The package includes six modules - each containing a video and facilitator material, plus six focus briefs and a User Guide.

FOCUS BRIEF

Intersectionality and marginalised groups

This focus brief provides guidance on integrating into frontline worker training the importance of understanding and addressing intersectional forms of discrimination, which are experienced by children and young persons with disabilities. The brief can also be used to design an introduction for frontline workers on using an intersectional approach, in order to reach marginalized and underrepresented groups of children and youth with disabilities. This brief is also linked to Video Module 1: Who we are.

Overview

Intersectionality is a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. It is about asking "who is left behind, why, and under what circumstances?" All people have intersecting identities made up of multiple factors such as disability, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, language, race, religion and location. People experience life differently based on these intersecting factors. They are professionals and students, adults or children, live in rural or urban places, speak different languages, have different faiths or no faith, and have different sexualities. People experience life differently based on these multiple identity factors.

Children and youth with disabilities also have intersecting identities. These intersecting factors affect how they access and use services, information and communication. For example, a girl who is deafblind will face multiple communication barriers in accessing education, and is more likely to experience discrimination and stigma from teachers and peers because of her gender and her disability. A child with autism from an ethnic minority community, who wants to join a youth literacy programme, may experience bullying and exclusion by her/his peers in a way that a child with autism from the ethnic majority would not. These different identities held by children and youth with disabilities mean that they may experience multiple and intersecting (i.e., where a person's different identities intersect) forms of discrimination.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) provides an intersectional framework on disability, gender and age through Article 6 (Women with disabilities) and Article 7 (Children with disabilities). The CRPD General Comment 6 on equality and non-discrimination further reinforces the importance of addressing discrimination against persons with disabilities, and specifically highlights that children with disabilities often experience multiple and intersectional discrimination.

Relevance to frontline workers

Intersectionality is important for addressing inequalities and challenging discrimination faced by all children and youth with disabilities. Many children and young people experience multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination because of their disability, age, gender, race, religion, class and other factors. If frontline workers are not thinking about who is most disadvantaged within disadvantaged groups, then these people will miss out on essential services.

Frontline workers play a crucial role in breaking down the multiple barriers and forms of discrimination faced by children and youth with disabilities, by challenging these structural forms of exclusion in programmes and services. For example, if a WASH programme is being implemented in schools, are the information and infrastructure supporting menstrual health and hygiene accessible to and inclusive of girls and young women with disabilities? Are the toilets accessible and in safe and secure locations, so women and girls with disabilities can access them without having to travel long distances?

Additionally, frontline workers play a role in data collection, and have the possibility to collect and use information on disability and other intersectional factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, economic status, refugee status, etc. This will support a more comprehensive understanding of a community, and the relevant services and programmes needed.

Taking an intersectional approach to disability inclusion in programme planning requires thinking through the diverse needs of the community at the onset of programming, rather than once programmes and activities are being implemented. This will also help policy makers, service providers and frontline workers to understand what is needed, in order to find better solutions for more accessible and inclusive programmes and services. In Malawi, HIV positive women experienced marginalization and exclusion because of their gender and HIV positive status. Through grassroots organization with HIV service providers, they shared their experiences and the kinds of intersectional discrimination they faced in accessing health services. This information allowed frontline workers to adapt services to better meet the needs of HIV positive women.

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UNICEF's approach

UNICEF advocates for intersectional approaches to discrimination and recognizes that there is no 'one size fits all' approach for integrating children into programmes and services. UNICEF's theory of change for the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 [PDF] shifts UNICEF towards a transformative, intersectional approach to inequality and discrimination. This approach strives to reflect and address the experiences of children and youth who are affected by multiple forms of discrimination, and to change systems and norms in a way that is grounded in gender equality, disability rights and anti-racism. This is what it takes to strike at the underlying, systemic causes of child rights violations and inequality; to break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage and deprivation; and to build inclusive, more cohesive societies that enable all children to thrive.

An intersectional lens is needed to reach those left furthest behind. It involves more inclusive, accessible, appropriate and responsive service delivery. It requires frontline workers to collaborate across sectors, leading to better use of resources and a more coordinated response. It also requires consulting and working with diverse persons with disabilities, including those from underrepresented groups, and across gender, ethnic, religious and other identities - to learn from them about intersecting and overlapping forms of discrimination that affect their participation in programmes and services.

Key messages

1. **What is intersectionality?** Intersectionality is a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. Intersectionality recognizes that social structures such as ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation and disability are interconnected, and that when they overlap, they can lead to discrimination and disadvantage. To effectively reduce inequality, there is a need to address the different societal structural barriers that people face because of their sex, gender or sexual orientation; their race or ethnicity; their disability; or the geographic location in which they live. Understanding how intersectionality works can help to address the multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination people face because of their multiple identities. Kimberly Crenshaw was the first scholar to discuss intersectionality and discrimination towards African American women, as described in the Columbia Law article, "Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later."

   Applying an intersectional lens to address the barriers in accessing and using community-based services and programmes can help to tackle inequality, not only by addressing these barriers, but also other overlapping forms of discrimination and disadvantage such as gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity and class. For example, ensuring that there are accessible toilets in the school specifically for girls, to ensure girls with disabilities can manage their menstruation and feel safe when using WASH facilities. Or that any materials developed to raise community awareness on public health, or materials on sexual and reproductive health, include images that show the diversity of children with disabilities, as well as families and community members with disabilities - and that they are developed in accessible formats which everyone can understand.

2. **Who is missing, and why?** It is also important to understand that, among persons with disabilities, there are some groups that are more marginalized or underrepresented than others. As the disability community is not homogenous, children and youth with disabilities are a diverse group with different accessibility needs that face different levels of inclusion, exclusion and discrimination. In many contexts around the world, specific groups of persons with disabilities are less visible in the community, including among the disability movement itself, and so face higher rates of exclusion. These groups include, depending on the context, young persons with multiple disabilities, indigenous persons with disabilities, persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities, persons with deafblindness, persons with albinism, persons of short stature, and persons with autism. Among these groups, women and girls are often more discriminated against, as are LGBTQI+ persons with disabilities. The specific barriers and types of discrimination that these groups experience must be addressed by service providers.

3. **Use communication and messaging that is inclusive, relevant to, and respectful of, people with disabilities in all their diversity.** It is important to recognize and portray the perspectives and strengths of diverse children and youth with disabilities. Messaging should also avoid and challenge negative stereotypes, and make sure that people experiencing discrimination are not perceived as victims, or at fault for something that is systemic. For example, awareness-raising materials that portray women with disabilities as effective parents can help to challenge negative stereotypes about the capacity of women with disabilities.
4. **There is no 'one size fits all' solution.** Intersectionality is a way of thinking, reflecting and working; it is not a complex or technical answer to a problem. It is about remembering that lives are not defined by one single issue alone, and that it is crucial to learn more about the many different ways that people experience discrimination, and barriers to accessing the services and programmes they need. This will look different depending on the context and the different ways that attitudes around disability, gender, age, race and other factors show up in that social setting.
5. **Consult with diverse persons with disabilities** to learn more about the kinds of intersectional discrimination they experience, as well as strategies to reduce barriers, stigma and exclusion in programming and services. Consider meeting with organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) that represent diverse disability constituencies, including marginalized and underrepresented groups (such as persons with deafblindness, women and girls with disabilities, persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities persons with albinism, etc.).

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