

# segie



## Make Intersectionality Work

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# Introduction

The landscape of social enterprise is evolving rapidly, driven by an increasing recognition of the need for innovative, inclusive, and equitable solutions to the complex social issues of our time. As these enterprises strive to make a positive impact, it becomes essential to adopt frameworks that can effectively address the diverse and intersecting identities and experiences of the individuals and communities they serve. Intersectionality offers such a framework, providing a comprehensive lens through which social enterprises can better understand and tackle systemic inequalities.

This handbook is designed to guide social entrepreneurs, leaders, and practitioners in embedding intersectional principles into their organizational practices and strategies. It draws on both theoretical insights and practical applications, offering a robust resource for those committed to fostering inclusive and transformative social change.

The journey begins with an exploration of *What is Intersectionality?* This section lays the foundation by elucidating the concept of intersectionality, tracing its origins, and examining its significance in revealing multiple identities and systemic inequalities. By understanding the historical and legal contexts in which intersectionality emerged, readers will gain a deeper appreciation of its relevance and applicability in today's social enterprises.

In the section on *Intersectionality and Social Businesses*, we delve into the transformative potential of intersectionality within organizational settings. We explore how intersectional thinking can act as a catalyst for social transformation and provide practical guidance on integrating intersectionality into internal policies. This involves creating inclusive work environments, equitable hiring practices, and decision-making processes that reflect the diverse realities of all stakeholders.

The final section, *Intersectionality and Social Impact*, focuses on translating theory into practice. It highlights the importance of building inclusive solutions that drive sustainable social change and offers concrete strategies for applying intersectional principles to social impact initiatives. By moving from theory to action, social enterprises can develop more targeted and effective interventions that address the root causes of social inequalities.

Throughout this handbook, the readers will find examples and actionable insights that demonstrate how intersectionality can be operationalized within social enterprises. The aim is to equip them with the knowledge and tools needed to make intersectionality work in their organization, fostering a more just and equitable society.

In conclusion, we invite readers to approach intersectionality not just as a concept but as a transformative practice that can enhance the impact and sustainability of their social enterprise. By embracing intersectional principles, social businesses can be not only agents of change but also exemplars of inclusivity and equity and, thus, serve as a catalyst for social transformation.

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## About SEGIE

In recent years, numerous reports have highlighted the need for better integration of women and gender minorities into the social economy, particularly as social entrepreneurs. However, there is little data on the interconnections between the social economy and gender equality as a whole, and on the sector's impact on the economic empowerment of women and gender minorities. This is why the SEGIE project (*For a Social Economy that reduces Gender Inequalities in Europe*) was born. While the social economy is booming in Europe, bringing new solutions to major social and environmental challenges, it also has a responsibility to foster positive change for all, not at the expense of women and other minorities. There is therefore a clear need to investigate this topic, raise awareness and develop hands-on tools in order to harness the power of the European social economy ecosystem to reduce gender inequality.

Against this background, SEGIE intends to pursue the following objectives:

- » Develop new data on and investigate the impact of the social economy on gender equality in order to identify areas of improvement and to make stakeholders in the social economy more aware and knowledgeable about gender equality.
- » Develop hands-on pedagogical contents to help European social enterprises push for more gender-equal practices and develop fairer and more women-inclusive business models.
- » Contribute to the emergence of 30 women-inclusive businesses in France, Italy and Portugal to generate a wider ripple effect on women's economic empowerment and shed light on business champions leading the way towards a more inclusive European social economy.

SEGIE is a project funded by the European Social Fund and is implemented by four partner organisations:

Empow'Her Global (lead partner, France) is an international feminist organization founded in 2013 that deploys several types of activities aimed at the same objective: supporting women in the realization of their projects, allowing them to reach their full potential and giving them all the keys to empower themselves through entrepreneurship.

Action Aid Italia (Italy) is a non-profit organization who works to promote and animate spaces for democratic participation everywhere, involving people and communities in the protection of their rights. Action Aid collaborates at local, national and international levels to bring about change and increase equity, improving the quality of democracy and thus supporting those living in situations of poverty and marginality.

Acube (Italy) is an incubator and accelerator of ideas and businesses with high social, cultural and environmental value. Acube encourages and supports the creation and development of impactful businesses in order to generate innovation and social transformation.

NOVA School of Business and Economics (Portugal) is an accredited and top-ranked business school that offers a variety of academic programs such as Bachelor's, Master's, PhD, MBAs.

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## Who Is This Handbook For?

This handbook presents hands-on pedagogies for European social entrepreneurs to strengthen their approach to gender equality and inclusion through an intersectional lens. It is designed to be shared with existing businesses in the social economy sector to help them take steps towards greater inclusion in their business models and practices. The contents of this handbook should enable them to take concrete actions and measures to transform their business models, internal practices, or value chain organization, thereby better contributing to the reduction of gender inequalities.

# 1- What Is Intersectionality?

noun in-ter-sec-tion-al-i-ty \,in-tər-,sek-shə-'nā-lə-tē \  
the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups

K. Crenshaw, Makers Conference, 2020

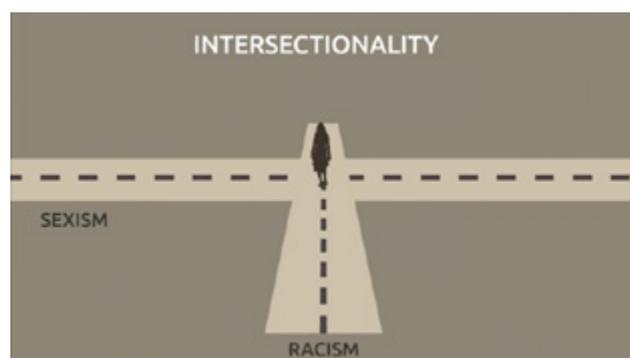
## 1.1 When an Analogy Frames the Discourse

Intersectionality is a term coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Law professor and civil rights activist from the United States. In 1989, in her famous article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex”<sup>1</sup>, Crenshaw cited a court case where a group of African American women argued that General Motors – a multinational automotive manufacturing company – had refused to hire them on the basis on their race and gender. However, the court ruled that the company was not guilty of discriminatory hiring practices based on race, because they had hired African American men to work on the factory floor. The court also ruled that the company had not discriminated on the basis of gender, as they had hired white women for office-based roles. What the court failed to consider was the intersection of race and gender and the combined discrimination faced by African-American women.



Crenshaw highlighted that the experiences of African American women, from the legal and institutional perspective, were left unprotected due to the invisibility of the convergence of two categories of discrimination – their gender and race – that were only legally recognized in an isolated manner. To explain this specific form of discrimination, Crenshaw used an analogy:

*“Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them.”<sup>2</sup>*



Source: K. Crenshaw, Ted Talk Video, 2016

In this case, the roads were the race and gender of the African American women and the cars on the road were the legislation and sentences that negatively impacted their rights. In short, Crenshaw used the notion of intersectionality to demonstrate how, for certain women, the coexistence of several factors can promote or give rise to a new and particular form of discrimination, which deepens a situation of injustice.

<sup>1</sup> K. Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, in *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 140:25-42, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 149.

## 1.2 Revealing Multiple Identities and Systemic Inequalities

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO www.usfca.edu

**Becoming aware of privilege** should not be viewed as a burden or source of guilt, but rather, **an opportunity** to learn and be responsible so that we may work toward **a more just and inclusive world.**

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**CHECK YOUR PRIVILEGE:**

|                                    |                                       |   |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> WHITE     | <input type="checkbox"/> CISGENDER*   | privilege: unearned access to social power based on membership in a dominant social group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MALE      | <input type="checkbox"/> ABLE-BODIED  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CLASS     | <input type="checkbox"/> HETEROSEXUAL |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CHRISTIAN |                                       |   |
|                                    |                                       |   |

Presented by Dr. Walker (Psychology Dept.), Dr. Pivola (School of Management, Marketing Dept.), Professor Murray (Design Program), and Student Life. Poster design by Candice Espinoza, Ray Choi, Vanessa Cabanayan and Cal Bagg.

\*CISGENDER: a description for a person whose gender identity, gender expression and biological sex all align

The views presented herein do not necessarily reflect the position of the University of San Francisco.

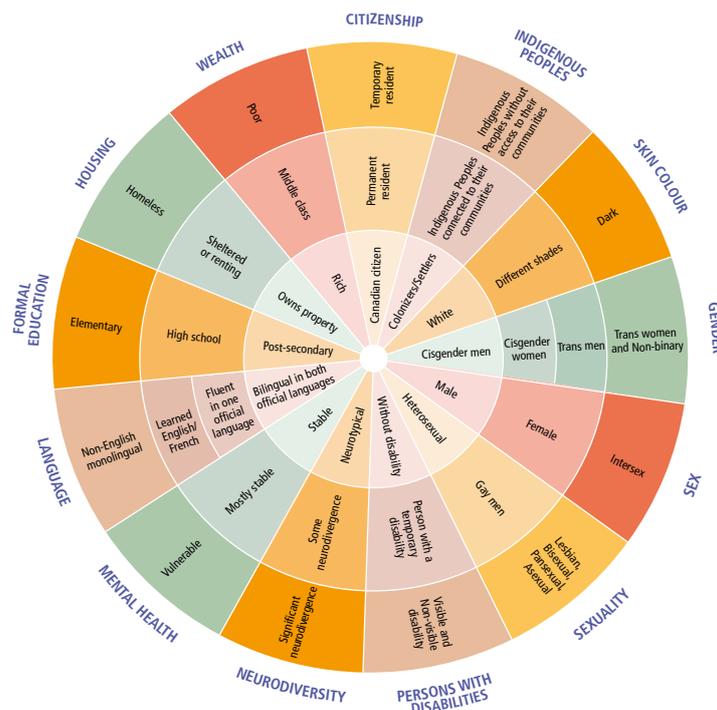
Intersectionality is thus both a concept and an analytical framework for understanding how various parts of a person's identity – like gender, sexuality, class, age, ability, citizenship, language, health status, and so on – overlap to create their individual or group unique experiences of oppression and privilege shaped by – *inter alia* – sexism, racism, colonialism, homo-bi-lesbo-transphobia, ableism, patriarchy, and the specific context they live, work, and spend their leisure time in.

In other words, intersectionality allows for understanding of how distinct aspects of a person's or a group's social and political identities combine to create different types of discrimination and privilege. It makes us aware of the interconnected nature of social categories and how they overlap to create interdependent systems of increased discrimination or disadvantage as well as power and privilege.

The hereinafter Wheel of Privilege graphically illustrates how the combination of the different parts of an individual's or a social group's identity can give them power over others in a given society as well as lead them to being privileged, marginalised, or excluded. It is crucial to keep in mind that

the context matters, i.e. intersections are experienced in different ways from one context to another. For this reason, different versions of the privilege wheel can be found.

Figure 1 - Wheel of Privilege and Power



Source: L. Bourdages, 2023

Intersectionality is thus about understanding and addressing all potential obstacles to an individual or group’s well-being and status. But it is not as simple as just adding up oppressions and addressing each one individually. All forms of discrimination exist on their own. But when combined, they heighten and transform the experience of oppression. The intersections are endless and cannot be considered independently from one another, since they constantly interact and often reinforce the oppression each brings. Intersectionality thus acknowledges that unique oppressions exist, and it shows how they change in combination. For instance, while the career of a young white able-bodied cisgender woman might improve with the adoption of gender equality protections, targets and mentorship programmes, an older, black disabled lesbian may continue to face racism, ageism, ableism, and homophobia in the workplace.

In recent years, intersectionality has become a sort of buzzword that has crossed academic boundaries and is now found in a growing number of policy texts and even in the public discourse. This is certainly a positive development that requires to be constantly monitored to avoid any form of “intersectionality washing”. It is thus important to always keep in mind what constitutes intersectionality in the first place, by using the following table drafted by UN Women and UNPRPD:

*Table 1 – What intersectionality is and isn’t*

| Focus of intersectionality          | What it is...   | What it isn’t...  |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Social inequality                   | Mutually constituted and intersecting social categories   | Adding up advantages and subtracting disadvantages  |
| Dynamic nature of inequality        | Inequalities as dynamic relationships   | A static and siloed examination of inequalities   |
| Contextual dependency               | Understanding that power configurations are time- and location-dependent  | Assumptions regarding the importance of any one or multiple social categories                 |
| Structural and political context    | Structural and political factors that shape inequalities  | Focus on individual behaviour without consideration of structural and political constraints   |
| Power relations                     | An exploration on how social inequalities are shaped by power relations   | Ignorance of the impact of power relations on social inequalities                             |
| Implications for most disadvantaged | Focus on implications for those most marginalised within a group  | Focus on implications for those whose status is protected or elevated within a group          |
| Reflexivity                         | Practitioners’ reflection on how their own background identities shape the research process and interpretation of results | Practitioners’ attempt to completely remove themselves from the research and analysis process |

*Source: UN Women et al., Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit, 2021.*

## 1.3 Intersectionality in Law

To date, no international definition of intersectionality has been agreed upon. Moreover, no legally binding international, European, and national instruments explicitly prohibit intersectional discrimination. However, intersectionality is commonly considered in the context of the principle of non-discrimination and equality, which is the cornerstone of international human rights law. Such principle is guaranteed under a wide range of international instruments, including the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the ILO Convention on Discrimination in Employment and Occupations (No. 111) and its accompanying Recommendation. These instruments guarantee the exercise of human rights and set out non-exhaustive lists of prohibited grounds of discrimination such as race, colour, gender, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, descent, property, birth and other status.

The **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (2006) is the first human rights treaty to recognise multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, but it is with the related **General Comment No. 6 on Equality and Non-Discrimination** (2018) that provides a definition of “intersectional discrimination.

The European Union enshrined the right to equality and non-discrimination in its key legal texts, namely the Treaty of the European Union, the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union, and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Equality Directives specifically provide protection against discrimination based on multiple grounds, but the texts fail to address intersectionality:

- » Directive 2000/78/EC prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation as regards to employment, occupation, and vocational training;
- » Directive 2004/113/EC prohibits discrimination based on sex in access to and supply of goods and services;
- » Directive 2000/43/CE calls for the elimination of inequalities and acknowledges that women suffer from multiple discrimination, but no specific requirements on Member States are placed.

However, courts still generally address one dimension at a time (either gender, or race, or sexual orientation, or religion, and so on) and focuses on individual discrimination, as opposed to structural discrimination, in line with the so called single-axis or siloed approach<sup>3</sup>. In recent times, though, the concept of intersectionality and intersectional discrimination are being incorporated into the EU legal and policy framework with greater clarity, including – inter alia – in the following documents:

- » EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025<sup>4</sup>;

### UN General Comment No. 6 on Equality and Non-Discrimination (2018)

“‘Intersectional discrimination’ occurs when a person with a disability or associated to disability suffers discrimination of any form on the basis of disability, combined with colour, sex, language, religion, ethnic, gender or other status. Intersectional discrimination can appear as direct or indirect discrimination, denial of reasonable accommodation or harassment. For example, while denial of access to general health-related information due to inaccessible format affects all persons on the basis of disability, the denial to a blind woman of access to family planning services restricts her rights based on the intersection of her gender and disability... States parties must address multiple and intersectional discrimination against persons with disabilities.”

### EU Resolution on intersectional discrimination in the EU (2022)

“E. whereas the achievement of gender equality cannot occur if all multiples types of discrimination, intentional and unintentional, in their individual, structural, institutional and historical forms, have not been eradicated; whereas applying an intersectional approach aims to examine the intersections between racism/colonialism, economic inequality and patriarchy; whereas traditional anti-discrimination laws fail to combat all forms of discrimination and their compounded negative effects on the women concerned and not all Member States explicitly cover multiple discrimination and intersectional discrimination in their national legislations.”

<sup>3</sup> C. O’ Cinneide, “The Potential and Pitfalls of Intersectionality in the Context of Social Rights Adjudication”, in S. Atrey, P. Dunne (eds.), *Intersectionality and Human Rights Law*, Hart Publishing, Oxford, UK.

<sup>4</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Union of Equality: EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025.

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- » EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025<sup>5</sup>;
  - » EU Resolution of 6 July 2022 on intersectional discrimination in the EU: socio-economic situation of African, Middle-Eastern, Latin American and Asian decent<sup>6</sup>;
  - » Pay Transparency Directive 2023<sup>7</sup>.

The acknowledgement of the crucial relevance of intersectional discrimination in fighting inequalities on the part of the EU Parliament, European Commission, and relevant institutions is a very positive positioning. It paved the way towards the potential adoption of clear, effective, and monitorable provisions and actions on prohibiting intersectional discrimination and promoting intersectional equality<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

<sup>6</sup> European Parliament resolution of 6 July 2022 on intersectional discrimination in the European Union: the socio-economic situation of women of African, Middle-Eastern, Latin-American and Asian descent (2021/2243(INI)).

<sup>7</sup> Directive (EU) 2023/970 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms.

<sup>8</sup> A. Larguier, "Intersectionality: just another tool to fight discrimination?", in [equineteurope.org](https://equineteurope.org), 31 May 2023.

## 1.4 Going Back to the Start

When you say Kimberlé Crenshaw, you mean intersectionality and vice versa. It is a bit like Einstein and the Theory of Relativity or Steve Jobs and Apple. Two sides of the same coin: inseparable. As a matter of fact, intersectionality was not a new concept back in 1989, when Crenshaw coined the term. From the 1850s onwards, mostly in the USA, many activists, researchers, and thinkers helped to inform the understanding of intersectional issues, especially women of colour who were part of human rights movements. To name but a few, Sojourner Truth, Anna J. Cooper, The Combahee River Collective, Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Gloria Anzaldúa, Mirta Vidal, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Mitsuye Yamada contributed to the development of intersectionality both as a concept and a framework to analyse the society and break down the hierarchies that create inequalities, such as racism, capitalism, and patriarchy. They argued that the hegemonic vision of women as a homogeneous group (i.e. uppermiddle class, white, heterosexual women, with traditional family models) impeded to acknowledge how race, social class, and sexuality shaped the diverse ways of being a woman and the different types of discrimination and oppression they face individually and as distinct groups. In light of the significant conceptual, political, and social reflections and positionings of her predecessors, Crenshaw's contribution to the intersectionality discourse must be regarded as the culmination of over 150 years' worth of work. And, yet the overall framework keeps being discussed, challenged, expanded, and adapted. Meanwhile, in 2015, the term "intersectionality" was added to the Oxford Dictionary.

### Sojourner Truth

(1797-1883)



US-American abolitionist and women's rights activist

### Ain't I a woman?

*"That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?"*

In her famous speech at the Ohio Women's Convention (1851), Truth challenged the contemporary ideal of femininity by using her experience as a black woman born into slavery. By simply asking "Ain't I a woman?", she pointed out that African American women were left out from the women's rights discourse and movement as they did not comply with the notion of womanhood and were discriminated against as black persons. In a few poignant and powerful lines, Sojourner Truth clearly described how intersecting systems of exclusion affected and oppressed African American women of her time.

## 2 - Intersectionality and Social Businesses

### 2.1 Intersectionality as a Catalyst for Social Transformation

Social businesses play a critical role in driving positive social change and addressing local, national or global challenges, while also demonstrating that businesses can advance equality within their own workplace as well as in the society they work in. Integrating intersectionality within social businesses is thus crucial to address systemic inequalities and promoting social justice. In this view, social businesses have a significant opportunity to leverage an intersectional approach to improve their own organizational culture and policies as well as to better their interventions with different target groups.

The adoption of an intersectional approach allows for social business to:

- » **Understand complexity and addressing diverse needs:** Intersectionality recognizes that individuals hold multiple identities and face unique challenges due to the intertwinement of distinct factors, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and so on. By integrating intersectionality, social businesses can better understand and meet the diverse needs of the targeted individuals and communities, ensuring that their interventions, services, and products are inclusive and effective.
- » **Reach marginalized groups and empower their voices:** An intersectional approach allows social businesses to identify and empower those most affected by social problems and often overlooked. By adopting an intersectional approach, social businesses create spaces for the voices of the marginalised groups to be heard and actively involve them in designing, implementing, and evaluating their initiatives. Not only does this empowering process strengthens the impact of interventions, but also it cultivates a sense of ownership and agency among the marginalized groups targeted.
- » **Promote equity and inclusion:** Incorporating intersectionality into the fabric of social businesses promotes equity and inclusion within their organizational structures, policies, and practices. By adopting inclusive hiring practices, offering diversity training, and creating safe and affirming spaces for employees, social businesses can cultivate a culture of respect, belonging, and fairness. This, in turn, attracts diverse talent, fosters innovation, and strengthens the organization's ability to create positive social change.
- » **Drive systemic change:** Intersectionality encourages a holistic understanding of social issues by recognizing the interconnected nature of oppression and privilege. Social businesses that embrace intersectionality not only focus on providing immediate support to marginalized communities but also work towards dismantling the systems of power and privilege that perpetuate inequality. By advocating for policy changes, challenging discriminatory practices, and promoting allyship and solidarity, these businesses contribute to broader systemic transformations.



By embracing intersectionality, social businesses can tailor their strategies to directly target the intersecting forms of oppression that individuals and groups face. This targeted approach

can lead to more meaningful and sustainable outcomes, as it addresses the root causes of inequality rather than just the symptoms. By taking an intersectional approach, social businesses can achieve:

- » **Effective Solutions:** By considering how different identities intersect, social businesses can design programs and products that are truly inclusive and address the root causes of problems.
- » **Increased Impact:** Reaching a wider range of beneficiaries within a target community through intersectionality can lead to a larger positive social impact.
- » **Sustainability:** When solutions consider the specific needs of diverse groups, they are more likely to be adopted and sustained in the long run.

In brief, integrating intersectionality within social businesses is not only relevant but also essential for maximizing their impact, promoting social justice, and creating a more equitable and inclusive world.

## 2.2 Integrating Intersectionality in Internal Policies

All workplaces should comply with human rights standards to ensure that all employees are free from any form of harassment, discrimination, or violence. However, for fostering a fully inclusive and equitable work environment and maximizing the organization's impact, the world of work, including social businesses, should also integrate intersectionality into their internal policies. This choice would not only lead to a more diverse and inclusive workplace but also increase competitiveness and provide a good economic return<sup>9</sup>.



Here are several key areas where intersectionality can be incorporated into internal policies:

- » **Diversity and Inclusion Policies:** Develop comprehensive diversity and inclusion policies that explicitly recognize and address the intersecting identities of employees. These policies should outline the organization's commitment to creating a workplace that values and respects individuals of all backgrounds, including those marginalized based on race, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, socioeconomic status, and other identities. The implementation of such policies can lead to improved employee satisfaction, and commitment, as well as decreased absenteeism, turnover, and groupthink.<sup>10</sup> It also ensures all employees are represented and treated equally at all levels from entry-level positions to executive-level roles. When companies show prospective employees that diversity, equity, and inclusion are priorities, they also attract new talent.
- » **Recruitment and Hiring Practices:** Implement inclusive recruitment and hiring practices that actively seek to attract candidates from diverse backgrounds. This may include using diverse recruitment channels, ensuring diverse representation on hiring panels, implementing blind resume screening processes to mitigate biases, and providing training to hiring managers on unconscious bias and inclusive interviewing techniques.
- » **Training and Development Programmes:** Offer ongoing training and development programmes that educate employees on the principles of intersectionality, unconscious bias, privilege, and allyship. These programmes can help raise awareness of the unique challenges faced by individuals with intersecting identities and equip employees with the tools and knowledge needed to foster an inclusive workplace culture.
- » **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** Establish these groups that provide safe spaces for employees with shared identities or experiences to come together, share perspectives, and advocate for their needs within

<sup>9</sup> MEP, *Understanding Intersectionality. Targeting All Forms of Discrimination in the World of Work*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Catalyst, "Why Diversity and Inclusion Matter: Quick Take" (2020). Available at: <https://www.catalyst.org/research/why-diversity-and-inclusion-matter/>.

the organisation. Encourage the formation of intersectional ERGs that recognize the interconnectedness of various forms of identity and oppression.

- » **Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policies:** Develop and enforce robust anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies that explicitly prohibit discrimination, harassment, and microaggressions based on any protected characteristic, including intersecting identities. Provide clear reporting procedures and ensure that complaints are promptly and thoroughly investigated, with appropriate disciplinary action taken when necessary.
- » **Promotion and Advancement Opportunities:** Ensure that these opportunities are accessible to all employees, regardless of their intersecting identities. Implement transparent and equitable promotion processes that recognize and reward employees based on their contributions, skills, and performance, rather than on biases or favoritism. Encourage and support those who are often left out of leadership positions (women, ethnic and racial minorities, people of colour, people with (dis)abilities, gender variant people, etc.).
- » **Health and Well-being Initiatives:** Implement health and well-being initiatives that consider the unique needs and challenges faced by employees with intersecting identities. This may include offering mental health support services, flexible work arrangements, accommodations for disabilities, and access to resources that address specific health disparities within marginalized communities. Also ensure that the work space meets the diverse needs of the employees.
- » **Workspace Design:** Improve your workspace design to reflect your organization’s values, culture, and commitment to diversity and inclusion. A thoughtfully crafted workspace has the power to cultivate a profound sense of belonging, unleash creativity, and foster seamless collaboration among a diverse team, whereas a poorly conceived environment may inadvertently erect barriers, reinforce biases, and spark conflicts among employees



ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND TO AVOID “INTERSECTIONALITY WASHING”!!

Source: BFS, 2023

For intersectionality to be effective in the workplace (and anywhere), it is crucial that everyone, regardless of their role in the organisation, consistently performs the following tasks:

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| CHECK YOUR PRIVILEGE   | And look beyond just skin colour. Middle class? University level education? Able-bodied? Cisgender? All your social identities play into your 'privilege', even if you didn't ask for it. Reflect on these and consider how this impacts the forms of discrimination you do and don't experience.   |
| LISTEN, LEARN, REFLECT | At its very core, intersectionality is about learning and understanding views from other persons. Listen to, include and meaningfully collaborate with diverse groups of people. But remember it's not the responsibility of marginalised groups to do all the work in educating people on their experiences. This often takes up lots of emotional labour and should never be taken for granted so be prepared to help undertake some of the labour by doing your own research.  |
| MAKE SPACE REFLECT     | Ask yourself if you're the right person to take up space or speak on certain issues. Centre stories and actions on those with the lived experiences. Don't speak for them, don't speak over them.   |
| WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE    | So many of the words we use every day are ableist, exclusionary, and downright offensive to marginalised communities. When was the last time you said "ah, that's so lame!" when you were annoyed about something? Consider how someone with a physical impairment might hear this. Recognise and correct your use of such terms. Accept criticism and call others out. As we become more intersectional and better at understanding differences, our language evolves to simply reflecting experiences from people of a singular identity. |

Source: Adapted from *Womankind Worldwide*, 2024

In conclusion, by integrating intersectionality into internal policies, social businesses can create a more inclusive, equitable, and supportive work environment where all employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to thrive. This, in turn, not only enhances employee satisfaction and retention but also strengthens the organization's ability to effectively serve diverse communities and drive positive social change.

## 3 - Intersectionality and Social Impact

### 3.1 Building Inclusive Solutions for Sustainable Social Change

An intersectional approach is highly relevant for social businesses seeking to achieve meaningful social impact as it provides a framework for understanding the complexities of identities, oppression, and privilege, targeting root causes of inequality, maximizing impact, promoting inclusivity, building sustainable change, and empowering marginalized communities. By embracing intersectionality, social businesses can advance their mission of creating positive social change in a more holistic, equitable, and effective manner.

“Building inclusive solutions for sustainable social change requires collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to equity. Social businesses embody these principles and are driving positive impact around the world.”

Social Enterprise UK

The relevance of an intersectional approach to achieving social impact for social businesses cannot be overstated. Acknowledging that individuals hold multiple intersecting identities allow for social businesses to better understand the complexity of social issues. Traditional approaches to social impact often address issues in isolation, without considering the interconnected nature of systemic inequalities. An intersectional approach goes beyond addressing symptoms and targets the root causes of social problems by examining how intersecting systems of oppression create and perpetuate inequality. By understanding these underlying dynamics, social businesses can develop more effective and sustainable solutions. This targeted approach maximizes the impact of social initiatives by ensuring that resources are allocated where they are most needed and that interventions are accessible and relevant to those who need them the most.

“Social businesses have the potential to transform the world by harnessing the power of business to create positive social and environmental impact. By prioritizing inclusion and equity, they can drive sustainable change that leaves no one behind.”

Yunus Centre

Without an intersectional lens, social businesses risk overlooking the experiences and needs of marginalized groups, which can result in interventions that are ineffective or even harmful. For example, a gender-focused initiative may inadvertently exclude transgender or non-binary individuals if their experiences are not taken into account. Intersectionality empowers marginalized communities by centering their voices, experiences, and leadership in the development and implementation of social initiatives. By actively involving marginalized communities in decision-making processes, social businesses not only can build trust and legitimacy, but it can also

ensure that interventions are culturally responsive, community-driven, and sustainable in the long term.

Social businesses that adopt an intersectional approach not only address immediate social issues but also work towards dismantling the structural barriers that perpetuate inequality and discrimination. To achieve lasting social impact, in fact, requires addressing the underlying structures and systems that perpetuate inequality. An intersectional approach emphasizes the importance of systemic change by advocating for policies and practices that promote equity, justice, and inclusivity on a broader scale. Social businesses that embrace intersectionality play a vital role in driving this systemic change by challenging discriminatory practices, advocating for policy reforms, and promoting social justice initiatives.

## 3.2 From Theory to Action: Intersectionality in Social Impact

By following these practical steps, social businesses can adopt an intersectional approach to their external interventions or projects, thereby maximizing their impact and promoting social justice for diverse communities:

### STEP

1

#### **Community Engagement and Needs Assessment**

- » Begin by engaging directly with the communities you aim to serve. Listen to their voices, experiences, and needs.
- » Conduct comprehensive needs assessments that consider the intersecting identities and experiences of community members.
- » Collect disaggregated data and ensure that the experiences of individuals with intersectional identities are not overlooked.
- » Use participatory methods such as focus groups, surveys, and community meetings to gather diverse perspectives and insights.

### STEP

2

#### **Intersectional Analysis**

- » Apply an intersectional lens to analyze the disaggregated data collected during the needs assessment. Identify the intersecting forms of oppression and privilege that shape the experiences of different groups within the community.
- » Consider how factors such as race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, religion, ethnicity, and immigration status intersect to create unique challenges and barriers.
- » Be open to thinking creatively about social justice issues, assessing how issues connect with seemingly unrelated topics, and considering how they may have unintended consequences for other areas.

### STEP

3

#### **Tailored Interventions**

- » Develop interventions or projects that are tailored to address the specific needs and priorities of different intersecting identity groups within the community.
- » Ensure that interventions are accessible, inclusive, and culturally relevant to diverse communities.
- » Collaborate with community members to co-design interventions, services, and products that reflect their values, preferences, and lived experiences.

### STEP

4

#### **Partnerships and collaborations**

- » Forge partnerships and collaborations with organizations and individuals that have expertise in addressing intersecting forms of oppression and privilege.
- » Build coalitions with community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and grassroots movements that represent and serve marginalized communities.
- » Share resources, knowledge, and best practices to leverage collective strengths and amplify impact.

STEP  
5

**Data Collection and Monitoring**

- » Collect disaggregated data to track the impact of interventions on different intersecting identity groups within the community.
- » Monitor progress regularly and adjust interventions as needed to ensure that they remain responsive to the evolving needs of diverse communities.
- » Use participatory evaluation methods that involve community members in the assessment and interpretation of data.

STEP  
6

**Capacity Building and Empowerment**

- » Invest in capacity building initiatives that empower community members to become leaders, advocates, and agents of change within their own communities.
- » Provide training, mentorship, and resources to support the development of skills, knowledge, and networks among marginalized groups.
- » Foster a culture of solidarity, mutual support, and collective action that enables communities to mobilize and advocate for their rights and interests.

STEP  
7

**Advocacy and Policy Change**

- » Advocate for policy changes that address the structural and systemic inequalities that perpetuate oppression and privilege.
- » Amplify the voices of marginalized communities in policy debates, decision-making processes, and public discourse.
- » Collaborate with policymakers, legislators, and other stakeholders to advance policies that promote equity, justice, and inclusivity.

STEP  
8

**Transparency and Accountability**

- » Maintain transparency and accountability in all aspects of the social business, including governance, decision-making processes, and resource allocation.
- » Regularly report on diversity and inclusion metrics, soliciting feedback from employees and stakeholders, and taking action to address areas for improvement.

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