

Title: Intersecting Inequalities and Prospects for Community Development

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More details/abstract:

This Special Issue of the *Community Development Journal* explores how the concepts of intersectionality and intersecting inequalities can contribute to inclusive community development research and practice, particularly in contexts of acute marginalization. The motivation for our focus follows insight from the Participate research initiative, which showed that marginalization is perpetuated when development interventions do not address the consequences of intersecting inequalities (Howard et al. 2017). The Sustainable Development Goals' call to 'leave no one behind' is unlikely to be realized unless researchers, practitioners, community-based organizations and social movements develop conceptual and methodological approaches for surfacing the diverse perspectives and needs of the most stigmatized, vulnerable and excluded groups, and then incorporate this complex knowledge into appropriate action. This issue includes articles based in our recent collaborations with Participate partners in five countries, which explore how an intersectional lens was applied both to understand how inequalities are differentially experienced and perpetuated and to evolve inclusive methodologies for supporting grassroots groups, in extremely inequitable contexts, to take collective action and seek accountability. This compilation was enriched by an open call, which brought in additional perspectives on applying intersectionality to community development in the Global North and South.

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Intersecting inequalities and prospects for Community Development

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Editorial Introduction

This special issue of the Community Development Journal (CDJ) explores how the concepts of *intersectionality*, and *intersecting inequalities* can contribute to inclusive community development research and practice; particularly in contexts of acute marginalisation. The motivation for our focus follows insight from the *Participate* research initiative, which showed that marginalisation is perpetuated when development interventions do not address the consequences of intersecting inequalities (Howard et al 2017). The Sustainable Development Goals' call to 'leave no one behind' is unlikely to be realised unless researchers, practitioners, community-based organisations and social movements develop conceptual and methodological approaches for surfacing the diverse perspectives and needs of the most stigmatised, vulnerable and excluded groups; and then incorporate this complex knowledge into appropriate action. This issue includes articles based in our recent collaborations with *Participate* partners in five countries, which explore how an intersectional lens was applied both to understand how inequalities are differentially experienced and perpetuated, and to evolve inclusive methodologies for supporting grassroots groups, in extremely inequitable contexts, to take collective action and seek accountability. This compilation was enriched by an open call, which brought in additional perspectives on applying intersectionality to community development in the Global North and South.

The experiences and debates presented here show how intersectionality theories can be applied practically, and this informs a nuanced, iterative and inclusive approach to community development. While each author speaks from a particular contextual perspective – including Egypt, Uganda, India, South Africa, Ghana, Scotland, USA, Hong Kong and Pakistan - some key ideas and themes run through all the articles. *Intersectionality* provides the conceptual lens for understanding the complex ways that different aspects of identity interact to shape life experiences (Crenshaw 1989), particularly the socially constructed identities that people navigate, such as race, class, caste, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, and age (Collins 2015). The articles consider how socially constructed identities are differently experienced within excluded groups, but also how they are compounded by *intersecting inequalities*, which are additional layers of disadvantage from, for example, economic, political and spatial factors (Kabeer 2016). The authors (as researchers/practitioners) are concerned both with applying these concepts analytically to sharpen our political awareness, but especially to strengthen our practices of inclusion, which is a key contribution to critical praxis in community development. Despite the wide-ranging content and diverse geographical settings, there are overlaps, complementarity and mutual exchange across the articles. Before introducing each article we next summarise the common themes:

First, several authors challenge the tendency to homogenise marginalised communities, which happens through generalised language, for example, with reference to 'the LGBTQI community', or in development discourse about 'the poorest of the poor' or the 'furthest behind'. If we frame

communities as homogenous we neglect within-group inequalities, and as a result our work can perpetuate marginalisation by overlooking or silencing some people (see Kumar; Bharadwaj et al.). There is a danger of becoming complicit with exclusionary or punitive governmental discourses, when we frame 'community development' without taking into account the drivers of exclusion. Intersectionality requires us to consider whose involvement and perspectives we privilege in community organising and mobilisation. A theme running through this special issue is the complexity of community, and the need for careful, reflexive and iterative navigation to support inclusive community emergence (see Wheeler et al; Shaw et al; Lopez Franco et al).

Second, authors identify critical-awareness of positionality and power as central to working with marginalised groups. This applies to our positioning as researchers as much as the dynamics within the groups we study or work with. Without reflexivity about our own perspectives and biases, training and relative privilege, we may construct research that maintains intersectional blindness (see Leach & Cricklow, Wheeler et al; Sawas et al). Several contributors used an intersectional lens to re-analyse research, and produce more nuanced analysis by highlighting important missing aspects of intersecting social identities (Hung et al; Leach & Cricklow); or to analyse how research on basic infrastructure and service provision had uncovered situated forms of social discrimination (Sawas et al).

Third, we note the importance of innovative methodologies for understanding intersecting inequalities, and successfully navigating the tension between recognising differences and finding common ground in community development practice and research. The iterative cycles of Participatory action research (PAR) enable the progressive combination and layering of exploratory action and reflective practice, needed to acknowledge and navigating difference while building solidarity (Wheeler et al; Lopez Franco et al; Shaw et al; Black et al.). Storytelling and visual methodologies, and autoethnography, can counter damaging mainstream narratives, by creating space for counter-narratives to be constructed, which incorporate intersecting experiences and identities across difference (Leach & Cricklow; Wheeler et al.). There is also important learning about the limitations and inherent dilemmas: reflective intersectional PAR showed that sometimes, in practice, consensus is not possible when working across conflicting and adversarial ideological politics, such as around caste and 'traditional' or criminalised livelihoods in India (Dheeraj et al.).

Fourth, there are unavoidable tensions between spatial, place-based and other identities (e.g. cultural, gender), which play out as neoliberalism and globalisation shape realities in context. These tensions manifested palpably in the relocation of pavement dwellers, and policies towards Denotified and Nomadic Tribes, in India (Wheeler et al; Bharadwaj et al.); in women's struggles in Ghana who faced privatisation of the natural collective resource they rely on (Lopez Franco et al.); and in co-production of services in disadvantaged urban settings where citizens confront multiple forms of infrastructural violence (Sawas et al.). Austerity and competition for funding drive the lack of solidarity and collaboration between organisations promoting identity-based equalities and those addressing class-based inequalities in the UK, and this undermines their efforts for social justice (Christoffersen).

Finally, we highlight the contribution of an intersectional or intersecting inequalities approach to building more accountable policy engagement in inequitable contexts. An 'inclusive reflex' (Shaw et al) must be maintained both while building capacities for collective action within and across groups, and also while navigating the challenges when marginalised groups mobilise to engage with decision-makers to seek justice. Marginalised groups can act to foster accountable relations through connecting with duty-bearers, but other influential actors may manipulate and exploit differences within groups, despite community workers' and facilitators' best efforts to support collectivity. Moreover, challenging the institutional discrimination and systemic injustices that marginalised groups experience, produces constraints and risks which may be overwhelming. For example, challenging duty-bearers' neglect, corruption and violence in the context of a South African township, (Black et al); or publicly speaking out against stigma towards people living with HIV/AIDS in Egypt (Shaw et al.).

In all accounts, we note the importance of grounding intersectionality in context, history and experience, in order to be wary of its absorption into mainstream discourses which co-opt or dilute its power to challenge structural injustices (Salem 2018). Across the articles, a clear message resonates: that a critical intersectionality or intersecting inequalities approach to research and practice, which enables hidden and invisible issues, interests and differences within the 'community' to be heard, critically examined and addressed, can enhance the transformative potential of community development.

In the first article in this special issue, Shaw, Howard and Lopez Franco consider intersecting inequalities as a way of informing inclusive practices to build collective action, through action research processes with highly marginalised groups in Egypt and Uganda. The PAR processes in each setting uncovered differences which created tensions, but the authors highlight some key practical aspects of the iterative group work which enabled negotiation and re-framing of discriminatory social norms, as the foundation for community activism towards accountability; as well as the barriers to this in some contexts.

Black, Liedeman and Ryklief describe the use of hand-mapping to understand how intersecting inequalities effect community safety in Cape Town. The hand-mapping process increased awareness of personal dignity and citizen rights within the group, but escalating contextual violence hampered the possibilities of people enacting agency together. This case highlights the challenges in overcoming social, spatial and economic inequalities for groups facing multiple exclusions.

Wheeler, Shaw and Howard examine innovative methodologies for engagement across intersecting inequalities, and for navigating the practice tension between recognising difference and building capacities for solidarity and collective action (also noted by Bharadwaj et al and Shaw et al). They identify approaches that can give space to different experiences, and iteratively build solidarity by challenging stigmatising narratives, thus underpinning a more difference-aware politics and practice of inclusion.

Bharadwaj, Dheeraj and Narayanan discuss challenges of building collective identity with De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribal communities in India. This case demonstrates the compounding layers of deprivation created by intersecting inequalities, and how innovative Ground Level Panels surfaced divisions between different group ideologies, and critical questions about the available livelihood 'choices', as well as illustrating how the contradictory positions within the DNT 'community' undermined a common political stance.

Sawas, Castán Broto, Anwar and Rehman draw attention to project processes in the context of marginality. They use an intersectional lens to analyse the coproduction of safety in urban spaces in Pakistan, in a context of environmental violence. Their contribution identifies the exclusion of women and young refugee men, and highlights the importance of considering whose uses are prioritised in research design, and the risk of deepening and reinforcing urban inequalities despite efforts to engage multiple stakeholders.

Hung, Fung, and Lau reanalyse a women's empowerment project in Hong Kong using an intersectional lens, and thus reveal differences according to intersections of gender, race and class amongst the participants. They observe that rigorous intersectional analysis is rare in the CD field in Hong Kong, and argue that a lack of intersectional insight diminishes the effectiveness of community interventions.

Leach and Crichlow combine intersectionality and Critical Race theories to highlight the need for researchers to recognise their own biases to avoid reinforcing exclusionary structures through their research methodologies. Considering non-profit strategies operating in communities of colour in the United States, they discuss how research processes and methodological tools can guide more inclusive non-profit community development practice and scholarship.

Christoffersen identifies barriers to operationalising intersectionality in third-sector community development practice; 'equalities' (identity) and 'inequalities' (class) organisations struggle to find solidarities, and equalities organisations face barriers to influencing the state due to funding attrition and the difficulty of building alliances. She suggests that intersectionality can help us to rethink the CD field, putting complex intersecting factors at the centre.

Kumar problematises the idea of identity-based community used in both popular and legal discourses, in the context of LGBTI in India. These discourses privilege certain constituencies, and Kumar proposes that a 'critical intersectionality' lens can enable a more inclusive and substantive justice; by recognising different interests and experiences within the wider group, and the historical structures and processes which underpin these power dynamics.

Finally, Lopez Franco, Quarmyne, Larweh, Boham, Elyanu and Howard reflect on the use of community radio within participatory engagement processes, through which they articulate the right to communicate as fundamental for inclusion and accountability. They illustrate the progressive use of community radio to challenge discriminatory social norms, through the interweaving of radio broadcasting with participatory performing arts such as poetry, dance, songs, and drama. This

democratised knowledge and communications processes; through amplifying local voices (in their own languages) and opening spaces for dialogue with duty-bearers.

Overall, this special issue addresses a gap in knowledge about how intersectional theories can be applied not only as an analytical tool, but as a practical approach to guide social justice work with marginalised groups. The combined articles achieve this through demonstrating a range of methodologies for surfacing diverse experiences of intersecting inequalities, and navigating the emergent practice tensions connected with addressing them. This contributes to a more inclusive community development praxis.

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