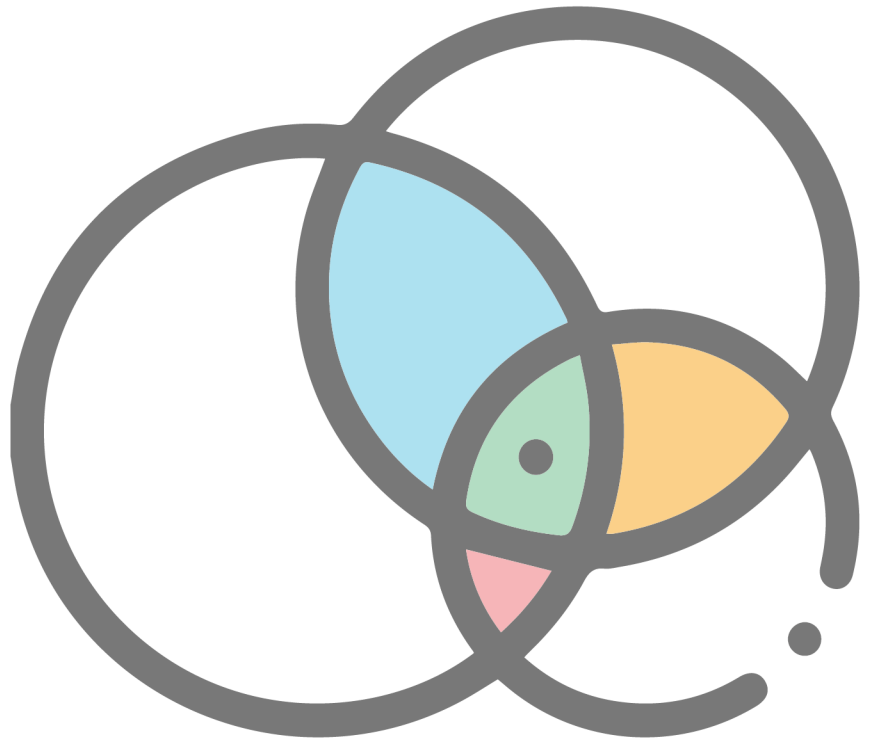


INTERSECTIONALITY

A COMMITMENT TO NETWORKING



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Intersectionality: a bet on networking

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Since the creation of the Latin-American and Caribbean Network for Democracy (REDLAD), its work has been based on citizen action, but the initial differential perspective, recognizing the struggles and demands of each population group, has changed to be driven by an intersectional approach, allowing an understanding about converging points of these struggles as well as their systems of subordination. The aim now is to seek convergence of matters among different agendas and develop common actions, so that they can mutually strengthen each other and broaden their range of incidence.

I.

WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY, AND WHERE DOES THE TERM COME FROM?



The term “intersectionality” is the result of discussions on feminist theories and the demands for women’s rights in the 90s, when American professor Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term to describe inequality among white and black American women and to criticize the universal category of “woman”¹. Intersectionality was then used to demonstrate heterogeneity throughout the feminist movement, pointing out that both women’s rights and equality struggles are diverse and determined by different realities, such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, among other factors². But how can we define the term intersectionality nowadays?

1. Maria Caterina La Barbera. (2016). Interseccionalidad un “concepto viajero”: Orígenes, desarrollo e implementación en la Unión Europea. Available on <https://bit.ly/2l2nLMu>

2. Escuela de feminismos alternativos. Interseccionalidad: Definición y orígenes. Available on <https://bit.ly/2mA6kTZ>

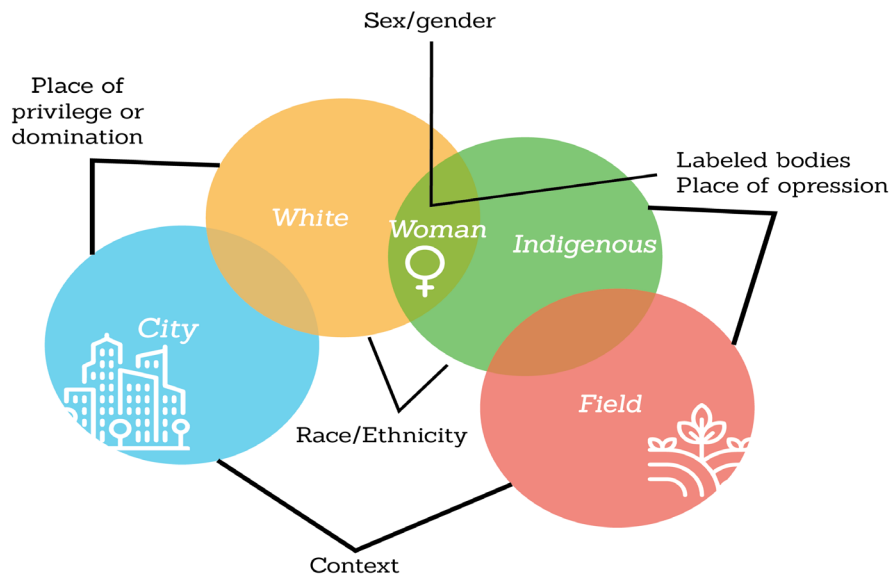
Intersectionality is a concept that has been transformed and developed hand in hand with various discussions on social inequalities, equity and efforts for equality and social inclusion. Nowadays intersectionality is an approach that serves to identify how systems of inequality and domination in the power framework have been created and interrelated, through characteristics that define personal identity and their manifestation in society.

Intersectionality is not in any sense a static theory that solves debates on socio-historic categories such as gender, ethnicity, or social class. On the contrary, it allows one to identify their complexity and avoids patterns of lineal and binary comprehension. This approach is also ambiguous, since it addresses, questions, and contributes to the deconstruction of the categories mentioned above, which promotes more creative actions capable of dealing with the complexity of the social reality of such categories.

An approach or “focus” can be compared to a lens allowing for the understanding of reality. As the definition suggests, it implies “to focus” and give more attention, clarity, or centrality to specific points. Approaches in social sciences help to close in on reality in a certain way, thus visualizing phenomena or factors that are overlooked and normalized in day-to-day life. Intersectionality could be understood as an approach because it allows one to focus in on and visualize several ways of oppression and how they interact between each other. It also allows for the discovery of several activism possibilities based on these confluences.

Intersectionality is based on the premise that people are placed into certain categories of social differentiation that define a certain position and role within society. For example, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, among others, are social categories that make up a person’s identity and are not mutually exclusive. In other words, an individual’s identity has multiple dimensions that interrelate with each other and influence the way they relate to others³. E.g., an indigenous woman from a rural context has a different position and role in ‘western society’ compared to a white woman from an urban context. Although both share the characteristic of identifying themselves as women, they experience this condition in different ways due to other factors that define them. A way to illustrate the intersection of distinct social categories described in the example above can be shown with the following graph:

3. Awid. (2004). Interseccionalidad: una herramienta para la justicia de género y la justicia económica. Available on <https://bit.ly/2lYth2Tps://bit.ly/2mA6kTZ>



Source: Author's graphical representation

According to the last graphic, intersectionality suggests that contemporary societies are hierarchical and unequal. Therefore, there are systems of domination and privileges. These systems are created based on social categories; wherein certain identities prevail over others⁴. E.g., Men have greater privileges than women, white people have conditions that allow them to exercise domination over non-white people, communities with fewer economic resources are discriminated against by people and entities that accumulate wealth, heterosexual people have greater acceptance in society and different rights than homosexual people, among other examples. To summarize, symbolically and in practice, the upper class and heterosexual white man has a dominant place in society, allowing him several ways to exercise power while other identity categories are subordinated in relation to him.

To synthesize, intersectionality is an approach that originates from the systems of domination and privileges existing in a society, and that are based on the hierarchies or inequalities created around identity categories or social groups. Intersectionality suggests that the same person can enjoy certain privileges and at the same time be discriminated in other aspects. For example, a white, wealthy woman is privileged because of her skin color and social class, but she is discriminated against because of her gender.

It is due to these differences that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) can more clearly identify their agenda and demands, and at the same time their interaction and joint development. In this way, it is not a matter of each CSO or population group 'fighting for its own'. Based on this intersectional view, it is possible to identify common agendas that favor the exchange of good practices and peer-to-peer strengthening.

4. Awid. (2004). Interseccionalidad: una herramienta para la justicia de género y la justicia económica. Available on <https://bit.ly/2lYth2Tps://bit.ly/2mA6kTZ>



II .

MAIN IDENTITY GROUPS / SOCIAL CATEGORIES

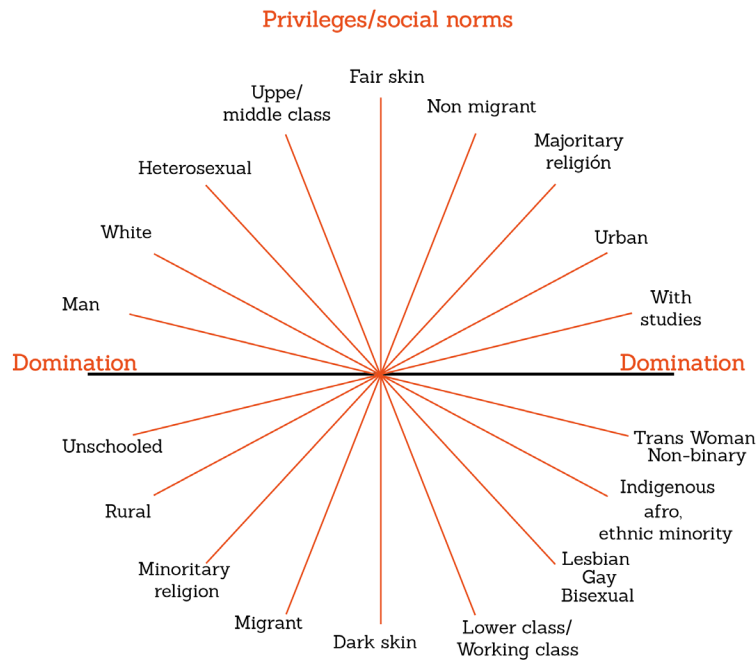
In the process of shaping the social identities of individuals, social categories are determiners, acting in relative ways depending on historical contexts, situational power relations, as well as privileges and dynamics of oppression⁵. Although the intersectional approach does not seek to create a sum of categories, the following can be identified as the most frequently stated:

5. Marcia Thereza Couto, Elda de Oliveira, Marco Antônio Alves Separavich, Olinda do Carmo Luiz. (2019). La perspectiva feminista de la interseccionalidad en el campo de la salud pública: revisión narrativa de las producciones teórico-metodológicas. Available on [https //bit.ly/2rcVkyE](https://bit.ly/2rcVkyE)

Thus, these groups, in addition to shaping the identity of individuals and communities, create hierarchical systems, in which some categories prevail over others.

Gender	Ethnicity	Religion	Social class	Rural/urban context
Age	Education	Nationality	Race ⁶	Sexual Orientation
Migratory status	Sex	Disability	Sexual characteristics	Gender Identity and Gender Expression

The image below exemplifies the systems of domination and privilege in contemporary societies. This allows one to understand the intersection between two or more axes of oppression, thus recognizing the relational issue between the markers or categories of social differentiation, and the way in which these create social contexts traversed by power relations within the framework of discrimination and subordination systems⁷.



Source: Author's representation based on the image *Opresiones y Privilegios* by Patricia Hill Collins.

Intersectionality seeks to change the way we understand social matters, beyond binary categories such as: man-woman or rich-poor. It aims to reveal how the structures of inequality are reproduced in scenarios where multiple identities coexist. Intersectionality can also be included in the debate on analysis of life experience differences in different social realities. Thus, domination is not something “arithmetical”, rather depending on the structures of a particular political, cultural, social, and economic contexts⁸.

6. Here the category of race understood from its historical and discursive construction to legitimize instruments of domination is mentioned. As Quijano (2003) points out, the idea of race is an invention, since it has no relation to the biological structure of the human race, nor is there any proven association between phenotypic traits and the biological processes of the organism.

7. Havinsky et al. (2017). The odd couple: using biomedical and intersectional approaches to address health inequities. Disponible en: <https://bit.ly/2qtQXPf>

8. This debate is addressed by Mara Viveros in the text *La interseccionalidad: una aproximación situada a la dominación*. She clarifies: “The properties of social agents cannot be understood in terms of advantages or disadvantages, from an arithmetical logic of domination. Consequently, the most disadvantaged position in a classist, racist and sexist society is not necessarily that of a poor black woman when it is compared to the situation of a young man of her same social group, who is more exposed than that woman to certain forms of arbitrariness, such as those associated with police controls. Analysis of particular social configurations can relativize common sense perceptions of how domination works.” (Viveros, 2016, p. 10).

III.

INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE WORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY



Intersectionality seeks, in the first place, a critique and “self-criticism” of the characteristics present in relations of domination or vulnerability in certain contexts. This approach favors diversity as an inherent characteristic of human societies and, consequently, understands it as an opportunity. In this sense, intersectionality exalts differentiated approaches, aims to make them visible and strengthen them, not as signs of inequality, but as signs of human wealth.

It is important to keep in mind that intersectionality is a critical approach to systems of domination and aims to eradicate such systems by making them visible. Intersectionality does not seek to homogenize social struggles; its intention is to eradicate those cultural structures that privilege and stereotype certain groups and individuals. Likewise, it is worth noting that this view is not about stacking up, but about broadening the comprehension of inequalities and understanding that it is necessary to look at the context of each group to be able to understand the oppressions that affect them as well as their own resistances.

Above all, intersectionality seeks empathy to develop activism dialogue exercises and advocacy within the framework of social struggles, which could be viewed as beyond our competence, because we belong to a privileged category or a particular identity. For example, returning to feminism, it aims towards “white” and “rich” women showing solidarity and becoming allies of the struggles fought by “black”, “poor”, “indigenous”, “trans” women, who live their womanhood in a different way, due to other systems of domination that put them in a disadvantageous situation.

In conclusion, to develop an intersectionality perspective, it is necessary to find points of convergence among different groups and social struggles, working together for the construction of collective agendas and the advancement in the configuration of more egalitarian societies, where diversity and differences are not used to create inequality in terms of rights.

IV.



INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE ACTIONS OF REDLAD

Intersectionality is fundamental for REDLAD in general and has a particular role in each of its projects, since this approach allows to better understand the realities experimented by different groups shaping the Latin American population, as well as their common struggles, facilitating the development of joint dialogue and advocacy, while promoting the strengthening of civil society organizations and their agendas through the process.

Therefore, intersectionality contributes to the understanding of the Latin American continent's diversity and allows for strengthening both in the participation and advocacy of civil society from an approach including the realities of population groups, as well as the different social actors that comprise it. Through the implementation of this approach, the action of REDLAD has become more qualified and has acquired a greater advocacy capacity, since it can deal with the complexity of Latin-American social realities, different identities, and exclusion situations coexisting in a single territory. This work also plays a role in the confluence of possibilities that can transform and advocate in the public agenda.

The intersectionality approach has been an opportunity for REDLAD to generate dialogues among various actors and Civil Society Organizations, based on a better approximation and understanding of the context in which each one develops its own actions, favoring mutual enrichment and peer strengthening. An example of this has been the dialogue exercises and knowledge exchange activities developed among the population groups that participate in REDLAD's activism and its projects.

The intersectional approach is fundamental for REDLAD in the work it carries on with Afro-descendant organizations, LGBTIQ+, faith groups, indigenous communities, among others; giving that it is important to understand the inequalities that affect these Latin-American identities or social groups, as well as their shared issues and actions of vindication. This intersectionality-guided exercise makes it possible to more effectively direct and support the participation of CSOs representing these population groups in very diverse advocacy scenarios, such as the Summits of the Americas. In other words, this joint work qualifies the participation of organizations linked to population groups, allows the development of common lines of action, strengthens their advocacy and, in this way, aspires to contribute to the effective access to fundamental rights in these populations.

The intersectional approach is complementary to other processes generated in REDLAD, such as the construction of the organization's Gender Policy. This policy was born amid a Network of reflections on multiple forms of oppression and inequality, taking place in recent years, which deserve to be discussed and recognized in the scenarios of civil society. One of these forms of oppression is undoubtedly gender-based. For this reason, the policy was conceived as a strategy in favor of gender equity, the expansion and promotion of women's participation in all areas of the Network, its projects and advocacy.

The gender policy is a path that has only recently been embarked upon and deserves to be constantly nourished by other reflections and processes, such as the one that is trying to position the intersectional approach within the organization. Likewise, each view and approach such as gender, strengthens the intersectional perspective in each of REDLAD's actions.

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