

ACTIVITY 4:

Intersections of Identity and Power

Identity is not merely a personal or interpersonal matter; it relates to larger power struggles. When we talk about difficult contexts, it is important to see how different groups experience them in different ways. This not only helps us to understand the political dynamics in our context better but also encourages us to build solidarity with others struggling in their own ways.

We tend to think of the most visible forms of risk and insecurity that protect those in power by silencing and suppressing any challenge: crackdowns on activism and outspoken community leaders, more restrictive laws undermining freedom of speech and assembly, surveillance and threats of violence. But risk and insecurity can take more everyday forms: discrimination, exclusion, marginalisation, subordination, silencing, harassment, economic exploitation, and domestic and sexual violence. These forms of violence maintain the social and political domination of people of non-dominant identities.

Materials: A computer and projector if possible; a handout of the introduction to this chapter.

Step 1: Intro to Intersectionality

Plenary: Review key points thus far: that identity is not singular and does not exist in a vacuum. Society assigns greater privilege and power to some identities than it does to others. Here, the concept of intersectionality is useful for locating our interconnected identities more clearly within social power dynamics.

To bring the concept alive, screen the video of [Awino Okech's intro](#) to Intersectionality. You may want to show more videos from [JASS' Big Ideas page on Intersectionality](#), in which people talk about their own intersecting identities. Alternatively, choose and read out quotes on the complexities of identity, for example from the [In Depth](#) section of JASS' Big Ideas page on Intersectionality (in which case, adapt the discussion questions).

Ask:

- Did you experience any 'aha' moments concerning intersectionality and why it matters? How did the video/s add to your understanding of identity?
- Did you relate to any particular video/s and if so why?
- What do these videos reveal about how different identities may intersect in a person's life and how this can relate to their experience of systems of power?
- What struck you in the women's accounts of reclaiming their whole identity and finding power and liberation that way?

You might want to direct people to this resource on [Power and Protection](#) for more on the targeting of activists in terms of gender and other aspects of their identities.

Step 2: Intersectionality Defined

Plenary: Share the introduction to this chapter as a handout or read out this shorter definition:

Intersectionality is a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. Every one of us has multiple and complex identities based on our gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, education, age, sexual orientation, ability, etc. Some parts of our identity may connect us to more dominant groups and the power that comes with that identity (for example white, male, middle or upper class, heterosexual). Other parts of our identity may mean we experience discrimination, less opportunity or security, and more risk and violence. Intersectionality describes how these identities interact and overlap to create different experiences of power, oppression, discrimination, and privilege. Intersectionality has become a way for people to name their distinct experiences and fight for visibility, justice, and inclusion.

In pairs: For a few minutes, discuss these questions.

- Can you think of instances where a lack of awareness about identity and privilege undermined trust and authentic collaboration or reinforced inequitable power dynamics
- And correspondingly, can you think of instances where awareness and a commitment to challenge such inequities have built solidarity and galvanized collective efforts?

Plenary: Invite people to share their insights from the activity. Open a discussion, drawing out key points. Note that, to understand and acknowledge openly the ways in which identity, privilege and power work:

- Is a critical step in social change.
- Enables us to see and address these power dynamics within ourselves and our organisations and movements.
- Gives us a better understanding of the workings of systemic power and how to challenge it.
- Provides a foundation on which to build a common commitment to liberation and the trust and solidarity that are needed.