

## ROADMAP SERIES: STRATEGIES FOR GENDER-SENSITIVE AND INTERSECTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Kirthi started the session by establishing a comprehensive understanding of what sex and gender are, and how important this understanding is in the development sector. Yet, we often find ourselves with systems and structures (college forms, election registrations, etc.) that have used 'sex' and 'gender' interchangeably.

### **Gender, Sex and Sexual Orientation**

Sex is assigned at birth and is primarily attached to one's biology. However, it is also a social construct because it is what society has decided to amount to male assigned at birth or amount to female assigned at birth based on the organs present on the body. Traditionally, because we live in a heteronormative society, we have certain binarized understanding of sex, believing that it either got to be man or woman. However, sex is also beyond the binary as one can be inter-sex. However, this is often considered to be a 'flaw' in the body by society, a 'condition' that can be 'treated'. Primary sex characteristics are what you see when the baby is born whereas secondary sex characteristics are those that are seen during puberty, such as facial hair, change in voice, thickening of the skin, etc.

Gender is a social construct. Gender identity refers to the internal perception of one's gender, and how individuals label themselves. Common gender identity labels include man, woman, gender queer and trans, among others. Self-determination plays an incredibly important role in gender identity, given that the individual is the only one who knows how they feel. Within this spectrum, an individual's gender identity can be fluid.

An individual's secondary sex characteristics are often used as a means to determine gender by society. Thickening of the voice is automatically seen as a way of identifying someone as a boy, regardless of whether the individual is making the choice themselves.

Sexual orientation is a term used to denote the type of sexual, romantic, emotional or spiritual attraction that one has for others. It is generally labelled as the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to. It is often confused with sexual preference. Sexual orientation is not voluntary. One is attracted to another the way they are and there is no scientific explanation to why this is the way it is. A sexual preference, on the other hand, is an individual's personal preference that is voluntary.

### **Importance of understanding Gender and Sex in work culture**

It is important to start by understanding these terms (gender, sex and sexual orientation) because, at the root of our interactions, we are addressing one's gendered experiences. We have often grown up learning that sex and gender are binaries. [Sam Killerman's genderbread person](#) is a useful tool to understand the different personal identities relating to gender, sex and sexual orientation.

One important thing to remember is every gender, sex and sexual orientation is perfectly and completely natural.

### **Intersectionality**

The concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberly Crenshaw in 1989, refers to overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination. Intersectionality is the idea that multiple identities intersect to create a whole that is different from the component identities. These identities include, amongst others, gender, race, social class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, mental disability, physical disability, mental illness and physical illness.

Intersectionality refers to the study of how our social categories intersect and how these intersections impact the experiences, structures of power and oppression. It examines how social categories such as gender, race and ethnicity overlap and shape our experiences, our life outcomes and our views of the world.

To understand intersectionality, there is an interesting tool called the [Intersectionality Wheel](#) developed by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. The circle divides our identities into four layers and looks at each layer independently, before putting them all together.

### **Why does intersectionality matter?**

Intersectionality helps in following:

- Responding to specific issues that cannot be separated from gendered oppression
- Creating sound policies and implement them based on the needs of each individual in question, with due respect to the multiple oppressions and their impact on them
- Evaluating how choice and consequences are altered by circumstances

Intersectionality is essential to our understanding of gender and sexual diversity, both of which are certainly impacted by other social identities. To create diverse and inclusive spaces and approaches

be it in training or at work, we have to be willing to think about difference, power and oppression in increasingly complex ways. Intersectionality gives us ways to understand how multiple identities intersect and produce understandings of difference that impact our lives.

### **How does all this matter to you?**

The impact of gender is real and a 'one size fits all approach works only with a homogenous target community. Given that this is often not the case, preparing for and responding to the impact of gender should be an integral part of every project. Recognising your privilege as an organisation and a service provider can help build the right teams for projects. If you have to change the team or inspect the work of a particular project, that is a good starting point. You should not talk for anyone else. Instead, you need to pass the mic, and to do this, you need to start by checking your privilege. Work with the community and understand the problems.

### **The importance of pronouns**

Being gender and queer affirmative is an approach that embraces a positive view of gender identities and relationships, and addresses the negative influences that misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism have on the lives of individual people.

People are not projects and we cannot homogenize them into a single group. We need to start by recognizing their identity. A good place to start would be by clarifying an individual's pronouns of choice as pronouns place the agency to self-determine identity in the hands of each individual. Pronouns help situate the individual's identity exactly as they determine it to be. They avoid presumptions, gender dysphoria, and the imposed burden of target group conformity.

### **Scenarios**

Kirthi provide the certain scenarios to the attendees and asked them to respond.

1. Your current project goal is to build 50 public toilets in a district. At the moment you have a census report from the district authorities that tells you how many men and women there are. How would you go about implementing this project?  
*Select answers: Speak to representative sample, conduct FGDs, find out other needs (e.g. if water is not available, building toilets may not be a priority.)*
2. You have set up a school offering free education for teens from ages 13-17 in a particular area in a city. You notice that the boys do not attend school and spend time harassing the girls who do. How will you make attending school safer for the girls within a limited budget?  
*Select answers: Build sensitivity and have conversations with boys and girls separately, encourage shared conversation, make them understand actions and consequences, awareness to parents and teachers, use creative ways to convey the message*
3. You work in the space of menstrual hygiene and provide sanitary products for use. You visit a new cohort of participants to train them in your batch. You find two men in your class. You notice that the women are uncomfortable with their presence. How do you proceed?

*Select answers: Thank the men for their interest, break stigma, build trust, sensitise men before they begin work, have shared sessions, share men's view on menstrual hygiene*

4. You work in the space of menstrual hygiene and provide sanitary products for use. You visit a new cohort of participants to train them. In your batch, you find two men in your class, the class proceeds per usual. After the session, one of the men walks upto you and asks for some time to talk to you privately, and in that time, explains that he has endometriosis and needs help. How would you proceed?

*Select answers: Thank him for trusting you with the information, assure him confidentiality, provide medical solution or direct him to trusted medical personnel.*

### **Question & Answer session**

1. If we start with shared group identities and start looking at intersections, we ultimately end up in the situation where every individual is unique. How important are group identities?

Certain aspects of our identities are shared and we belong to certain groups. It is important to remember that people are not projects. They are not going to serve group identities at the cost of individual identities. The key to identify whether group or individual identities are more important is to see what impact the classification is going to have. If going with group identities will benefit all individuals in that group, then so be it.

2. What are some of the hands-on ways in which you can incorporate intersectionality in our field interventions?

The first is by making the community that you work with the centre of your work. You are not working for them. Your interventions are not for them. You are a conduit for what they want. This attitude will allow empathetic responses and intersectional interventions.

3. Very often field interventions are defined by the power inequality between giver and recipient. How can one be sensitive and intersectional in such circumstances?

Power comes from various equations. Especially in the development sector, the idea of privilege is what defines the power inequality and also places the person for whom such development is being offered in a very disadvantageous position. It is important to place the community at the front of all actions. Sensitivity starts from your side. It starts from every word you put together in grant pitch, in the project, in monitoring and evaluation, in indicators we choose, and the way we approach dialogue around the community itself.

4. Any ideas on how to promote intersectionality and sensitivity in donor conversations where once again, there is power imbalance?

Donors who come with very large corporate budgets look for Section 80G exemptions and CSR adherence. In such scenarios, the focus on impact may not be priority. This is an ongoing struggle for all actors, and the only solution is to encourage empathy from the donor as well.

5. In the context of pronouns, there are circumstances where such conversations may not be appreciated. For example, during FGDs in rural environments. Should one err on the side of “caution”?

Asking a person what pronouns they prefer can be put them on the spot and put the burden of emotional labour on them to identify themselves. We must bear in mind the following in such scenarios:

- Understand the population from the census or demographic studies for some clarity on how many people there are, what beliefs they have, their educational levels, and past histories in dealing with particular gender identities
- If you have been able to identify target demographics within that community, you are going to conduct a needs assessment first. These assessments should encourage honest conversation. However, they should not put respondents on the spot in public eye. Such conversations can be labour and time consuming but that is the only way to build trust.

### **Resources**

- 1) Sam Killermann's website: [Link](#) (A good resource to start with on the site is [here](#))
- 2) Supplementary courses one can take to learn more: [Course 1](#) [Course 2](#)
- 3) A resource that can help you understand more about gender-based violence and how to respond to it: [Here](#)
- 4) An excellent YouTube channel you can learn from: ([Here](#))
- 5) A free book that can help you learn about the ABCs of Gender Identity (Read free [here](#)) (Buy [Here](#))
- 6) Books you can buy and read more on: ([One](#)) ([Two](#))