about strategies of resistance and liberation. It is important to integrate the breadth of our wisdom within our movements - distinct forms of advocacy and organizing, a diversity of narratives and cultural interpretations of social justice, and rich capacities for resilience and healing.



INTERSECTIONALITY WITHIN AND BETWEEN MOVEMENTS:

OUR MOVEMENTS CAN BE ENRICHED BY ENSURING DIVERSE EXPERIENCES AND ACTORS ARE AT THE CENTER.

The challenge of identity and intersectionality lies in recognizing and addressing differences and inequalities, but not allowing them to become unbridgeable chasms that prevent people from identifying common ground and building relationships of solidarity (JASS).

Our different narratives of violence are possible meeting points: to connect organizations across contexts and action-areas to understand others' experiences; to unite and prepare ourselves to confront the complexities of patriarchal violence on a much deeper, connected and nuanced level.

We are working to analyze discriminatory behaviors and patriarchal structures that we reproduce, causing exclusion and cracks in our movement. For example, the gendered violence against women and those who self-identify as women from the LGBTIQ movement, are linked – we experience violence for stepping out of and pushing back against our assigned “roles” in society – as an empowered women, as a trans woman, as a woman of color. When our patriarchal societies try to keep us down, it's important that we band together to push back, stand up across differences and rise together.

Between our movements, we need to amplify the voice, visibility and collective power of women where patriarchy intersects with other forms of oppression from transnational and corporate power, extractive industries, fundamentalisms, homophobia and transphobia. Our aim is to create and maintain dialogue with different social justice movements.

INTERSECTIONAL AGENDAS AND WORK FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Strong movements are united movements. Unity emerges when we:

- * build trust and genuine collaboration across difference;
- * address exclusion and discrimination in our movements;
- * make space for more voices, ideas and ways of doing things;
- * share leadership and power thoughtfully;
- * stand with each other.



* **Creating intentional spaces within our organizations and movements** that enable specific groups to others safe come together, be heard and provide leadership (e.g. the Black Feminist forum prior to the AWID forum).

* **Fostering sisterhood across many differences**— in Uganda the Feminist Forum offers spaces where members can talk freely, “unleash some madness”, build connections and shared understanding within the diversity of their movements.

* **Challenge language that reiterates exclusion:** CREA challenges women’s organizations to think about who is included in the term “all women”. They deliberately use terms such as “gender-based violence” to specifically include trans women and others along the gender spectrum in the narratives and agenda of their work.

* **FAMM, a network of young women in Indonesia has made building solidarity across difference** – gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, religion and origin – a critical focus and strength that makes them more powerful and safer.

QUESTIONING OUR POWER AND PRIVILEGE

When patriarchal styles of leadership and power dynamics (and those of other forms of dominance based on race, class, gender normativity, etc.) are the only examples we have to learn from, it’s “normal” that we often replicate them. In order to build critical awareness among ourselves, we encourage regular reflection:

* **What are the identity ‘labels’ that hold power in our contexts?** (Race, skin color, ethnic/religious group, social class, gender and sexual identity, education, language, etc.). Which of these labels am I /are we carrying?

* **Who “holds” power and leadership in the movement?**
Who gets “included” and by whom? What signifies membership in our movements and how might this exclude others?

* **In what kinds of movement spaces do a wider range of women feel included, valued and able to lead? Are we committed to creating that kind of movement?**

* **When developing our strategies for action – whose voices and experiences are valued?** Whose is missing? What do we lose in not having those perspectives and leadership?

* **What kinds of alliances and collaborations will enable us to experience solidarity and trust across difference?**

* **When we do reproduce these forms of power, how can we talk about these realities without shutting down?**

* **Most of all, how can we remain committed to our work and our sisters** whilst understanding that change doesn’t happen overnight – not within our circles, nor within society. Let’s give ourselves the time and space to learn and unlearn.

TO GO DEEPER INTO INTERSECTIONALITY, CHECK OUT THE RESOURCES IN THE ONLINE TOOLBOX AT:
www.preventgbvafrica.org/understanding-vaw/zines

This magazine series emerged from a gathering of feminist activists working to prevent VAWG in the Global South co-hosted by Raising Voices and JASS.