

THE TRANSFORMA- TIVE POWER OF INTERSECTIONALITY

*INTERSECTIONAL PRACTICES TO PROMOTE SOCIAL
JUSTICE AND REDUCE INEQUALITIES*



INTERSECTIONALITY

The term *intersectionality* was coined by Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the particular experiences of discrimination faced by African American women who are marginalized because of both their race and their gender. The term emphasizes the interplay of different social identities which produces distinct experiences of inequality. Other relevant characteristics besides gender and race include class, ability, religion, sexual orientation, age and citizenship.

The concept of intersectionality recognizes the multidimensionality of inequality and the interconnection of different forms of discrimination. It analyzes the role, function and impact of power structures on discrimination and privilege. An intersectional perspective can be used to draw attention to existing systems of oppression in society and to challenge, break through and change them. Intersectionality thus holds the potential for promoting social justice, solidarity and fairness.

Intersectionality, guided both by analysis and practice, can fundamentally transform how we understand the causes and impacts of inequalities and therefore how to meaningfully challenge them.

Rana Zincir Celal

EDITORIAL NOTE

ROBERT BOSCH STIFTUNG

How can systemic inequalities be addressed and reduced? This is the central question around which the Robert Bosch Stiftung strategy for reducing inequalities revolves. We are convinced that intersectionality is key to understanding and tackling inequality in all its complexities.

To effectively combat inequalities, it is vital to understand and transform the underlying systems and processes that define and shape inequalities of all kinds. Different social identities and locations, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, disability, caste, sexuality, immigrant status and geography, are intertwined in many ways and produce distinct experiences of exclusion. Intersectional approaches draw attention to these forms of interconnected oppression and allow for analyzing and addressing the root causes of inequalities.

In 2020, the Robert Bosch Stiftung launched its Support Program *Reducing Inequalities through Intersectional Practice* to learn with and from partner organizations that have hands-on experience with applying intersectional approaches to challenge inequalities.

The central objectives of the Support Program were to uncover and promote good practices with regard to intersectional work; to support actors addressing inequality with an intersectional approach and foster connections among them to provide a platform for exchange and learning among practitioners with the aim of informing future programmatic work.

Thus, 11 partners from around the world, who work on different aspects of inequality with a range of different strategies, were provided with Robert Bosch Stiftung funding to deepen their intersectional practices. They were also supported through a one-year facilitated and co-designed learning journey, in which they collectively examined common questions and challenges encountered when working with an intersectional approach. This booklet aims to showcase the work of the partner organizations and to reflect on the discussions, learnings and insights that were gained within this program.

By sharing the knowledge that was generated more widely, Robert Bosch Stiftung hopes to contribute to intersectional practice being applied more often. We hope that this may lead to changes in how philanthropy provides funding and to open up spaces for those fighting inequalities, so that they can come together in solidarity to collaborate, exchange ideas and mobilize around social change.

We want to thank our partners without whom this learning could not have happened:

- **Calala Fondo de Mujeres**
- **Centre for Labour & Social Studies (CLASS)**
- **Chayn**
- **Cultivando Género**
- **Dasra**
- **End Cyber Abuse**
- **Global Greengrants Fund UK**
- **Institute for Economic Justice**
- **RomaniPhen e.V.**
- **SUPERRR Lab**
- **Universidad del Valle**
- **Women in Migration Network**

INTERSECTIONALITY & ITS PRINCIPLES

INTERVIEW WITH PRAMADA MENON

BY ZOE RASBASH

Intersectionality is a big word. It asks us to make space for the infinite ways people experience the world – understanding that all forms of discrimination are interconnected. It holds a sense of responsibility, complexity and care, to learn and build something better. For those working in social justice, it can feel overwhelming – how can we do all this well in our work?

Chatting with Pramada Menon, who has been practicing intersectionality for a very, very long time, I am met with a pragmatic and humorous approach. As part of Robert Bosch Stiftung' year-long investigation, she co-created the ↗ **intersectionality principles** – cross cutting guidelines to assist this complex work. Finally, someone who can tell me exactly what I need to do!

TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF AND HOW IT LED YOU TO THE INTERSECTIONALITY PRINCIPLES?

I've worked in India and globally for 30 years, grounded in community craft work, the sexual rights movement and women rights organizations across the globe. We've been talking about intersectionality in the Indian women's movement for ever so long, since every woman has multiple identities and one cannot talk about their lives without acknowledging all of those. No person has a homogenous identity and the sooner we realize that, the better it is for our work.

When Robert Bosch Stiftung asked if I was interested in this project, I laughed uproariously because it seemed ridiculous: 11 diametrically opposite



organizations from across the world, given this money to explore intersectionality together in COVID and engage regularly? I thought *“another mad donor idea, let’s go with it.”* But that’s what made it such a fantastic experience, learning all these contexts.

WHEN YOU ENCOUNTERED THIS TERM INTERSECTIONALITY, DID IT CATALYZE A DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING?

It wasn’t a new concept, but solidified what I had believed in. Intersectionality is a fancy way of saying any human you meet is a mixture of everything. In the 2000s, donors were suddenly all about intersectionality as if it was a new idea — and I was frustrated, as if they were insinuating that we’d all been twiddling our thumbs and doing something else?

Many words have become common parlance without actually explaining what it means. For example, feminist methodology is really just common-sense methodology — it’s not rocket science! Everyone always says I’m an intersectional feminist. I’m like *“Okay, fabulous. You’ve learned the word. But what does that mean?”*

It’s just about equity, we need to use these words practically. This is why we developed the intersectionality *principles* to guide good work you develop in context, rather than specific instructions. There are enough ways you can tick a box and feel you’ve done the work; we need something different.

COULD YOU SHARE EXAMPLES OF GOOD INTERSECTIONAL PRACTICE?

In the sexual rights movement, we are constantly re-learning. We began with issues around sexuality: women and men are different. Suddenly, the game changed: what about queer and trans people? And it wasn’t that we weren’t including them previously, but we saw them as part of *us* — that works for some queer and trans people, but not for others. And then we realized, what about disabled queer folks? Do we even use the word queer? Do we use

LGBT? The sexual rights movement gets its ass kicked constantly and has forced us to look at caste, class, ability, education, religion, marital status — so many cross-cutting issues, in the fight for all of us. No one is doing it perfectly.

SO, IS INTERSECTIONAL WORK REALLY ABOUT COURAGE IN THE FACE OF AN ASS-KICKING?

We fear failure because we’ve been told we must succeed. Donors tell us, *“you must be successful because we have invested in you.”* But we must be better with failure.

So often we don’t understand the *inner* challenges: do we think we know everything? Every time you think you’ve got something sorted out, something else hits the fan that you never considered. Intersectional work must be something where you can admit that you don’t have the answers and you may fail. But you know what, we’re going to try it anyway. And that’s what I liked about the way Robert Bosch Stiftung funded the project; giving us space to try, even if we didn’t think we would succeed.

WHEN FUNDERS ARE SO DESPERATELY FOCUSED ON QUANTIFIABLE OUTCOMES, DOES IT INHIBIT THE ABILITY FOR US TO FOCUS ON INTERSECTIONALITY AS AN EMERGING PROCESS AND EXPERIMENTATION IN HOW WE DO THINGS?

I understand donors: they take public money and you are accountable because they need numbers. You can give figures, but you must give more context.

If someone said: *“10,000 women in their village have all become leaders,”* I’d question the words. What do we understand as leadership? Do you mean leading movements? Leading their own lives with information? If a woman gets married and doesn’t want to work, are you okay with that? Donors need to be more open that the results are not always quantitative and can’t always be scaled up.

It's big money and we're trying to change the world. And the larger question: what do we want to see at the end of the day? Do we just want scalable models? Or do we want to see people exercise informed choices in a way that is non-judgemental and supportive? Can they access their rights? And if they can, do we just pat ourselves on the back? And how do you work with donors on this and say we need some financial allocation to fail and change as we go?

Robert Bosch Stiftung did not see themselves as donors and instead participated in the learning curve with us. It was so refreshing to have donor agencies listening. Donors must be more receptive to failure and admitting they are learning as well is a huge first step.

**INTERSECTIONAL MOVEMENT BUILDING
MUST BE ROOTED IN CARE, BE MEANINGFUL,
NOT RUSHED. BUT THERE CAN BE TENSION
WITH THE URGENCY WITH WHICH WE NEED
TO ACT. HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE THIS?**

The real question is: what do you actually want to change? How do you want to change it? Our entire conversation can become polarizing. I see it as: what's the commonality that brings you together? I don't think we can ever be fully intersectional but it's about striving to be intersectional to the best of our ability.

And you must see the humor. Some of the mistakes I've made are ridiculous. One thing I insist on is you can't do this work without laughing. Have fun doing it and ensure those you work with have fun too. Think critically, allow yourself to make mistakes, the people you work with to make mistakes. It's an uphill battle and you may never have all the answers and that's fine.

I didn't get direct instructions, but I now understand why practicing intersectionality feels scary. We will try to create change that is inclusive of everyone's experiences and needs. And we will fail because that's an impossible task. But we can't let the fact that it's impossible stop us from trying.

We need to tackle our egos and reframe failure as an unavoidable step in a much broader process of transforming the systems which oppress us. I know I often hesitate for fear of getting things wrong. The social justice space is riddled with cancel culture and punitive attitudes to mistakes both online and interpersonally. In this reality, it's nerve-wracking to take risks and build bridges with communities outside of your own. So yes, we have to understand failure is a necessity, but we also have to stop calling people out and start calling people in. To tackle the complex ways multiple axes of oppression intersect and build a society which works for everyone in a coalition of many groups, to fail at this and get up and try again, step one is to care for each other. Radical empathy, trust and accountability and no time for hesitation.

The principles for [↗ download](#) in 7 languages.

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INTERSECTIONALITY & INEQUALITY

RANA ZINCIR CELAL

Intersectionality is often referenced in ways that hollows it out of its transformative potential, which itself is a reflection of and a contributor to further entrenching inequalities.

In my work over the years, I've observed a tendency towards safer concepts like diversity and inclusion. While certainly important, the problem is that they can gloss over *why* there is a lack of diversity and what drives exclusion to begin with. That's why I was so excited to join forces with Robert Bosch Stiftung to design a new grant program centering intersectionality.

I am left hopeful and energized by the abundance of insights that emerged through the partners of the Support Program for *Reducing Inequalities through Intersectional Practice*. It shows that intersectionality, when applied holistically as a framework to guide both analysis and practice, can fundamentally transform how we understand the causes and impacts of inequalities and therefore how to meaningfully challenge them.

WITHOUT AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH, WE CANNOT GRASP THE COMPLEXITY OF INEQUALITIES

Because inequality is complex and multi-dimensional, it cannot be understood by looking at one aspect of inequality in isolation from others. Similarly, responses need to be constructed in ways that recognize the interconnected nature of inequalities.

Intersectionality offers a transformative way of understanding how inequalities are experienced, particularly for people or groups facing multiple disadvantages and how these vary depending on context and the confluence of different factors (such as race, gender, class, sexuality, faith, origin, ability, education, language and more).

Partners of the Support Program found that it was through intentionally using intersectionality as a prism for analysis that they could arrive at a sharper and more nuanced assessment of interconnected

inequalities, making it possible to grasp the relationship between a host of multiple factors, for example, migration and race, or race, class and gender and faith.

Intersectional analysis also reveals how different systems of oppression are intertwined and the particular impacts this produces, making explicit distinct and diverse forms of exclusion, oppression and discrimination. This is especially important to ensure that no one is left behind, due to overlooked or invisibilized inequalities, that then result in the accumulation and persistence of advantage and disadvantage. Otherwise these will continue to both generate and reproduce existing inequalities.

CONTEXTUALIZE AND FIND WHAT MATTERS MOST

An intersectional approach is, by definition, context-specific. Partners shaped their analysis through bottom-up approaches informed by lived experience combined with a recognition of the structural and systemic drivers of inequality. Nearly all partners worked with different communities to unpack, with practical and participatory techniques, how multiple layers of inequality intersect in their lives and in relation to different forces, from technology to migration to climate change.



Through the process, partners also found that the core tenets of intersectionality could be adapted and applied in tangible and accessible ways, whether or not the term itself is used. For some partners, this meant foregrounding a decolonial lens, anti-racism and/or power. For migrant women's movements, decolonization and anti-racism often resonate more strongly, because of the possibilities for articulating and challenging the ways that violence is reproduced and experienced.

For the Calala Women's Fund, the process of shifting power and sharing decision-making with their grantees led them to look at how they could ↗ **infuse a decolonial perspective** within ↗ **Calala**, starting with recognizing the impacts of European, white and class privileges and the ways that resulting power differentials are reproduced.

In the case of ↗ **Women in Migration Network** (WIMN), there were related calls from their counterparts in Africa and Latin America to promote an autonomous understanding of intersectionality from the Global South that is not dependent on academic concepts originating in the Global North.

As these cases show, what is most critical is to capture and reflect the nuances of inequalities and the power imbalances they create.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE POWER OF NARRATIVES

How the reality of inequality is framed matters. Narratives are often instrumentalized in ways that stigmatize certain people or create false divisions between different groups.

The process of generating an intersectional analysis must therefore be shaped by an understanding of the power of narratives, stories, language and ideas in determining how inequality is understood, whether it is acted upon and how.

Dominant narratives, such as meritocracy for example, skew the way people think about the causes of inequality and who is *deserving* of success. Stories and experiences of marginalized groups are left out altogether which perpetuates patterns of exclusion.

More concerningly, evidence and data in the public domain often fail to represent or capture the challenges of intersecting inequalities, which then has an influence on public policy and the distribution of resources, critically affecting already marginalized groups.

THE POTENTIAL OF INTERSECTIONAL NARRATIVES TO BUILD POWER

In the UK, identity politics is often used to divide people on the basis of race and class. In response, ↗ **CLASS** developed an ↗ **alternative**

narrative to build solidarity across these identifiers. Their research *“found that intersectional messages that explicitly talk about different races and identities are far more persuasive than ones devoid of terms referencing identities; they create a more inclusive we, engage better with the realities of people’s lives and guard against reductive or stereotyping of a single group.”*

I’ve personally seen and experienced false dichotomies and divisive rhetoric used in different contexts, whether in Turkey, the US, Cyprus or the UK. But, I’ve also seen people respond positively to the real sense of connection that emerges from being exposed to multiple perspectives and to facing up to hard truths.

↗ **RomaniPhen’s** approach uses the arts, archiving and research to expose the unacknowledged histories of genocide and other forms of injustice against Romani and Sintizzi communities and to elevate their stories and contributions which have been systematically erased and silenced.

Both these cases, although working in very different contexts, demonstrate how community-driven intersectional narratives play an essential role in naming and acting on inequality.

Intersectional practice involves claiming ownership of stories, narratives and data through collective knowledge generation and intersectional storytelling. Space is made for multiple stories and forms of evidence to emerge and be shared, reflecting complex lived realities that might otherwise go unrecognized.

These narratives reveal how structures and systems of inequality are present in lived experiences and offer the possibility of showing how struggles are connected. As we saw in the case of ↗ **Dasra’s** work with ↗ **migrant women workers in India**, narratives give us a window into the deep and multiple facets of inequality that data alone cannot capture, allowing us to discern the links between patriarchy, neoliberalism, caste and climate breakdown.

POWER THROUGH PARTICIPATION

Participation has been a central theme in the Support Program. A shared intersectional analysis of inequalities, developed through participatory processes, emerged as an essential building block for joint action and cross-movement power grounded in a mutual appreciation of both the impacts and causes of inequality.

However, participatory processes of co-creation, collective analysis and movement-building require being attuned to how power plays out. It means being prepared to shift dynamics through practices that both redefine and redistribute power towards advancing agency, especially for those who have been historically marginalized.

This means reconfiguring who makes decisions and how decisions are made. The move towards participatory grantmaking is one example of this, as in the case of Calala where representatives of the migrant women's movement decide on grants.

Power imbalances exist in all contexts, including in progressive social movements, NGOs and philanthropy. For far too long the default approach has been one that is siloed, overlooking groups and issues deemed less crucial or the concern of others, or simply taking for granted that the needs of certain groups have been accounted for, when often they are not (as in the case of the mainstream women's movement, which often neglects the perspectives of racialized women, sex workers and trans people). This tendency has fractured the capacity to truly understand and respond to the multiple factors at play with inequality.

WORKING TOWARDS INTERSECTIONAL SOLIDARITY

Applying a participatory, intersectional approach can support the process of forging vital connections within and across different struggles.

The partners found that building intersectional solidarity requires genuinely inclusive processes that allow for the integration of different realities and priorities.

To break silos and build connections across issues and struggles requires constantly interrogating and challenging power imbalances and not falling into the trap of tokenistic approaches. This needs to be done, both externally and internally, to ensure that organizations and movements can meaningfully work towards equity. This means honest self-reflection on privilege and (dis)advantage to ensure that power is shared fairly.

MOVING TOWARDS MECHANISMS THAT ENABLE INTERSECTIONAL PRACTICE

To experience and confront inequality means facing violence and dealing with the ongoing impacts of trauma. Those working with an intersectional approach recognize that individual and collective care and mechanisms of protection are essential, not only to sustain the work, but as a matter of justice and survival.

What would it mean to build and resource a movement-oriented infrastructure for care, protection and inclusion?

Speaking with Calala about their own decolonial journey, they shared: *"We have understood that, taking into account that we have all been socialized in sexist, racist, ableist societies, we can unknowingly reproduce these forms of violence and occupy different*

positions in relation to power dynamics. We have learned that a decolonial and intersectional approach need more than personal and collective will.”

This underscores the importance of developing organizational processes and structures that reflect and uphold these principles and not just remaining at the level of individual or group awareness of inequalities.

Finally, what emerged through the Support Program is that intersectionality’s potency lies in going beyond an analysis of the intersections of identity categories (e. g. race, gender and ability) to pinpoint structures and systems of oppression (e. g. racism, patriarchy, ableism, neo-colonialism, classism) that are the root causes of inequalities.

What is experienced at the level of the individual is the result and a reflection of wider systems of power, which can only be understood by accounting for the histories behind them and their responsibility in entrenching systemic inequality and injustice.

Social and political norms as well as policies, practices, processes of institutions (such as the educational system, the justice system, the media, philanthropy, finance and so on) are molded by systems of oppression, hence they explicitly reflect and uphold hierarchies of power.

These insights from the Support Program are just a drop in the ocean of struggle that intersectional feminist movements have waged for years the world over. My hope is that the Program’s reflections bring forth a more curious, courageous and rigorous engagement with intersectional practice, to truly live up to its transformative potential.

THE AUTHOR

Rana Zincir Celal brings over 20 years of experience working across multiple geographies and domains, including academia, philanthropy and civil society. She is an advisor to philanthropies and impact investors with a focus on tackling inequality. As an external consultant to Robert Bosch Stiftung, Rana designed and coordinated the Support Program on Reducing Inequalities through Intersectional Practice.

INTERSECTIONALITY & POLICY

ELLEN MILES

The policy making world is in constant flux. As political, economic, environmental and public health events create new challenges, not only do policies themselves change, so too the frameworks they emerge from.

At present, a new north star is rising: intersectionality-based policy frameworks are moving from the margins to the mainstream, bringing critical race theory and feminism to the top of the change-making food chain.

But why is an intersectional approach to policy needed and what does it look like in practice? I caught up with four researchers and policy advisors — across migration, tech, financial and urban planning sectors — to find out the current state of play and how they're moving policy making towards an intersectional future.

WHY DO WE NEED INTERSECTIONAL POLICY?

Intersectional policy-making aims to reduce inequalities by identifying and addressing multifaceted issues that traditional policies overlook.

One of the biggest failures with current policies is that they are largely generic, involving sweeping statements and blanket aims — ostensibly to serve the majority. But, in failing to account for complex differences within a population (the unequal distribution of assets, access and opportunities across dimensions of race, gender, ability, class and so on), such policies typically serve a

privileged *minority*, while leaving swathes of marginalized groups at a disadvantage.

As such, non-intersectional approaches to policy and policy making often exacerbate existing socio-economic inequalities. By taking an intersectional approach — as outlined below — policymakers can hope to uncover the myriad issues different people face and so create policies that can begin to address the needs of the whole population.

IS EVERYONE INCLUDED?

An intersectional approach to policy doesn't simply mean creating new policies specifically aimed at one marginalized group or another. In their efforts to be *intersectional*, many well-meaning policy-makers erroneously treat oppressed identities as discrete groups, without considering the multiplicity of crossovers between such groups and unique experiences within them.

As Argentinian gender and migration specialist Paola Cyment from ↗ **Women in Migration Network** (WIMN) summarizes: “*They say, okay, let’s create a policy for women migrants, or disabled migrants but the resulting policies still don’t respond to the multiple discriminations and oppressions these groups face.*”

Consider a policy designed to financially empower women, which looks at women's financial needs in relation to men's. Looking at *women* as a homogenous category, one that isn't intersected by disability, ethnicity, migration status, unpaid labor and



so on fails to consider the multifarious needs and experiences of women with intersectional identities – i. e. the majority of women.

The more oppressions someone faces, the more a policy ought to serve them (in order to fulfill an aim of social justice and equitability). Yet, with non-intersectional policies, the opposite is happening: a policy aimed at *women* which fails to take intersectionality into account actually fails the majority.

Intersectionality is rooted in the premise that human lives cannot be reduced to single characteristics, nor can human experiences be accurately understood by prioritizing any one factor (or even a finite cluster of factors).

So, rather than having separate policies for specific identities, Paola advises policymakers to create unified policies that take *all* marginalized groups' needs into account: *“Instead of multiple policies, each focused on one specific group, we must change our approach to create a holistic policy that acknowledges multiple oppressions,”* she says. *“To ensure no one is excluded, policies must aim*

for universal accessibility and equitable affirmative action.”

In other words, to take an intersectional approach, policymakers should ensure that they do not give higher status to any one inequality of experience or discrimination.

FOCUSING ON LIVED EXPERIENCES

Devising a truly holistic, inclusive policy such as this requires zooming right in on the issue at hand, to surface all the different ways people experience that issue (creating fractal levels of complexity known as *sub-issues*). This demands forging new research paths. Whereas policymakers traditionally rely on quantitative data from databases or censuses, such information is limiting.

For instance, a database can tell you that 20% of a population are disabled, but it can't tell you what they're experiencing, or what kind of solutions they need. You have to actually listen to people.

Intersectional policy making in contrast places a greater emphasis on *qualitative* research, bringing both a deeper level of understanding, greater

human empathy and representation of groups affected into policy creation.

Research for intersectional policy can involve focus groups, field notes, photography, workshops, visits to a space or facility, observation, one-to-one interviews and less formal conversations — often all of the above. It's not just using these methods, but the *combination* of different methods involved in an intersectional approach which, for urban planner Ángela Franco-Calderón, is *“the real richness of the approach.”*

Ángela led a project in Cali, Colombia called ↗ **Ciudad y Paz** to support the community of Brisas de las Palmas, a self-built neighborhood developed at the city's fringes by people who'd been displaced by the country's internal armed conflict.

The culmination of the project's qualitative research — in particular, walks around the neighborhood with residents — is *intersectional mapping*, a new tool that allowed the team to, in Ángela's words, *“apply academic concepts from gender and critical race theory to physical, spatial urban planning.”*

This tool tangibly illustrated the intersectional principle that multiple experiences co-exist within any community. The neighborhood's park, for example, was simultaneously perceived as a highly oppressive space (a *red zone*) by some and a highly joyous space (a *green zone*) by others.

However, changing our approaches to policy making isn't always easy and creating the tool wasn't exactly a walk in the park. *“The most challenging part,”* Ángela tells me, *“was understanding how to put to paper, into technical maps, all the feelings and perceptions and qualitative information.”*

Wrestling with this kind of puzzle is a necessary part of intersectional policy making — and a rewarding one. Now, ↗ **Universidad de Valle** (at which Ángela is a professor) is working with the community to co-design the Brisas de las Palmas park in ways that reduce the *red zones* of oppression, so that everyone can enjoy this public space together, at the same time.

QUESTIONING THE STATUS QUO

As well as *zooming in* to different niche perspectives and experiences, intersectional policy making demands that we *zoom out*, or step back, to critically examine existing policies and the frameworks they're based on.

What status quo are they serving? Whose views, perspectives, material interests do they reflect? Are the current inputs to decision-making and processes (the data gathering, analysis and public consultation process) sufficient to unearth the hidden inequalities of marginalized subgroups?

“For us,” says ↗ **Institute for Economic Justice** (IEJ) researcher and social justice activist Zimbali Mncube, *“the point of departure is to interrogate social and historical processes and the structures of power that intersect to reproduce socio-economic exclusion. Historical processes such as apartheid and colonialism, for instance, continue to be reproduced by today's economic policies.”*

Beyond providing context to present experiences, stepping back can help policymakers get to the roots of issues, rather than addressing surface symptoms.

On tech policy, Elisa Lindinger, Co-Director of German ↗ **SUPERRR Lab**, a lab for feminist digital futures, says: *“Cases of discriminatory algorithms or AIs are just symptoms of a bigger picture: technological infrastructure is unjust. In the way tech is rolled out, the way that access is provided, in the fact that it's a business model not a social model — the problems with tech start with the things you can't even see.”*

For Elisa, intersectional tech policy isn't about progressing the current system, but remodeling it at the roots. *“We wanted to provide a new lens, a new frame of reference, to reveal various dimensions and layers that need to be addressed.”*

For SUPERRR Lab, this manifested in a ↗ **feminist tech policy framework**. As Elisa says *“Feminism is intersectional by nature; it means looking at power dynamics and dismantling them. We didn't put out principles to make tech more gender equal,*

Intersectionality-based policy frameworks are moving from the margins to the mainstream, bringing radical critical race theory and feminism to the top of the changemaking food chain.

because that would just shift the gap, a bit, for a few — that can't be what we're working towards."

The radical conclusion of SUPERRR's ↗ **feminist tech principles** (which are hanging in a few offices in the German parliament and EU parliament) is that tech policy should be reframed as social policy.

"Right now, tech is tied up in the economics corner," Elisa explains. "It's about investing in innovation and digital markets for profit. Really, tech conversations should be in the social field and for truly revolutionary policy making we need digital town halls, run by a collectivist, feminist form of systematic governance."

COLLABORATION AND CO-DESIGN

So, once you understand the (unlevel) playing field through research and reflection, it's time to start building the policy framework. In intersectional policy making, this means co-design. Listening to beneficiaries at the research stage is not enough; they must also be brought into the policy design process itself.

At its core, this participative process involves dismantling traditional power dynamics between researcher and subject. This manifests in many ways, including language and labeling of minoritized groups.

"We're against labeling communities as vulnerable groups because it puts them into a passive role," Paola explains. "If you believe migrant women or other systematically minoritized groups are vulnerable, you're not seeing them as an agent of change, you don't recognize that they have a voice and should have a seat at the decision-making table. They don't need your protection, they need to be actively part of the dialogue."

The experts I spoke to all echoed the significance of collaboration across working groups. Elisa spoke out against gatekeeping, declaring that *"the time has actually passed where one stakeholder group can provide meaningful, impactful policies that work for all. We need to work more closely together, facilitating dialogue with other civil society organizations and researchers."*

Referencing the participation of WIMN at the United Nations Network on Migration (UNMN), Paola highlights the articulation of the (previously distinct) anti-racism and gender discrimination workstreams. International labor organizations are part of the network to help create policies that address all the interwoven difficulties migrants face; an approach which recognizes that, because issues are linked, they require cross-movement solidarity and knowledge-sharing for their solutions to be meaningful.

POLICIES OUTSIDE THE BOX

Given that intersectionality is fundamentally about breaking free from static labels and all intersectional policy ultimately aims at reducing social inequality (rather than simply fixing one facet of it), it's not surprising that recommendations arising from intersectional policy making processes are cross-sector.

In other words, intersectional policies not only address multiple forms of experience and oppression, but break beyond traditional borders between economic policy, healthcare policy, tech policy and so on.



So, an intersectional economic policy isn't only an economic policy and an intersectional tech policy isn't only a tech policy.

The IEJ, for instance, recommended infrastructural developments and improved access to healthcare. Paola's work with WIMN often involves *"policies that are not only aimed at migrants: sexual and reproductive rights, non-discrimination in the workplace, racism."* She continues, *"It's important to break through silos and not only work on migration policy but also work on other policies that can impact migrant women."*

The findings in Ángela's research for Brisas de las Palmas not only resulted in the municipality financing infrastructural development (including the park, safe homes and provision of water pipes for clean water and sanitation), but also formally recognizing the neighborhood. As Ángela explains, *"We quickly realized that being part of the city, as a legalized neighborhood, was very important for its residents as a reparation."*

ONGOING OPTIMIZATION

An intersectional policymaker's work is never done. Once a new policy is implemented, the work begins to see how impactful and effective it is. As with every stage in this process, this involves working closely with those affected by the policy, getting their rigorous, qualitative feedback and hearing their suggested solutions to any rough edges. This is an iterative feedback loop, which should never end.

That's the zoomed in look. You also need to step back and *never stop questioning* the foundations and assumptions your policies are based on: truly intersectional policy making frameworks involve constant reflection on intersectionality itself, from as many perspectives as possible, to try and do more and do better.

WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE US?

As micro and macro (r)evolutions continue to occur around the world, intersectional policy

frameworks will never be static, but exist as complex, living, breathing things.

As a species and society, we love to understand things: cramming complex issues into cognitive boxes; and looking for quick, simple answers. But, just like a *one size fits all* t-shirt, *one size fits all* policies only properly fit a minority of people. More often than not, the minority who already benefit from the status quo: the *default* human, the straight, white, able-bodied man.

Intersectional policy, on the other hand, embraces the spectrum of experiences. It acknowledges the complexity of the problems we face and refrains from trying to provide easy answers.

Rather, intersectional policy making centers the mutual understanding of challenges and the creation of new opportunities for flourishing. Properly executed, intersectional approaches help to surface and identify overlooked niches, to address multiple problems at once.

In many ways, intersectional policy is a new frontier: *"In terms of intersectional economic policy, there are very few resources out there right now,"* Zimbali laments. At the same time, there is a long history of intersectional thinking. *"We're standing on the shoulders of giants,"* says Elisa, *"generations of feminists have been organizing around these ideas."* Thoughts that used to be thought of as radical (though still radical) are now being brought into the mainstream. The future is intersectional.

THE AUTHOR

Ellen Miles is an activist and author who roots for nature in urban neighborhoods. She believes in meeting grassroots, ground-up action with top-down policy solutions.

INTERSECTIONALITY & HOW WE UNDERSTAND IT IN PRACTICE

SAFIYA BASHIR

Growing up, navigating the different aspects of my identity was always difficult. As a woman, I could share the struggles of living in a patriarchal world with female friends. As a South Asian woman, however, my experiences of sexism didn't fully match those of my white counterparts. I found myself boxing my identity into neat, distinctive categories. I have Pakistani heritage, I'm a woman, I'm British, I'm Muslim. I am made up of many separate things. It wasn't until I came across Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality that it became clear that markers of inequality operate simultaneously. Understanding this theory – particularly in policy – is key to creating meaningful change for marginalized groups. However, how effectively is this being carried out? Whilst the term intersectionality might be increasingly used by government officials and NGOs, there is a danger of it remaining an abstract theory rather than a tool to create meaningful change and challenge structural oppression.

INTERSECTIONALITY IN MEXICO: PAVING THE WAY OR PERFORMATIVE ACTION?

Having carried out research on intersectionality in Mexico for the past five years, Isabel Arellano and Geras Contreras have seen the term integrate itself into much of the country's public policy. In many ways, the country seems to be leading the way and incorporating an intersectional lens into many of its laws.

In 2020, Mexico became the first country in the Global South to implement the Intersectional Feminist Foreign Policy and since, has appointed two female career diplomats to the Ministry of Foreign Relations. However, whether the theory has been translated successfully into practice remains another conversation.

“The term is very much here and it’s being introduced and incorporated into laws, policies and programs. However, there’s no real consensus on how to use it and there are lots of loopholes if you analyze these laws closely,” Isabel tells me. *“Are we hearing it more because institutions are jumping on a bandwagon without actually being intersectional? Probably.”*

Through their work with ↗ **Cultivando Género**, Isabel and Geras are on a mission to change things. Cultivando Género aims to improve access to public services from an intersectional perspective and they believe that strengthening the abilities of public servants is key for this to happen successfully.

The organization works directly with local public servants by delivering workshops and sharing its ↗ **Guide to Intersectionality**; a comprehensive resource that facilitates self-reflection, understanding and awareness of the factors that lead to structural inequality. A lack of intersectionality can be extremely complicated and have problematic effects for already marginalized populations, something which Geras points to through the recent decriminalization of abortion in several Mexican states.

While last year’s ruling was undoubtedly a huge step for women’s rights, it’s not as inclusive as it initially presents. As Geras explains, *“mainstream feminism was very happy about this law and of course, we’re glad that most women achieved the right to an abortion. But these same states don’t recognize the rights of transgender people or respect Indigenous practices. We need all womxn to be heard in the new fight so that really, everyone is guaranteed access to abortions.”*

BEYOND THE BUZZWORD

The exclusion of already minoritized Indigenous communities and transgender people from this landmark ruling proves that institutions still have a long way to go. In this sense, we can see a real danger of intersectionality being used as a meaningless tick-box exercise without true interrogation and implementation of its principles. When I asked Isabel and Geras why it’s still proving difficult to move beyond being a buzzword, they explained a limiting factor can be its associations with gender and identity.

So, to move beyond being a buzzword, intersectionality clearly needs to be both viewed and understood as something beyond

gender and viewed as a tool to challenge *all* forms of structural power. Geras explains that policymakers are increasingly viewing it through a lens of an identity that needs to be *fixed*. *“Public servants tend to see intersectionality as only something that affects the other and not them,”* they said. *“We need to talk about it in a more systematic way. It’s not something that just affects women or LGBTQI+ people, it’s about the system’s powers at play.”* This detail shifts the view of how we look at intersectionality in a big way. Although the essence of exclusion is still very much there, this approach to intersectionality takes the pressure off marginalized voices by recognizing that all power structures need to be part of the conversation.

MOVING FROM THEORY TO ACTION

I asked Isabel and Geras for some practical tips on how we, as individuals, can move the conversation forward.

“This is the billion-dollar question,” says Geras. *“For me, it’s important for everyone to understand their position within intersectionality. We need to understand how we all can profit from some societal structures and we might also be disadvantaged compared to others. It’s about understanding how your position differs compared to others.”*

Intersectionality needs to be both viewed and understood as something beyond gender and viewed as a tool to challenge all forms of structural power.

As the conversation moves forward, we’re seeing a surge in comprehensive resources and tools that allow us to grow our vocabulary around intersectionality.

In Mexico, Cultivando Género shares their Guide to Intersectionality in workshops to public servants. UN Women also share a ↗ **free online guide and toolkit** on their website for organizations and individuals. The language and resources are coming together in a

way that is allowing societies to avoid falling into an *add and stir* approach but rather a shift in mindset.

For me, it's these approaches that are breaking down the broad and sometimes overwhelming associations with intersectionality. Creating practical resources and toolkits are proving to be a key step in making the topic accessible and available to all people, organizations and levels of power.

"We all are part of the oppression in social systems," Isabel adds.

"Sometimes we're on the top and then sometimes it can completely flip and we find ourselves lacking. If you're in a position of privilege, you have a responsibility to use that and balance it out for others."

It's this helpful reminder from Isabel and Geras that stays with me after our conversation. I can find myself guilty of clinging to aspects of my identity that are associated with inequality. However, to ensure that it becomes an important tool for change, we need to recognize that our identities are much more complicated than that. Sometimes we benefit from structural powers, sometimes we don't. And it's when we do that it's most important we use intersectionality as a tool to balance it out for those excluded. It's time to hold ourselves and organizations accountable and start recognizing the importance of intersectionality in everything we do. Through becoming familiar with the theory, language and how it plays out in our everyday lives, we have the responsibility to communicate intersectionality as an everyday tool that can be used from a grassroots level to the biggest structures of power.

Organizations such as Cultivando Género are overhauling the way policy is organized to ensure no groups are left behind. We need to recognize the interconnected nature of inequality and frame it as an issue that affects *everyone* – not just a few marginalized groups.

THE AUTHOR

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INTERSECTIONALITY & LANGUAGE

MARIAJO CASTRO LAGE

Writing about language justice and intersectionality as a read-as-white, European, university-trained person whose mother tongue is one of the most widely spoken languages – having been imposed with blood and fire for centuries, with the epistemicide of other populations – runs the risk of being a little presumptuous, regardless of how many layers my identity may have.

However, what I am going to try to convey here comes from experiences and observations working with human rights defenders for years, thanks to the hundreds of people from around the world speaking truth to power in different languages and I want to honor them beforehand. I also pose some questions that I hope may be the seed of a broader collective reflection on language justice.

AN ISSUE OF ACCESS

The basis of language justice is that all voices, whatever language they speak, should be heard with the same weight and should have equal access. This means tackling oppressions and privileges.

We might start by asking ourselves: what is it that makes a language official? In what languages is mainstream knowledge disseminated? What language do we use with those closest to us? What does it mean if we tell stories in one language and give speeches in another? What are the languages used at international events? And do these coincide with colonial languages?

The working languages during the Support Program were English and Spanish. Of the 11 partners involved, the participants almost certainly spoke more than 10 languages between them. Just to give a few examples from the participants' countries: in India alone there are hundreds of languages and 31 of them have more than a million speakers each; in Colombia there are 69 native languages; and in Southern Africa, there are at least 35 languages, not including English, of which 10 are official languages. The decision made by the foundation to ensure that partners were able to participate as fully as possible was to provide English-Spanish interpreting for the sessions and so we were fortunate to be invited to share this learning journey as interpreters.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING LISTENED TO

The first time I heard the term language justice was while supporting peasant movements. A Korean peasant woman I had heard struggling with the English she had learnt as an adult was finally able to express herself in Korean through an interpreter. Suddenly she was speaking about life-giving microbes and bacteria in a detail that she never could have conveyed through English. What an immense pleasure, both for her and for her listeners! At the movement's international conference, we successfully interpreted 17 languages, numbers not seen even at the UN. It seems self-evident that we aren't the same when we speak another language,

particularly if it's one we're not fluent in. Not all of us have had the opportunity — the access — to learn the languages spoken at international conferences and programs. Some even make a political choice in refusing to learn imperialist languages. No matter how brilliant our ideas may be, they become lost if we can't express them well or *correctly* and this is much more likely to happen if we're using our second, third or fourth language. Hence the slogan: ***“There's no revolution without translation!”***

At the borders, language may result in a question of life or death. We have seen Rifians not receiving asylum in EU countries because their interpreter was Moroccan and eluding their story of political repression, as well as human traffickers working as interpreters and co-opting Nigerian women in the airport in front of the police. Access to court in many countries depends on colonial language literacy.

INTERPRETATION IS ONLY A FIRST STEP

Providing interpretation and allowing everyone to express themselves and receive the message in the language they feel most comfortable in is a great step towards linguistic justice, but it's not enough on its own.

Let's go back to the concept: that everyone, regardless of the language they use, should have equal access. This means translating all the materials, the agendas, comments in the chat, post-it notes, writing on the board...even the data protection policy! Furthermore, attending a session with interpreting is incredibly tiring. You have to focus much more and the message reaches you at least 5 seconds later, which often means the rest of the room has already moved on to the next subject. When there is a language imbalance, dynamics change depending on if you are using the dominant language or the minority one.



And what happens when you have to rely on the interpretation all the time? What about interpretation at the informal spaces between the sessions that we enjoy so much when we get together, where the true bonds are woven?

The fact that the Support Program was carried out remotely added factors that also had an influence on language justice: Who had good internet access? Who had a headset with an external mic allowing clear sound and therefore a faithful interpretation? Who had a quiet place they could connect from with no background noise to interrupt them?

It is true that interpreting services aren't cheap and also require technical equipment. This sometimes raises questions for organizations: where do we put the limits on justice? To what extent do we want to invest resources in a conference just to add one, two or 10 voices? I would put it the other way around, who are we leaving out? Can we afford to keep leaving them at the margins? It is a political decision, as is interpreting.

PEOPLE, NOT MACHINES

Because interpreting is provided by people, it is not objective. It depends on the knowledge, sensitivity and physical and mental state of the interpreter. Interpreting for eight hours with a partner and adequate breaks, or doing 12-hour days by yourself, aren't the same thing.

We are seeing the rise of artificial intelligence and it's true that it can help us to understand each other, but it also sets off alarm bells. It's worth asking whether artificial intelligence is critical of language privileges or whether it reinforces them. Who programs artificial intelligence? In Spanish, for example, a language with several genders, it unfailingly translates into the masculine. If we create words to express something that is not yet widely accepted, or that better represents our reality, how does AI react?

WALKING THE TALK

Thinking about access in general — language and ability-wise, to start with — demands a collective reflection to truly understand the problem; to put ourselves in different shoes or to listen to those in those shoes, in order to find a solution.

Power lies in languages and words. Let's be aware of it and play it nicely, building bridges instead of walls.

THE AUTHOR

Mariajo Castro Lage is a translator and interpreter with more than 15 years of experience. She is a member of an independent media group and of a feminist self-defense collective, supporting social movements advocating for food sovereignty, migrants' rights and Indigenous peoples' rights.

INTERSECTIONALITY, POWER & COMMUNITY

LARISSA KENNEDY

The word *intersectional* is so overused that it has almost lost its meaning. As commonly happens with things created by Black women, it has been taken out of context, diluted, distorted and made palatable once its teeth were taken out.

But, across the global justice movement, there are some exceptions: projects, communities and organizing spaces where intersectionality is true to its original intentions.

What is that original meaning? Kimberlé Crenshaw first used the term intersectionality to explain that *“problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure. Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism.”*

Otherwise put, intersectionality was intended to be an analysis of systems of power, how they are indivisible from one another because they intertwine to reinforce and reify oppression.

Whilst the word itself was first used then, we can pre-date the concept in Black feminist spaces prior to Crenshaw’s paper, with one of the most notable examples being the Combahee River Collective.

Having organized together since 1974, in April 1977 the group published a statement, writing: *“we realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy.”* The statement goes on to say that the group is *“particularly committed to working on those struggles in which race, sex and class are simultaneous factors in oppression.”*

An intersectional approach before the language existed.

In these emergent iterations of the concept, intersectionality is

designed as a means to an end; a lens through which we understand what we're struggling against.

This framework identified the need for holistic interventions that allow us to challenge and subvert these interconnected systems, ensuring that when we fight to redistribute power, we think beyond merely reproducing the same hierarchies that oppress.

Intersectionality must be therefore seen as a tool: its existence as theory means nothing without practice.

INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS FOR OUR PHYSICAL WORLD

↗ **Ciudad y Paz**, a project rooted in the community power among residents of an informal settlement in Colombia, acutely understands this and is putting theory into practice through an anti-hierarchical approach to placemaking.

The Community Action Board, led by residents of Brisas de las Palmas in Cali, Colombia, has come together with academics at Universidad del Valle and the Secretary of Social Housing and Habitat to channel the voices of local people living in the informal settlement into change.

Intersectionality must be seen as a tool: its existence as theory means nothing without practice.

In Cali, informal settlements are primarily made up of those who have experienced forcible displacement, most commonly due to armed conflict but sometimes including rural migrants who come to the city in search of job opportunities. A large percentage of those living in these precarious sites are from Afro-descendent and Indigenous communities, with the intersections of class, race and other systems operating to uphold these communities' disenfranchisement.

I spoke to academic, architect and planner, Ángela Franco-Calderón, who with Danny Ramírez Torres and other colleagues has been working on the project alongside residents, namely Francy Mina, President of the Community Action Board.

Ángela insisted that locals had already built this neighborhood *“with their hands and their knowledge”* and, due to the informal status, all of this took place without recourse to state funds.

An intersectional lens was taken towards gathering community knowledge, which uncovered evidence that women and LGBTQI+ folks felt unsafe in particular areas of the city; that disabled folks and women, who had taken on almost 70% of caring responsibilities, were relying on suboptimal informal transport systems to access healthcare.

Without the anti-hierarchical framework for the project that amplified local expertise and the intersectional lens that identified specific knowledge, it may not have been possible to reimagine these spaces as safe and accessible for all.

The project was designed such that academics like Ángela were there to learn from locals and act as a catalyst for data and information sharing, meaning they could encourage the public administration to work with and, ultimately, recognize the settlement as a formal neighborhood of the city.

Formal recognition leads to investment of public money in things like a water pipe system, roads and public transport. Informal settlements are ordinarily criminalized and outcast but through the Ciudad y Paz project, displaced peoples — and particularly those most marginalized among them — are reclaiming their knowledge, their rights and their power.

INTERSECTIONAL LENS FOR DIGITAL AGENCY

Equally important as community power over physical space is that in digital space. ↗ **Chayn** and **End Cyber Abuse**, two organizations working to end Technology-enabled Gender Based Violence (TGBV), have come together to advance intersectional, survivor-centered pathways forward.

Chayn was originally based in Pakistan but now operates globally; as an organization creating resources to support the healing of survivors of gender-based violence, the name Chayn, meaning solace in Urdu, feels apt. End Cyber Abuse is a global collective of lawyers and human rights activists with expertise in TGBV, with leadership from South Asia and the South Asian diaspora.

Speaking with Hera Hussain from Chayn and Nishma Jethwa from End Cyber Abuse, it soon becomes clear that this collaborative effort seeks to put power into survivors' hands through resources and information diffusion, with a focus on survivors from underserved communities that ensures it isn't just more of the same generic response.



The advice many other platforms offer those experiencing online violence is often whitewashed, eurocentric, heteronormative and, therefore, incredibly isolating to huge groups of survivors. Nishma explains that an intersectional lens means understanding there is no tick box solution to undoing this systemic erasure, but the ↗ **principles** Chayn and End Cyber Abuse co-developed through the project offer a lens to ensure that agency, safety, power, plurality and accountability to communities are centrally considered.

Elaborating on the need for accountability, Hera explains that survivors' voices need to be heard in these platforms because they serve an important reporting function.

She tells me: *“We know from evidence from Uber, more women in South Asia and the Middle East feel comfortable going to Uber and saying your driver harassed me rather than going to the police.”*

The inherent shortfalls of policing become abundantly clear when women are entrusting *justice* to multinational corporations whose priority is profit, not people.

If intersectionality is a tool to help us construct liberation from intersecting forms of oppression, we are called to consider what transformative justice would mean in the global context of TGBV.

AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO COMMUNITY POWER

It sounds as though hope and joy are flowing in abundance among Sintizzi and Romani community organizers when I speak with Isidora Randjelovic from ↗ **RomaniPhen**.

Whilst dealing with heavy topics in Romani feminist work, such as reproductive justice, forced sterilization, epistemicide and trans-generational memory of genocide, Isidora assures me that the group sings, dances and laughs together a lot. The project being undertaken by this women-led community is about actively learning from other women organizers and particularly Black feminism. The group has even met with Dr. Margo Okazawa-Rey, a founding member of the Combahee River Collective.

As a part of the Romani feminist movement, RomaniPhen and its members sit at the crossroads of oppression. To live and breathe an intersectional approach means building community power, with political education around how to lobby, connect people, hunger strike; it's also about creating opportunities for members with different lived experiences to take up space and co-own the group.

Topics for discussion are crowdsourced among the community and Isidora explains to me that members identify *“issues that need to be discussed to work better together,”* embarking on a process where the issue is spoken about in more depth, arguments are exchanged,

common ground is identified and then two or three people who attended are invited to discuss the topic in a podcast.

This type of anti-hierarchical, community-driven conflict resolution feels resultant of the intersectional lens of this work. It's about dialogue and creating space for individuals to share their experiences, in recognition that their point of view is valid and deserves to be heard. I remark to Isidora that I think many organizing spaces could learn a lot from their workshop process.

SO HOW CAN WE RE-IMAGINE THESE SYSTEMS TO POSITION COMMUNITIES AT THE CENTER?

Speaking to Ciudad y Paz, Chayn and End Cyber Abuse and RomaniPhen, I feel confident that the radical potential of intersectional analysis is in good hands. The continual reclamation of intersectionality as an analysis of interlocking oppressive systems, allows visions of what a transformed world might look like. Devoid of this, intersectionality is merely a buzzword.

Whether addressing race or ethnicity, focusing on characteristics, without actively using the framework to aid disruption to power, addresses only the superficial. But oppression runs deep.

In their own ways, each of these groups is using intersectionality as a tool to understand how marginalization operates at the intersecting crossroads of multiple forms of oppression; whether in placemaking, online agency or community power, intersectionality is a tool that enables movements to shift power to those who have historically been actively stripped of it.

When intersectionality is used in this way, it is a springboard from which we can imagine new worlds. In the words of the Combahee River Collective, *“we have a very definite revolutionary task to perform and we are ready for the lifetime of work and struggle before us.”*

THE AUTHOR

Larissa Kennedy is a Londoner with heritage in Jamaica, Barbados and St. Vincent who focuses on social movements in Latin America and the Caribbean. Larissa is also a Global Young Leader at Women Deliver, campaigning alongside fellow youth activists and organizers in 130+ countries around the world who are advancing health justice, social justice and climate justice through a feminist lens.

INTERSECTIONALITY & ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

R. BUSE ÇETIN

“Should we develop nonhuman minds that might eventually outnumber, outsmart, obsolete and replace us? Should we risk loss of control of our civilization? Such decisions must not be delegated to unelected tech leaders.”

↗ Pause Giant AI Experiments: An Open Letter — Future of Life Institute

“Here we go...” I think to myself while sipping my morning coffee, as *“How to increase your productivity and make thousands of \$\$ using ChatGPT”* videos begin to flood my TikTok For You page. For a while now, I’ve been convinced that generative AI models, such as ↗ **ChatGPT**, are hunting me — probably you, too.

The open letter above is published by Future of Life Institute, a think tank concerned with ↗ **existential risk**; and signed by more than 2000 people including CEOs of technology companies, academics and prominent AI researchers. The letter requests AI labs to halt *“the training of more powerful models than GPT-4”* as their potential effects on society cannot be properly predicted nor controlled. I am also worried about the consequences of Large Language Models (LLMs). These are essentially deep algorithms, relatively new in AI, that can generate text and other content based on knowledge from large data sets. As somebody who spent time understanding and explaining social impacts of AI systems, I oscillate between the seduction of increased productivity offered by models like ChatGPT and my knowledge of unjust ways in which these technologies are built including the ↗ **extractive and exploitative labor they are often built**

on.

The Open Letter capitalizes on the uncertainty (shared by many) over the possibility of a catastrophic future and suggests pausing the development of AI until the regulation catches up. But, it contains a huge irony: it is signed by people who have poured millions of dollars into the company who developed ChatGPT, while researchers such as Timnit Gebru and others have been ↗ **fired from Google** for warning the company about the negative impacts of LLMs in 2020.

THE POWER OF NARRATIVES

Narratives are like maps; they create meaning and reduce the uncertainty, randomness around us. AI narratives are the same. AI, as with all past technologies, does not operate in a vacuum that is separate or circumvents societal perspectives, values and influence. Narratives have a real and profound influence on technology, perception, innovation, adoption and policy. As technology narratives are co-created based on public perception, mutual understanding and cultural values, they are influential in how development of AI is imagined, framed and unfolds.

In fact, many researchers and thinkers suggest studying AI not as a *thing* or a technological artifact but as a set of narratives, ↗ **mythologies** and ↗ **ideologies**.

In ↗ **Time Machines: Artificial Intelligence, Process and Narrative**, Mark Coeckelbergh sees AI as a process, a *becoming*, a narrative itself. He explains, *“If, through prediction and recommendation, AI shapes our choices and actions – and thus shapes our narrative and our future – then this is also normatively important. Consider the predictive policing example: if fewer people commit a crime in a particular neighborhood as a result of actions taken as recommended by AI, then this is ethically and politically good (assumption: reducing crime is good). At the same time, if people in that same neighborhood feel targeted as a result of the police actions, this is ethically and politically problematic: people may invoke a narrative about historical discrimination with regard to people living in that area, people with a particular ethnic background, for example.”*

SHIFTING POWER

We could stop here and think of AI as a process that generates often competing and/or conflicting narratives, values and priorities. Maybe, it wouldn't be unfair to think of The Future of Life open letter and ↗ **Statement from the listed authors of Stochastic Parrots on the AI pause letter** as two different ways of understanding the

world and the trajectory of AI. But, if we think beyond what these systems have in common, we can come to see how the main difference in these narratives is their relationship to power.

When we examine these narratives through an intersectional feminist lens we can understand how they can perpetuate inequalities and exclude marginalized communities. The *who* and the *how* is as important as the *what* in deciphering AI narratives.

As Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein put in *Data Feminism*: ***“intersectional feminism is not only about women and gender. It is about power – who has it and who doesn’t.”***

Power refers to the current configuration of structural privilege and structural oppression where certain groups experience unearned advantages (including on personal, community and institutional levels) while others experience systemic disadvantages.

The first letter creates fear and places *the threat of AI* at an undefined near future. The narrative of the first letter is a perfect example of a narrative that upholds the status quo and Syed Mustafa Ali breaks down hegemonic characteristics in ↗ **“White Crisis and/as Existential Risk, or The Entangled Apocalypticism in Artificial Intelligence”**. There is a certain determinism of the proponents of human-like AI, they all say it will come and it's just a matter of time; slightly like waiting for a messianic figure. A messianic figure that could save us from the miseries of poverty and that could help extend our lives. A messianic figure that could also make us irrelevant and oppress us. Therefore, this invisible threat should be controlled. Stories and imaginaries do not represent all that is possible and neither are they our destiny. However, they impact our imagination and sense of self. Intersectional feminist analysis is crucial in understanding the ways in which technology narratives shape our understanding of the world and can perpetuate inequalities.

By centering the experiences and perspectives of marginalized communities, we can create more inclusive and equitable technologies that benefit everyone. We must continue to critically examine technology narratives and strive towards creating technology that is truly inclusive and accessible for all.

THE AUTHOR

R. Buse Çetin is a creative strategist and AI ethicist. Her work revolves around ethics, policy and governance of AI systems and it is grounded in intersectional feminism. Buse aims to demystify the impact of AI technologies through research, policy advocacy and art.

INTERSECTIONALITY & MIGRATION

ISABELLA YASMIN KAJIWARA



It is only by realizing the complex and cumulative nature of how discriminations impact peoples migration experiences, that we can begin disassembling the interlocking systems of oppression that underpin these hierarchies.

Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are all impacted by global migration and related policies in some way, shape, or form.

However, our relationship to movement between countries, localities and places of residence is contoured by our own socio-economic identities and lived experiences. Whether it's our class, religious background, educational or employment history, race, gender, caste, the language we speak, or sexual orientation — all of these factors influence the ease with which we can move throughout a world with human-devised borders.

As a result, it is no surprise that global migration justice movements are increasingly embodying intersectional approaches to help further understand the issues faced by those who migrate as well as how their experiences differ on account of their position in the social order.

It is only by realizing the complex and cumulative nature of how discriminations impact peoples migration experiences, that we can begin disassembling the interlocking systems of oppression that underpin these hierarchies. In the words of James Baldwin, *“nothing can be changed until it is faced.”* Through conversation with the ↗ **Women In Migration Network** (WIMN) and strategic philanthropic advisory platform ↗ **Dasra**, I aimed to

unpack what intersectional approaches mean in practice for migration policy-making and advocacy. WIMN's global reach and involvement in international policy making spaces give us insight into how substantial civil society participation, language justice and technology play a role in these developments. Meanwhile, although Dasra's work is not limited to migration advocacy, their focus on migrant women workers in India specifically shows us how intersecting oppressions even within one country impact migration.

↗ **The IOM's 2022 World Migration Report** reveals how vital understanding the diversity of internal migration is even when we are analyzing it from a global perspective, given that *“the great majority of people do not migrate across borders; much larger numbers migrate within countries (an estimated 740 million internal migrants in 2009).”*

VISIBILIZING WOMEN AND EMPOWERING THEIR EXPERIENCES

The experiences of people in migration are inherently gendered — not only due to the ↗ **statistically higher global proportion of male migrants to female migrants**, but also because female migrants are more vulnerable to discrimination and mistreatment on account of their gender identity which exposes them to double discrimination. This can be for a whole range of factors, including the ways in which there are sexualized divisions of labor, meaning that there is ↗ **increased demand for women migrant workers in informal sectors which tend to be more precarious, lacking in labor protections and with less pay.** In India, migration is considered a key potential driver for women's economic empowerment as it exposes individuals to more employment and educational opportunities than in their local geographic area. According to Dasra, ↗ **70% of the total internal migrant population is made up of women.**

However, their work and their experiences are often made invisible from narratives, because data

analyses fail to capture the informal gendered societal norms that obscure them from view.

Anandiben Asari, one of the community voices interviewed by Dasra as part of their ↗ **Making Visible Poor Migrant Women Workers report**, explains that often in the agricultural sector *“the women do a lot more work than the men, including cattle rearing, clearing of the household premises of the landowners, etc. However, when the payment is made, women’s work does not get counted.”*

Providing these research-based insights which offer ground-up reflections on the realities of migration and other sectors of giving is part of Dasra’s work to galvanize a philanthropic movement in India. In doing so, they are able to build the capabilities and institutional resilience of their non-profit partners, ensuring that policies are being driven by and led by those with lived experiences. By centering these analyses, we can establish approaches to migration advocacy that are truly inclusive and relevant and accessible to the people who are on the receiving end of that support.

INTERSECTIONALITY IN RELATION TO MIGRATION IN INDIA

Carrying through an intersectional approach in the Indian context, we can consider how the experiences of migrant women workers (and other people affected by migration) are also layered by the intersections of their family history, socio-demographic identities and lived experiences.

↗ **Caste hierarchies – a system of heredity social stratification that divides people into classes in Hindu society – remain a huge inter-generational barrier** for many Indians in accessing opportunities and rights, even though caste-based discrimination was formally outlawed in 1950 through Independent India’s Constitution. Dasra’s Ami Misra links the perpetuation of few social hierarchies to ↗ **historic marginalization under British colonial rule**, clarifying that *“when the British colonized India, they deemed certain communities as criminal and many of these groups*

are still facing stigma locally.” Today for example, a migrant woman from a De-notified Tribe background may be at increased risk of persecution compared to other migrant women, due to the perceived criminality of their community. This often means they are less likely to approach judicial systems in case of any human rights issues, which they are more exposed to while living on the margins.

As a result, discrimination on grounds of intersectional identities and the amplified impact it has on the existing vulnerabilities of migrants requires that migration policy making and advocacy factor in the historical marginalization faced by people from Scheduled Castes (Dalits), Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis and Indigenous) and other marginalized communities (Nomadic, Denotified Communities, etc.). Otherwise, their interests and experiences may be sidelined and misunderstood.

ENSURING A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Paola Cyment from the Women In Migration Network (WIMN) takes a similar stance in connecting present day discrimination to the historical roots of these structural inequalities, explaining that *“intersectionality is not only about the multiple overlapping identities that people hold, but also the colonial structures which perpetuate those inequalities.”*

Promoting women’s rights at the center of all migration and development policy, WIMN was born out of a desire to transform historically white, European and male global migration policy making spaces, opening them up to grassroots organizations and migrant women’s voices.

There are notable barriers to accessing these forums to enable change, such as educational inequalities, class, technical jargon and language barriers – not to mention geographic location. Through an intersectional lens, we can clearly identify the reasons why marginalized voices are left out of decision making circles and simultaneously also see the effect this has on policies being made.

According to Paola, *“in these global spaces, it can be difficult to get a seat at the table. And even when it is possible, civil society participation is not always substantial – there is a shrinking space for civil society.”* For example, during the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) she notes that government negotiations continue to be closed to civil society participants.

One of the ways that WIMN is currently putting intersectionality into practice is advocating for the continuous, meaningful representation of marginalized grassroots leaders at these global migration policy events.

They’ve also been convening regional and global strategic online spaces for information and experience-sharing across silos – bringing together migrant, refugee, feminist, labor, LGBTQI+ and other allied sectors and movements together in dialogue.

LANGUAGE JUSTICE AND INTERACTIVE MAPPING

Central to the success of these dialogues are the accessible, multilingual background papers and advocacy-oriented multilingual toolkits that WIMN puts together.

With English and other European languages dominating most of the global migration policy making institutions, the network keenly recognizes how language justice must be another element of its intersectional approach to advocacy. By contributing more resources towards translation and interpretation services, not just for one-off events but also in day-to-day practice, they are ensuring more organizations can become active members of the network.

A second element of WIMN’s success in linking global and local migration justice efforts together has been its willingness to utilize technology to create an ↗ **Interactive Global Mapping of Organizations Working on Gender and Migration**.

Built from an initial survey of over 300 respondents, the map includes categories which filter and identi-

fy migrant women-led groups focusing on labor rights, LGBTQI+ rights, Black and Indigenous rights, climate and the environment and more.

In doing so, they are able to reflect a clearer picture of what’s happening on the ground and enable groups to connect in solidarity with each other. The Asia Pacific Transgender Network, Paola mentions, was one of these collectives who found it to be a unique and useful tool in seeing which organizations were working on similar issues.

One area where this building of community networks is extremely useful is in ↗ **the intersection between climate change and global migration** and the uneven impacts this is having on different people in migration around the world – particularly in Asia and the Pacific, Africa and South America. With increasing numbers of people being essentially forced to migrate for their safety and livelihood due to adverse weather conditions, environmental degradation and strain on resources, it will be useful to apply this intersectional lens to how climate change is making people vulnerable in diverse ways. By more groups sharing their varied experiences of climate change-induced migration with each other and amplifying each other’s struggles, we will be able to better connect both local and global struggles for justice with each other.

RESTRUCTURING OUR SYSTEMS FROM WITHIN

Intersectional practice is not only about identifying and dismantling external manifestations of intersecting inequalities in the world around us, but also reflecting internally on our own organizational structures and working practices.

As important as it is for organizations to consider the ways they can advocate for external stakeholders, foundations and governments to consider intersectionality in their migration policy making and advocacy, it is just as vital that these same organizations do not replicate the hierarchies which perpetuate existing systems of power or inequality.

Incorporating these perspectives into our approach to migration policies allows us to see the roots of the systemic inequalities more clearly and in turn begin to unravel them. It also allows us to identify the interconnectedness of our local and global migration struggles and in doing so align and unify our resources and efforts towards our shared hope of dismantling systems of oppression.

What is crucial going forward is that we continue to focus on cultivating a decentred, decolonized, multicultural, multi-linguistic, transnational umbrella of groups and individuals working towards migration justice that is not just based on inclusion for inclusion's sake.

Instead, it's vital that agents of change continue to recognize that intersectionality involves not only policy implementation and lived-experience-led leadership, but also the potential for radical overhaul of existing structures that are perpetuating these injustices in migration but also interconnecting social struggles.

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INTERSECTIONALITY, WORKPLACES & WELLBEING

LARISSA KENNEDY

Care is often spoken about as a personal concern, with self-care reduced to bubble baths and finding happiness at the bottom of a jar where candle wax used to be.

The neoliberal co-option of the care conversation has warped something that was supposed to be about community into a packageable item that they can sell right back to us — *insert deluxe and limited edition versions of the aforementioned candle here.*

This self-care façade attempts to conceal a failure to provide systemic and intersectional responses to the damaging nature of labor exploitation. Scratching the surface, it is clear that capitalism doesn't have answers to crucial questions about the mental health



implications of in-work poverty, time poverty and the ways that digitization has enabled an overreach from the 9–5 into constant availability.

Nor does it offer solutions to ongoing (neo)colonial work patterns and the fact that the wheels of the West are kept turning by the exploitation of workers, predominantly in – though certainly not limited to – the Global South.

The neoliberal-capitalist co-option of the care conversation has warped something that was supposed to be about community into a packageable item that they can sell right back to us.

There is little recognition of the reality that industries from agriculture, to technology, the textiles industry and beyond, rely heavily on *cheap labor*, many of whom are Black and brown folks – at what cost? These imbalanced power relations are devoid of care; they’re often dehumanizing.

Capitalist self-care fails to eradicate unsafe work environments for women, for racialized, disabled and queer folks. Nor does it address heightened vulnerability for those at the intersections of these forms of oppressions – all of which negatively impact workers’ mental (and physical) health.

Even in paid and organizing work environments where people are fighting these forms of oppression, there is rarely adequate dialogue and action to provide care for those expending copious amounts of emotional effort fighting the very things that they and their communities face.

PHD candidate and writer of *Lost in Work: Escaping Capitalism*, Amelia Horgan, argues that all labor that requires emotional effort – work that puts you in situations where you have to “*manage your emotions to induce some emotional state in others*” – can cause emotional exhaustion.

Whether in retail, hospitality, teaching, therapy, or beyond, the forced regulation of emotions for extended periods in order to fulfill labor requirements, has the power to cause harm. Though, the difference

in workers' agency, access to mental health provision and to other forms of (culturally sensitive and competent) care across these labor contexts can greatly change the impact on workers' mental health. That's why it's all the more important to think radically about how organizations championing change in society can also champion change in how we work.

All too often, even though there is a mission to disrupt systems of power in the workplace, this doesn't always translate to ways of working. Organizations we expect better from are reproducing the same hierarchies, harmful work environments and inadequate care provision that exist elsewhere. The same can often be said for organizing spaces, with positive dialogue about collective care often succeeded by limited imagination when it comes to the practicalities.

COLLECTIVE CARE AND LABOR WITHIN OUR MOVEMENTS

Three organizations that refuse to fall into this trap are the ↗ **Mariwala Health Initiative** (MHI), Chayn and End Cyber Abuse. In fact, the collaboration itself between Chayn and End Cyber Abuse – two organizations with complementary expertise in technology-enabled gender based violence (TGBV) – feels to be an intentional effort to build an intersectional community of care.

Hera Hussain, founder of ↗ **Chayn**, tells me that *“the tech-based abuse space is pretty small and very well knit because it's an emergent space. All the actors work closely together to figure things out together.”* The way that she and Nishma Jethwa, co-founder of ↗ **End Cyber Abuse**, bounce off each other, attests to how this truly works in practice.

Discussing the secondary trauma sustained from working in resistance to TGBV, Hera adds that *“resistance to this kind of trauma has to include collective care.”* She describes this very practically, talking about faith and actively championing religious freedom in the workplace; as well as the need for positive working conditions and ensuring that rest is possible.

Recognizing themselves as part of a broader movement dedicated to eradicating TGBV, Chayn's hybrid team of full time and part-time staff, contractors and volunteers helps balance how workload is distributed. Without practical steps like these, organizations risk burnout of those dedicated to progress, making for unsustainable change. Identifying the elements of capitalism within workplaces that are important to avoid in this collective care model, Nishma says *“we, as organizations and collectives, can completely replicate all the underlying things that have created these systems of harm in the first place. Whether it's hierarchy, power structures, the way that we*

demand outputs of our work, the lack of rest, the lack of space for care, or really badly compensating team members.” This list could be endless; capitalism and its myths about productivity are so pervasive in how we operate, including among spaces championing change. It requires great intentionality to unpack and practically undo these embedded behaviors. Though, Nishma is convinced that this effort is worth it explaining, *“The way we do this work is going to influence our capacity, the atmosphere that we create for survivors and the future we want to create for ourselves.”*



BUILDING THE ALTERNATIVE

Guest speaker at a Support Program workshop and Director of the Mariwala Health Initiative (MHI), Raj Mariwala, concurs. Having left work environments that necessitated *“taking higher doses of pills or smoking”* to deal with their *“oppressive weight,”* Raj sought out the possibility of creating an alternative approach. Based in Mumbai, MHI provides grants and strategic support to community-based collec-

tives to enable greater access to mental health services for all.

“For MHI, it is very important to view challenges in mental health using a lens that unpacks systems of power. Once you look at these systems, you can see how mental health cannot be separated from people’s lives, experiences and contexts,” Raj explains. For those who are economically vulnerable — be that homeless people or low-income households — this includes mapping mental health provision against social security systems.

With racism, casteism, ableism, queerphobia, transphobia, ageism and religious discrimination in mind, this means sourcing specialist services that truly cater to marginalized folks and the realities of how intersecting forms of oppression impact mental health. Warning that many mainstream services are rooted in these harmful systems, Raj says *“the same system of power — cis-heteronormative brahmanical patriarchy — is also at the foundation of mental health.”*

As someone who has severe anxiety and dyscalculia and often had *“terrible encounters with psychiatrists”*, Raj’s passion for MHI to model an alternative to systems of harm stems from a personal place. Challenging presumptions of what care looks like, Raj says that people *“seem to talk of self-care in a static, individual silo when I think we cannot speak of it without considering interdependence and balance. In fact, I don’t think it’s possible to co-exist harmoniously without the concepts of agency, autonomy and systems of care, support or solidarity.”*

Real structures of care are complex, multifaceted and require us to think differently about our connection to one another. In resisting capitalism and imagining alternatives, it’s up to us to build healthy ways of working, practical systems of collective care and enable access to mental health provision that sees us — all of us.

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Larissa Kennedy is a Londoner with heritage in Jamaica, Barbados and St. Vincent who focuses on social movements in Latin America and the Caribbean. Larissa is also a Global Young Leader at Women Deliver, campaigning alongside fellow youth activists and organizers in 130+ countries around the world who are advancing health justice, social justice and climate justice through a feminist lens.

INTERSECTIONALITY & PHILANTHROPY

DEEPA RANGANATHAN

Within philanthropy, the concept of intersectionality has been used to effect in conference spaces, donor circles and zoom rooms, but what does it take to really translate this into an everyday practice? How are funders really using an intersectional lens in the work they do? What does it entail and how is it impacting their grantmaking?

For starters, adapting an intersectional lens into philanthropy translates into self-reflection, something the sector has been long-critiqued for lacking in, because of ↗ **its top-down approach** and the power it holds as the *giver*. There is a powerplay that cannot be ignored and funders often revel in a sense of superiority stemming from their hold on resources.



As someone who has been in this field for eight years now, it amuses me to notice how philanthropy expects instant results as soon as it releases resources. This is a very capitalist approach: expecting something tangible and weighty in exchange for capital. *“I spent the \$\$, therefore, I want the product now.”*

It’s a tricky situation, too, because we’re trying to critique capitalism while still using the power of capital in resolving some of the most complex problems. But that’s exactly why we need intersectionality to guide us in reflecting on our own practices as funders, question the shortcomings of a philanthro-capitalist approach and get comfortable with the discomfort of exposing the power dynamics. This is both difficult and necessary to really look at giving in a more holistic manner.

“Intersectionality can completely change the way philanthropy is working, but it requires rethinking the whole structure from the roots, contributing to a fair distribution of rights, freedoms and resources,” explains Greta Frankenfeld from ↗ **Calala**, a European organization that funds women’s human rights in Spain and Central America.

Within the philanthropic landscape, this translates into being more self-reflexive, approaching relationships with grantee partners with respect and trust

Who is at the center of the conversation? Who is at the table? Who is present by choice and absent by design?

and creating spaces for meaningful participation that addresses power structures at play: Who is at the center of the conversation? Who is at the table?

Who is present by choice and absent by design? Naomi Lanoi Leleto works for Global Indigenous Grantmaking and ↗ **Global Greengrants Fund** (GGF), a fund that mobilizes resources for communities worldwide to protect the planet. She believes this self-reflexiveness also means actively looking out for what’s missing. *“We need to reflect on whose voices are valued and whose are silenced. For example, are our grants accessible to all types of identities, bodies and backgrounds?”* she asks.

PHILANTHROPIC BIAS

At present, philanthropic giving is unfairly tilted against organizations led by and working with BIPOC people. Black Feminist Fund’s latest report ↗ **“Where is the money for Black feminist movements?”** revealed that a mere 0.1 % – 0.35 % of foundation giving globally went to Black women, girls and trans people in 2022. And according to ↗ **a report by AWID**, 99 % of development aid and foundation grants still do not directly reach women’s rights and feminist organizations. Globally, ↗ **less than 2 % of philanthropic giving goes directly into mitigating climate change**, even less towards organizations doing this work in the ↗ **Global South, a region that has contributed least to global warming** but is most impacted by it. Now, those who are on the ground working towards justice, democracy and accountability recognize the threads that hold seemingly different issues together and are working hard with measly resources to approach the problem.

So, the issue is actually one of scarcity within scarcity. There is already little money dedicated to addressing the most pressing issues – the climate crisis being one of them – and within that, the Global South nations get the least share. Shockingly, ↗ **Indigenous people receive less than 1 % of climate funding**, an ironic thing to process given that they protect 80 % of the world’s biodiversity and their knowledge of and connection to Mother Earth is something to be valued and replicated, rather than erased.

LESSONS FROM THE CLIMATE MOVEMENT

There's much to learn from those who are on the ground, certainly. The way climate justice organizing has branched out and connected itself with different struggles is a case in point of how intersectionality must define our social movements going forward. Growing temperature levels, global warming and mass carbon emissions by Global North nations has led to major climatic shifts. However, the impact isn't limited to more droughts, wildfires, hurricanes and melting glaciers in different corners of the world. The ripple effect has been felt by nations all over the world, disproportionately so in the Global South.

The ↗ **number of climate refugees today is unprecedented**, freedom of press has been deeply compromised as ↗ **journalists reporting on the environment have been murdered** and mining operations have led to a staggering ↗ **increase in sexual violence against marginalized women**. The current climate catastrophe actually offers an opportunity for funders to explore intersectionality through cross-movement collaborations that may not have been prioritized in the past. It is a critical moment that should be seen as an invitation for funders to think beyond the silos and understand how climate justice is inextricably linked to race, caste, gender, labor, sexuality and ability. Building these bridges could then translate into breaking the silos around funding different movements. For instance, funding climate crisis solutions has to now extend beyond only environmental activism.

Naomi attests to the idea that much can be learned from grassroots climate organizing, where the intersectional methodology of groups on the ground is a lens through which GGF can approach their work. *"These movements encourage solidarity and highlight how all struggles for self determination or against oppression are interlinked and that they can all benefit by interacting with each other,"* she says. Greta agrees, highlighting the lessons that Calala has learned by observing those they fund.

"They have taught us to continuously revise our privileged position, to take a stand aside from the center of the scene and to take them into account for every step of the actions that affects them," she says, adding that having an intersectional approach as funders demands recognizing different cosmogonies, worldviews and wisdoms and more importantly, trusting the expertise and wisdom of grantee partners.

TRUST IS KEY WHEN THE REALITY IS STARK

It's useful to mention ↗ **trust-based philanthropy** here, something mainstream donors are still only waking up to. At its core, *trust-based philanthropy* has a willingness to shake power imbalances that exist between a funder and a recipient. It also looks at philanthropy more from a reparations than an *aid* perspective.

The relationship, then, moves from a transactional one to a reciprocal one and is key in ensuring that intersectionality is translated into practice. Naomi emphasizes the need for this shift, explaining *"More progressive funders have realized the need for reciprocity and participatory grantmaking. What needs to change is our habit of romanticizing terminologies. We are so concerned with words and not the weight they carry."*

In 2022 0.1 % – 0.35 % of foundation giving globally went to Black women, girls and trans people

Trust is also key in ensuring funders move the needle more towards flexible, unrestricted funding allowing movements and organizations to best



decide how they'd like to channel the money into their work.

However, this seems to be ↗ **the exception rather than the norm** and this is precisely because funders are unable to offer trust to the very folks they're trying to support. We cannot claim a piece of the intersectionality pie without first starting to trust the wisdom of those we seek to support. Trusting groups advancing the social justice agenda is no longer negotiable because we are dealing with a stark reality.

IS INTERSECTIONALITY A REALITY OR A BUZZ?

The nonprofit sector is notorious for being too comfortable with jargon and overusing terms that are often eulogized for woke effect. But there is merit into realizing that intersectionality, among other terms, is something funders haven't stopped talking about.

"I think one of the reasons for this buzz is that people are realizing that philanthropy, as it is set up now, often reinforces the very inequalities it

seeks to dismantle," says Ursula Miniszewski, Director of Gender and Equity at GGF.

"I believe that individuals within philanthropy are definitely open to doing good differently, but it's the antiquated structures they work within that prevents them from doing so," Ursula continues.

"Currently, philanthropy is not set up for nuance or complexity and that prevents intersectional approaches that reflect real life, which is nuanced and complex." We must acknowledge that this is messy work, but it's okay because it leaves us more enriched as individuals committed to building a just world.

Another complexity to address is how intersectionality can mean different things in different contexts, given that movements vary across geographies.

Ursula explains how GGF's grantmaking advisors who come from a social justice movement background have informed and shaped their own understanding of intersectionality. She adds how intersectionality, in the words of one of their advisory partner organizations, is *"both an individual and*

collective issue.” She believes this is at the crux of their organizational process.

This is echoed by others at GGF who tell me: *“It’s one of the biggest lessons we have learned on our journey to cultivate an intersectional approach to environmental grantmaking. We’ve recognized a need to attend to our own personal growth and reflections, to cultures of machismo and the ways these manifest in our practices and thoughts. Sharpening our grant craft practice also meant attending to our own organizational and personal belief systems around equity and justice.”*

It then becomes critical for funders to be less attached to development terms — intersectionality being one of them — and be open towards framing the discourse in a language that describes layered concepts like power, analyses of root causes, or structural oppression.

INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY AND WHAT LIES AHEAD

A key topic that comes up in my conversation with Greta is the need to include diversity and to ensure that this remains a key principle in our conversations and practice in the philanthropic world. *“The process has been slow but we are gradually seeing a growing understanding of how systemic discrimination of racialized people is affecting everything around us,”* she says.

Perhaps George Floyd’s murder in the US in 2020 and the subsequent racial injustice uprising that was witnessed around the globe, was a watershed moment for philanthropy. ↗ **Foundations made impressive moves in the aftermath;** however, the conversation around confronting racial injustice must never end.

Accounting for what has happened in the past and finally beginning to talk about racial representation in positions of power has been long overdue.

Greta tells me: *“There is a great diversity in the philanthropic world and each organization needs to walk at its own pace. We will always need to change things, be alert, listen and learn. But*

I think that intersectionality is more and more difficult to ignore and I stand by the good will and responsibility of the donors and the good disposition of the grantees.”

The conversation around intersectionality is definitely getting louder and it might be worthwhile for funders and donor circles to take notice of the fact that philanthropic work rooted in intersectionality benefits us all. It helps us show up better and braver as donors and it supports organizations to do their work with more clarity and responsibility. Let us identify and name all the structural tensions that bind us as human beings. Let us ask the difficult questions and marinate with the pauses. It’s a small price to pay if our collective vision, indeed, is building a planet that is safe, accessible and just for all.

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shado mag CIC
A lived experience-led community of artists, activists and journalists united in the fight for social justice, founded and run by Hannah Robathan and Isabella Pearce. They came on as Project Managers in the content creation of this resource and a key part of their role has included sourcing writers with a range of lived experiences from Shado's network to lead on

the different chapters and to ensure an opportunity for different experiences, voices and identities to be represented.

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