Summary

Discrimination can happen based on a number of attributes including peoples' gender, class, education, race, sexuality, disability, religion, nationality, age, etc. Intersectionality is an analytical framework used to understand how the myriad of attributes and socio-political identities of people can result in different types of discrimination and privileges. This Tools introduces the theory of intersectionality as a concept, discusses issues of magrinalisation in the context of water governance, and points to key considerations on how to leverage intersectional thinking for enhancing water action.

What is Intersectionality?

Based on the idea that people's identities are multi-layered and diverse according to their gender, class, caste, race, sexuality, disability, religion, nationality, age, and more – intersectionality is an analytical tool as well as sociological concept that acknowledges that people are members of more than one community, have unique individual experiences that result from this, and can experience oppression and privilege at the same time (Figure 1). It aims to uncover the different types of discrimination that occur as a result of these diverse identities and takes historical, social, political, and power relations into account (Crenshaw, 1991). By the time Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term, she was seeking to shed light on how the experiences of Black women in the United States with the legal system were shaped both by their gender and race.

Image

Figure 1. Representation of intersectionality from the perspective of individual characteristics and societal power structures. Source: Authors.

Figure 1. Representation of Intersectionality. Source: Soeters et al. (2019).

The Pros and Cons of Using Intersectionality

During the development of policies, programmes, services, and laws, intersectionality can be used as a method to assess the impact those have especially on the people with the least amount of power, analyse the complete picture of social, political, cultural, and economic circumstances, and "building a global culture of human rights from the grassroots to the global level" (AWID, 2004, 3). As with all approaches, the value of intersectionality depends on how it is applied, methodologically it is complex. There is a danger of homogenising certain social "target groups", putting them in boxes based on their characteristics (e.g. gender, race, or class) and working towards single-issue, individualising, target-based solutions. The idea behind intersectionality is holistic, progressive, and focused on social justice by making sure programmes account for and understand structural inequalities and factors such as patriarchy or racism that underlie social systems. WASH and other water-related sectors have the potential to facilitate wider change and address exclusion by taking both the individual intersecting characteristics of those in need as well as those overlapping systems of power into account.

Marginalisation and Access to Water and Sanitation Services

An inclusive approach to WASH and water-related services is essential to fulfil universal and equitable access for everyone. Improving WASH and other water services in an equitable manner requires practitioners to understand context-specific power dynamics and holistically address the various factors that influence unequal access and exclusion. In practice, it is often a challenge for WASH and other development practitioners to identify this diversity of barriers and needs, and there is a tendency at all levels to address different types of discrimination or marginalisation separately rather than in an integrated way (WaterAid et al., 2017). This is where intersectional methods come into play to analyse, disclose, and address these overlapping power systems and intersecting oppressions. The Marginalisation Framework developed by WaterAid can be used to identify who is marginalised and what are the barriers to inclusion (Fig. 2).

Image
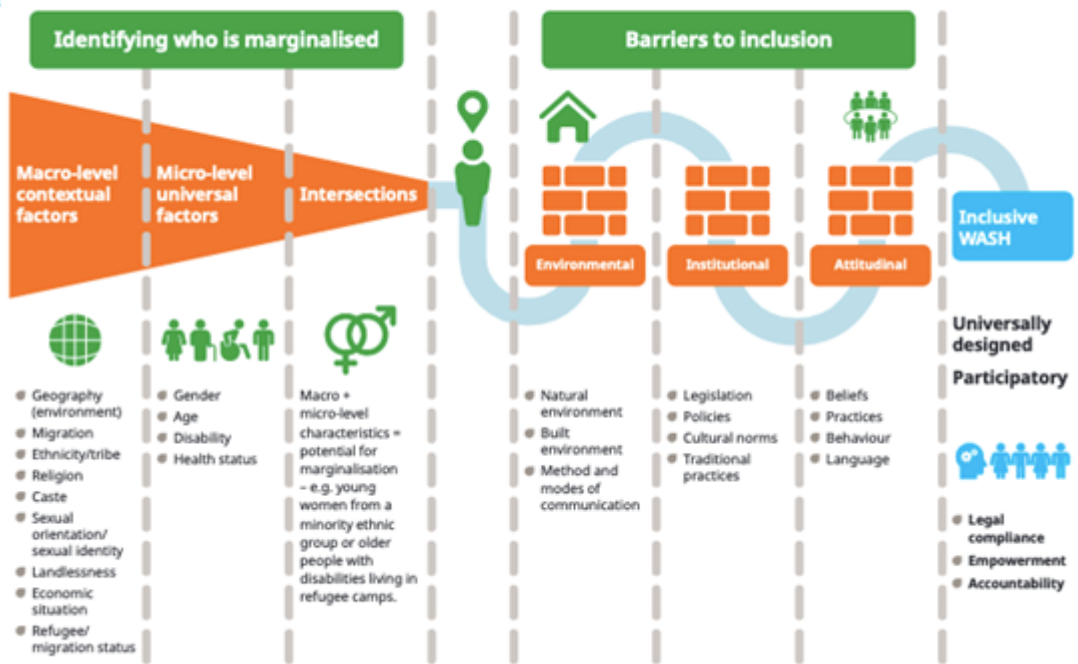
Figure 2. The Marginalisation Framework. Source: WaterAid (2018).

Disability, Health Status, Age

People with disabilities are disproportionately represented among those who experience only limited rights to WASH. Disability is commonly defined as the result of the barriers that are imposed on people with impairments to their participation in society. They face both multiple barriers in terms of access and of inclusion. This includes both physical barriers, for example access to low-maintenance household latrines that provide space, ramps, handrails, and running water, as well as organizational and attitudinal barriers, not letting people with disabilities meaningful participate in advocacy, programme design, evaluation, or information delivery. It is estimated that 15 percent of the world's population and up to 10 percent of all children live with some kind of disability (WHO, 2011).

This marginalisation and discrimination also disproportionately affects the elderly, the chronically ill and the mentally ill. Poor access to WASH for these groups of society affects access to healthcare and increases the likeliness of illness for children. It affects if children with disabilities, chronic, and mental illness are going to school, and a person's ability to participate in paid work (UNICEF, 2018). Poor access and lack of inclusion thus reinforces the poverty cycle. Having independent or support with the access to WASH facilities means being less excluded and less dependent on the help of others

including the family, being able to participate more in community life, and increasing chances to "tap in" to other knowledge, information, and services. Improved human dignity and a reduction in stigma towards disability, chronical illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, and mental illnesses is the goal.

Ethnicity, Religion, Nationality, Caste

In many parts of the world, access to water is determined by access to power, leaving certain social groups based on their caste, ethnicity, religion, or nationality discriminated or marginalised. Indeginous community and religious minorities have the least opportunity, access, and voice in the decision making process of water management and allocation. This type of discrimination is highly differentiated between women, men and amongst women themselves. For instance, the water problems and issues faced by a Muslim woman is different than a Hindu women in a country dominated by Hindu religion or vice versa. In India, upper caste Hindu as well as some of the Muslim communities do not allow women to leave their domestic area to fetch water in the absence of men.

In most South Asian countries the caste system influences the physical access (location, quality and quantity) of water resources. The community from the upper caste are privileged, thus, get more power and authority and tend to suppress the voices and disregard the issues of minor caste people. Similarly, immigrants also face discrimination over water resources as services and facilities provided by the government privilege their own nationals. That could be basic water supply and sanitation, electricity, health, and employment opportunities.

Property, Residence, Economic Status, Social Status

The ownership of assets, economic well being, and location affect the reach and power to mobilise water resources. People with good economic status have more access to and control over water usage and water resources or afford bottled water. People living in different geographical locations, especially urban or rural, deal with water issues in different ways. As cities are expanding, authorities concentrate on larger population groups overshadowing the rural water supply and sanitation services. Due to inadequate water supply and sanitation facilities, the number of people getting

affected with water borne diseases and several other health problems are higher in rural areas than in the cities. In many parts of the world, women from rural areas who are deprived of tap water, have to travel long distances in order to fetch the water for daily water needs. This will take away most of the time of their day to be engaged in economic activities and social/community events and many young girls are even forced to drop out of the school so that they could help their mothers in daily household chores and water management. Not only geographical location, people living in informal residence settings or slums often lack basic WASH facilities which are not provided by the government.

Sex, Gender, Family Relations and Hierarchies

Women and girls experience discrimination and inequalities in having the basic right to water and sanitation facilities in various ways (Tool B5.06). Not only the social standing within the community or social system impacts the access to water resources and usage, it also differs within a family depending on family relation and hierarchies, depending on, among other things, marital status or gender roles. Being a daughter in law and a daughter of the same household might bring different

roles and responsibilities in terms of water use and management with it, for example, when it is mostly the responsibility of the daughter in law to fetch water. Within many families, a mother-in-law has more power over decision making than other women of this family. In that case, she gets to decide on the location of sanitation facilities as well as the quantity of water required for household chores.

Key Considerations for Inclusive WASH

Based on guiding principles from multiple publications on how to use intersectionality as a tool (e.g., AWID 2004; Simpson 2009; IGLYO, 2014; The Opportunity Agenda, 2017; Sarwar & Mason 2017; WaterAid, 2018), especially in the development of policies, services, programmes, projects, and research, some of the cross-cutting advice is to:

- Collaborate: Intersectionality means strengthening collaboration across sectors, communities, and issues, to drive transformative processes, e.g. between civil society organisations,

proactive local officials, and government representatives who all understand the importance of inclusion. Reaching out to and consulting with local interest groups and other sectors will also reveal where there is space to improve in making services more inclusive.

- Collect Disaggregated Data: Often data is unable to capture the experiences of people located at intersections because it only focuses on isolated aspects of people's or community's identities. Compile statistics on areas and populations that have been left behind.
- Allocate Resources: Context-specific analysis will reveal who has the least access to rights and resources. During the programme or project development process, commit to invest in those that are harder to reach.
- Give Voice and Visibility: The voices of those most affected by issues should be promoted and communities allowed to speak up for their own goals as they are often excluded from the major platforms. Consider if people from different backgrounds are included and publicly represented.
- Change Internal Policy and Consider Representation: Internally policies should protect minority groups and historically disadvantaged groups as well as encourage their full participation within the organisation.
- • Consider Cross-Issues: Being open to critically reflect on how seemingly unrelated issues relate to one another is important to work towards a holistic social justice approach. Working on one issue might have unforeseen consequences, both beneficial or harmful, to another. For example, immigration relates to poverty, poverty to water security, water security to public health.
- Advocate: Legal clauses in national constitutions and bi- and multi-lateral mechanisms need to take into account multiple grounds of discrimination. Governments should be supported in developing appropriate approaches to include groups that are socially excluded or harder to reach. Water and sanitation service provision can go beyond technical support and influence discriminating social norms, for example if anti-discrimination laws are actively implemented to end exclusion from communal water for certain social groups.

Thematic Tagging
Gender Youth

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