



Guidance note

Towards more inclusive practices: A Disability, Gender and Age Intersectional Resource

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Created in 1994, the F3E is a learning network of actors involved in solidarity and international cooperation, serving actions that have an impact that brings about social change. It is a multi-stakeholder group composed by more than 85 French member organisations (NGOs, local authorities, networks, foundations, etc.), including Humanity & Inclusion (HI), leading actions in development aid, advocacy and education for global citizenship. Its mission is to strengthen their skills and to encourage the improvement of practices. F3E also contributes to the agility of organisations in a complex and changing environment. To do this, it supports and trains professionals and organisations. It co-constructs and disseminates methodological resources and tools and organises spaces for exchange and experimentation. F3E supported HI in the process of this study and co-financed it.

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Background and methodology

Humanity & Inclusion (HI) is an independent charity working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster, which works, 'tirelessly alongside disabled and vulnerable people to help meet their basic needs, improve their living conditions and promote respect for their dignity and fundamental rights.'¹ HI wants to deepen its work on disability, gender and age, and in 2019 it launched the Disability, Gender and Age (DGA) Institutional Policy² and guidance document³ across the international federation.

This Intersectional Resource was developed through an iterative process to draw out as much as possible from existing HI staff learning and practice. The methodology used by the consultants included: a document review of relevant HI documents and wider literature on intersectionality approaches; Key Informant Interviews (KIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted by Skype or face-to-face with staff from headquarters in Lyon and from Country Offices to understand the opportunities and barriers to greater integration of gender, age and disability into inclusion programming; a 1.5 day Co-creation Workshop in July 2019 with staff in Lyon to validate findings from the document review and KIs and to identify key priorities for staff in terms of the resource itself. To give space for strategic reflection, additional Key Informant Interviews and an extra planning session with the Steering Committee were added. This resource document supported a four-day workshop that took place in Cambodia in December 2019, bringing together 35 HI staff from 15 countries.

How to use this document

This Disability, Gender and Age Resource aims to support staff to better understand intersectionality.

An intersectional approach reminds us of the need to look deeper at the way multiple individual characteristics and societal factors intersect to compound discrimination in any given context.

In Section A, we introduce the concept of intersectionality, its use as a lens to understand vulnerability and the relevance of 'context'. Section A also introduces a few critical concepts: the fact that disability, gender and age are all social constructs, the centrality of power and the need to transform unequal power relations.

In Section B, we provide some guidance on inclusion and bias; the need to consider the wider environment; how to work with social norms; how to understand power differently; and empowerment and participation processes.

¹ From [HI's website](#) - accessed 18 July 2019

² [Humanity & Inclusion's Policy on Disability, Gender and Age](#), Operations Division, 2018 - accessed 18 July 2019

³ Humanity & Inclusion '[How to deliver on inclusion to leave no one behind: An implementing guideline of the Humanity & Inclusion Policy on Disability, Gender and Age](#),' Operations Division, 2019

Some of you may already be experienced practitioners in these areas, but for those of you that are not, we would suggest further discussions with your teams and project partners to think about the implications of these concepts in your day to day work.

Adopting an intersectional approach should be seen as an organisational change process – one that is not politically neutral. As HI increasingly promotes an intersectional approach, with a particular focus on the characteristics of disability, gender and age, it must have a clear communicated position on why it is promoting greater equality, as this will shape the factors and methodology it prioritises in any analysis process. Having a clear and well communicated organisational position and taking an organisation-wide systematic approach is required (see more in [Appendix 1](#)).

SECTION A: Principles & benchmarks

1. An intersectional approach – A definition

An intersectional approach recognises that it is a combination of multiple individual characteristics and environmental (or societal) factors which intersect to shape a person's:

- Experience
- Roles and responsibilities
- Access to and control over resources including basic services for example health, education
- Experience of power and the ways they may exercise power⁴
- Capacity to respond to different barriers and opportunities.

Using an intersectional approach, for example, recognises that a girl's exclusion from education is caused by multiple intersecting, compounding factors. These can include: the individual characteristics of her sex, age, disability status, nationality, language; her household-location and its composition; the socio economic status of her family and environmental factors, for example the accessibility of the school buildings; the availability of safe and appropriate toilet facilities; attitudes of her parents and caregivers towards her right to education; social attitudes which discriminate against the rights of girls to education and institutional capacity.

Individual and environmental factors also intersect to impact on the capacity⁵ an individual or group has to respond to a social vulnerability.

HI staff need to 'unpack' these different intersecting elements to design **effective project interventions that support project beneficiaries to improve their lives.**

HI has identified nine key factors which intersect to understanding different people's experiences, capacities, needs and vulnerabilities: disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, geographical location, ethnic origin, religion and political opinion.

Of these nine factors, **HI has decided to consider systematically Disability, Gender and Age.**

In addition to prioritising how Disability, Gender and Age intersect to create vulnerability, Programme Staff should prioritise other factors dependent upon on i) the context and ii) the goal of the intervention.

⁴ 'Power' has a fundamental role in how our societies work. Understanding power is critical if we are to understand how power can maintain and reinforce inequality, vulnerability and exclusion. See Section B4.

⁵ Capacity can refer to 'human capacity' knowledge, skills, education, 'social capacity' networks, relationships, family connections, other forms of social status, 'resource capacity' access to land, savings, remittances, micro-credit.



Intersectionality is not about extending HI's mandate, for example, supporting projects which now prioritise 'women' or 'children'.

Intersectionality is a lens to help unpack how individual characteristics intersect with environmental factors; to shape the experience, needs and capacities of our beneficiaries and to design projects with this knowledge and understanding.

2. Intersectionality – A lens for understanding 'vulnerability'

In both humanitarian and development contexts, HI projects aim to focus on the 'most vulnerable', including people and groups discriminated against or those at high risk of discrimination. But trying to identify which people are 'the most vulnerable' and why, and designing appropriate project responses, can be challenging.

At a project level, a person or group's vulnerability is sometimes assessed against an outcome; for example, it is measured against a person's ability to access education. Or in some of HI's current tools, needs are assessed and framed through individual or group characteristics, e.g. 'people with disabilities', or 'single-headed households'.⁶

The challenge with a measurement which assesses a person's vulnerability against access to a service is that it may not offer any insights into the factors creating barriers or advantages. This may mean an over-reliance upon assumptions when we design projects. For example, we may assume that physical obstacles preventing a disabled-child from being able to access a school-building is the main obstacle preventing the child attending school, rather than, it maybe being the quality of education provided. This can create a risk that a project responds to a false 'problem' or to a factor which may not be the main barrier limiting the impact of a project.



Vulnerability = Individual X Environmental Factors⁷

Vulnerability refers to the characteristics and circumstances which make an individual, group or community susceptible to a threat. It results from the interaction of multiple personal characteristics with factors relating to the environment. Environmental factors are contextual. Vulnerability is not fixed or absolute and must always be considered in relation to specific problems or threats.

Individual factors: Age, gender, marital status, impairment, ethnicity, legal status, displacement, psychosocial status.

Environmental factors: Physical access, transportation, social norms, legislation, institutional capacity.

⁶ For example HI's *Rapid Multi-Sectorial Assessment Tools*

⁷ Adapted from: Access to protection outreach for people most at risk, Inclusion Matters Series, Issue 1, September 2016, Handicap International

Framing vulnerability through group-identity e.g. 'people with disabilities' also poses problems. It presumes 'groups' are homogenous (or all the same). It risks presuming there is a typical vulnerable disabled person or woman, when there is not a 'typical vulnerable woman'.

Defining a group as vulnerable also creates a tendency to perceive this group as passive beneficiaries and may reinforce negative stereotypes. For example, always seeing women as vulnerable overlooks their capacity and agency. Capacity and agency are often less visible to those from outside a society or community, especially in emergency settings.⁸

It also presumes a group is static or fixed. HI works in many of the most fragile environments in the world. These contexts are highly fluid where roles and responsibilities, privileges and vulnerabilities will be changing. Despite being violent and unstable, conflict affected contexts can be incubating environments for positive change. Conflict settings are often marked by high levels of displacement; traditional structures may no longer be functioning; some men who may have been in roles of leadership may be absent; spaces may open up in which traditionally excluded groups may enter; and women's and young people's roles can often change.⁹ For example, in 2017, in response to a survey of crisis-affected communities in Kachin State in Myanmar, female youth respondents reported that as a result of the recent crisis, men have been recruited into armed groups and other men have been forced to migrate. They described this situation as creating new opportunities for them to engage politically, in roles and spaces previously occupied by men.¹⁰

Framing vulnerability through group-identify can also lead to comparisons to the other homogenous group. For example, persons with disabilities compared to persons without disabilities; women to men; youth to elders; and victims to perpetrators of violence. This risks that all those contained within the more privileged group e.g. men (in the case of comparisons between women and men) are perceived as not vulnerable, when in fact, if you consider different individual factors and environmental factors, some men may be more vulnerable than some women.

Through HI's programme practice, especially in the field of disability; HI and its staff, particularly those working closely with beneficiaries, recognise that the causes of vulnerability and exclusion are highly complex, multiple, over-lapping and dynamic.

Adopting an intersectional lens, supports project staff to move beyond assumptions and even unconscious bias about pre-determined 'vulnerable groups', for example 'women' or 'disabled persons'; to unpack what makes an individual, group or community vulnerable to 'the problem' the project aims to address.

⁸ Thinking about power differently (see section x) can be a useful tool to reveal different forms of power and agency, alongside capacity assessments; which may be less visible to staff.

⁹ It is important to note that these 'spaces' which excluded groups may enter can equally snap back shut. For example, in the absence of men, women may take on different roles for example as community leaders; but these spaces can snap back shut when men return due to unchanged patriarchal norms and traditional generational relationships of 'power over'.

¹⁰ Marjoke Oosterom, Ross Wignall, Sarah Wilson, *Youth Action in Fragile Settings*, Institute of Development Studies (IDS, April 2017). The Report was commissioned by Plan International UK and included primary research carried out between October 2016 and January 2017 in Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Myanmar.

An intersectional approach recognises that it is a combination of multiple individual characteristics and factors relating to the environment (or society), which come together to shape a person's vulnerability as outlined in the case study below.



Warda, an 85 year old woman and Syrian refugee living in Lebanon¹¹

For older people affected by humanitarian crises, the prospects are far graver when the temperature drops. There are no extra warm clothes to put on, no way to turn up the heating. "I miss my health and mobility," Warda told us. In a country where humanitarian need far outweighs the resources of aid agencies to respond, she remains extremely vulnerable even when the weather warms; far from home and with no immediate prospect of returning.

Warda is vulnerable not only because she is a Syrian refugee caught up in a humanitarian crisis, in which the rights of those affected, including refugees, are often denied. Nor simply because older people are often neglected and forgotten in emergencies, conflict and war. Nor because she has a disability and she cannot afford the surgery she would need to be able to walk again.

Warda, as a woman, an older woman, with a disability, and as a refugee, faces numerous threats and challenges; including the increased threat of violence, abuse and neglect. During emergencies, older women like Warda become more vulnerable to violence, abuse and neglect, and often have their basic human rights denied.

3. Why the 'context' and 'goal' of the Intervention (or project) matters

As described in Section 1, HI has identified nine key factors to understanding different people's experiences, capacities, needs and vulnerabilities. Of these nine factors, HI has decided to consider systematically disability, gender and age. **In addition to prioritising how Disability, Gender and Age intersect to create vulnerability, Programme Staff should also prioritise other factors dependent upon on i) the context and ii) the goal of the intervention.**

As an intersectional approach recognises that it is the interaction of individual characteristics with environmental (or societal) factors, understanding the context (at that present moment) and prioritising factors linked to context is very important because:

- Disability, gender and age are each social constructs (see [Section 4.1](#)). The privileges and disadvantages linked to disability, gender and age are context and time specific.
- Focussing on only disability, gender and age may risk overlooking other identity-based or structural systems which shape a person or groups' privileges and disadvantages.

¹¹ Adapted from a HelpAge International case study - <https://www.helpage.org/blogs/madeleine-mcgivern-31050/violence-and-discrimination-against-older-women-is-compounded-in-emergencies-1066/>

For example, in the case of HI's work in Sinjar and Hawija in Iraq, focussing only on how disability, gender and age intersect to create exclusion from access to services would overlook the other additional priority factors of ethnic, tribal and faith identity. Doing so could actually **risk reinforcing inequality and doing-harm**. (See case study below).

Vulnerability is not fixed, it relates to a specific 'problem' or 'threat', e.g. why an older person cannot access health-care may be different to why s/he cannot access economic livelihood opportunities.

When considering gender, disability and age, it is not about understanding all the multiple vulnerabilities a disabled girl, for example, may experience. It's about unpacking how individual characteristics **intersect** with environmental (or societal) factors to make a person 'vulnerable' to the 'problem' or 'risk' the project is aiming to address.

So, for example, in the case of a disabled girl excluded from primary education, applying an intersectional lens may reveal that although physical barriers make it difficult for her to access the school building, it is discriminatory attitudes discouraging the education of girls and prejudiced attitudes about disability which result in stigmatisation of both the disabled girl and her family, which are the main factors which have stopped her parents from enrolling her in education.

Projects should design interventions which address the priority factors which make an individual, group or community most vulnerable to the specific problem the project aims to address.



Building Peaceful Futures – A case-study from Iraq

In Iraq, HI is part of a consortium delivering an Australian government funded project, *Building Peaceful Futures*, aimed at supporting the return and reintegration of returnees, strengthening community resilience and social cohesion through inclusive services. Part of HI's role is to lead on Inclusion Mainstreaming.

At the beginning of the project a number of comprehensive needs assessments were supported for each of the project components. This included an Inclusion Analysis aimed at trying to better understand how disability, gender, age and diversity in the two project locations (Sinjar and Hawija) impact on access to services, decision-making structures and the realisation of basic human rights.

Tools for the Inclusion Analysis were adapted from consortium members existing tools, drawing on gender analysis and barrier to services assessments tools for people with disabilities. However, the adapted tool was context-blind, including to conflict sensitivity, despite the project goal of supporting social cohesion. By not prioritising contextual factors, the project risked overlooking other characteristics, namely faith, ethnic or tribal identity affiliation (actual or perceived), which intersect with gender, disability and age to create barriers to services, drive exclusion and discrimination.

Originally, the quality of the sampling criteria for the needs assessment and the recruitment of enumerators were assessed through the lens of disability, gender and age. By identifying that ethnic, tribal and faith identity were additional priority factors (alongside disability, gender and age), the criteria for hiring enumerators was broadened; which directly enabled access to 'difficult to reach' communities, who would have not been possible to consult, based on the original characteristics of the enumerators..

In a context where identity politics has played a critical role in determining which communities are privileged (can assess services, have political representation etc.) and which have experienced discrimination and been subjected to violence and other human rights violations; being blind to the contextual factors could have resulted in the services that are linked to the project being less favourably accessible by some ethnic and faith groups

By not taking contextual factors into account, there is a risk of reinforcing discrimination, deepening societal cleavages, and even potentially creating an environment that could lead to future violent conflict.

4. The added-value of disability | gender | age to an intersectional model

While HI's Policy pays specific attention to nine factors which intersect to create multiple vulnerabilities and exclusion, HI prioritises disability, gender and age (DGA) as the key factors to understanding different people's capacities, needs, and exposure to risks in any context or crisis.¹² Although in practice these three factors are often seen in **silos rather than as intersecting characteristics**.¹³

This section aims to explain how DGA 'glasses' support HI staff to:

- **Use their understanding of disability** (as the interaction of personal factors intersecting with environmental factors) **to understand intersectionality**
- Use their knowledge of disability as a **social construct** as a building block to understanding gender and age
- Understand gender (disability and age) as **systems of power – and the need to transform unequal power relations to support individuals and groups to improve their lives**
- **Understand the importance of addressing discriminatory social norms.**

¹² [DGA Policy](#), page 4.

¹³ This is based on feedback from the KIIs, FGDs and document review.

4.1 Disability, gender and age as social constructs - and the need to address personal and environmental factors in project design

An intersectional approach recognises that it is a combination of multiple individual characteristics and factors relating to the environment (or society) which intersect to shape a person's vulnerability.

Understanding the importance of how different characteristics and factors intersect and impact on a person is not new to HI project staff. It is central to both how HI understands disability and HI's Person Centred Approach.¹⁴

HI recognises it is not a person's impairment alone that shapes a person's experience or impacts on their ability to fully realise their rights. But rather it is the interaction between personal factors, social and environmental factors.¹⁵

In the way that HI understands disability as a social construct – this understanding should also be applied to age and gender.

4.1.1 Disability as a social construct

HI recognises it is not a person's impairment alone that shapes a person's experience or impacts on their ability to fully realise their rights. But rather it is the interaction between personal factors, impairment, employment status, family's socio-economic status, education background and social and environmental factors, attitudes and stigma, the presence or absence of services and institutional frameworks (which can protect and promote the rights of people with disabilities.)¹⁶ As a consequence, HI recognises that disability is not a fixed status but disability is a created social construct.

4.1.2 Age as a social construct

Although age itself is a biological process and there are distinct and measureable biological differences that impact on an individual's capacity, the expected attributes, roles and responsibilities expected for 'teenagers' or 'older-persons' are also socially constructed. A child, teenager, adult or an older person's experience and the level of rights an individual will enjoy, vary greatly between societies and are shaped by the interaction of multiple factors; which include biological differences, but which are also determined by other factors from social norms to policies and laws.

For example, statutory or customary law may prohibit a person under a specific age from standing for political office. This barrier to participation is arbitrary; it is not determined by capacity but rather is shaped by socially constructed norms and expectations.

¹⁴ [Person Centred Approaches](#), (Person Centred Approaches) Handicap International, Technical Resource Division, April 2014, (Sd /WA|08), Consultant Author S. Lorenzkowski, page 7

¹⁵ Adapted from *Person Centred Approaches*, pages 7, 9, 12-13.

¹⁶ Adapted from *Person Centred Approaches*, pages 7, 9, 12-13.

4.1.3 Gender a social construct

Gender refers to the socially constructed expectations, roles, behaviours, attributes which are constructed for men and women by a given society and which each given society considers most appropriate and 'valued' for men and women. These constructs are learnt from families and friends in the home and reinforced at school, the community, workplace as well as by the media, religion and the government. They shape how people define themselves and how they are defined by others. For example, how women and men are expected to act, speak, dress and conduct themselves based upon our assigned sex (e.g. in patriarchal societies girls and women are generally expected to dress in typically feminine ways and be polite, accommodating, nurturing, emotional, subservient; men and boys are generally expected to be strong, aggressive, fearless and independent). Expectations around gender roles, attitudes and behaviour vary within and between societies and change over time (both positively and negatively).



Key Learning Points

Like disability, gender and age are social constructs.

To address discrimination and inequality based on disability, gender or age, we need to understand and respond to individual characteristics **and** 'societal' factors.

Building-up from the understanding that disability, gender and age are all social constructs with individual characteristics and environmental factors intersecting to shape a person's experiences, capacities, needs and vulnerabilities, should support staff to understand why it is necessary in projects to design interventions which address both **personal factors** and **environmental (societal) factors** if HI's projects are to be DGA-responsive (minimum standard) or DGA-transformative. See more guidance on designing DGA sensitive and responsive projects in [Appendix 2](#).

4.2 Gender, disability and age as systems of power – Need for transformation of power relations

Gender is also understood as a **system of power** - it's about the unequal power relations that exist between women and men, girls and boys, which results in women and girls being systematically disadvantaged across all spheres of their lives.¹⁷ The ways in which many men hold privilege and therefore have access to power is evident in the fact that women and girls are more likely to experience violence, workplace harassment and wage discrimination as major barriers to their quality of life. Unequal power relations between women and men, and girls and boys is one of the most persistent structures in the distribution of power in most societies, both currently and historically. They exist at all levels, from the individual, household, community and societal levels.

¹⁷ See for example, Cornwall, A. '[Women's Empowerment: What Works?](#)' in Journal of International Development, 28, 342–359 (2016)

See below an adapted model on the different levels that require consideration when working towards gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment:¹⁸

- **Individual Level:** Unequal power relations affect women's and girls' individual self-confidence, self-esteem, knowledge or self-awareness.
- **Household Level:** Power relationships within the family shape, often negatively affect women and girls in relation to autonomy over sexual relations and marriage; roles and responsibilities within the household; access to and control over household resources and budgets. This can include how household incomes are spent and invested, from decisions to prioritise the education of boy without disabilities, to control over and access to other resources; including technology like mobile telephones, increasingly important for information.
- **Community Level:** Gender norms, values and practices affect the roles and decision-making power of girls and women at community level.
- **Societal Level:** Formal and informal institutions through which women and men, girls and boys make decisions; establish leadership; organise and control political, economic, social, technological and environmental activities; laws (statutory and customary); policies; practices and budgets.

Gender **inequality** is '**produced, reinforced and reproduced**' across these different levels.

Gender constructs are learnt from families and friends in the home and reinforced at school, the community and the workplace; as well as by the media, religion and the government.

Formal and informal structures, through which women and men, boys and girls, make decisions, organise social, economic, political, technological and legal activities, are **built by the privileged for the privileged**. They have been designed by privileged elite men. They are controlled by privileged elite men and these structures favour elite men's experiences, skills, behaviour, ways of working and male-gender norms. They protect and reproduce elite male privilege; replicating, often silently and invisibly, gender inequality.

In HI approaches to disability, 'power' and the need to change 'power' relations is only implicit and is framed through the need to support the 'empowerment' of people with disability or disability rights organisations. Yet parallels could also be drawn that the exclusion and discrimination of people with disability is also produced, reinforced and reproduced, because society at all levels **privileges the experiences, skills, behaviour and norms of people without disability**. Similarly, in some societies the experiences, skills, behaviour and norms of elders may be privileged; creating, reinforcing and reproducing privilege for older generations (or vice versa) leading to the **discrimination of youths**.

¹⁸ Smee, S. '[What works to achieve gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment?](#)' An evidence paper to accompany the DFID PPA Gender Learning Group theory of change on gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, 2015

Unequal power relations (between people with and without disabilities, women and men or youth and elders) means **not everyone is at the same point**, at the individual, household, community or societal level; which affects an individual's ability to take advantage of the existing status-quo or of the change a project aims to support.

For individuals and groups to change their position in society, (to address a person or group's vulnerability to a 'problem' or 'risk'), imbalances of power need to be transformed and **power needs to change hands**. This **process is not neutral** and can create backlash. This can be achieved overtime by supporting the meaningful participation of excluded groups, and by directly supporting those experiencing inequality to gain more power at all levels.

4.3 Importance of working on social norms to realise transformation

Learning from work on advancing women's and girls' empowerment and gender equality as well as work on increasing people's health, has highlighted the **importance of working on social norms** in relation to behavioural change towards social transformation and justice.

A **social norm** is defined as: 'a social construct. It exists as a collectively shared belief about what others do (what is typical) and what is expected of what others do within the group (what is appropriate). Social norms are generally maintained by social approval and/or disapproval.'¹⁹

Gender norms are the standards and expectations to which women and men generally conform within a range that defines a particular society, culture and community at that point in time. They are very powerful ideas about how women and men should be and act. Internalised early in life, they can establish a life cycle of gender socialisation and stereotyping. Gender norms affect how we perceive ourselves and our potential, and how others view and treat us; both informally and formally, such as in the law. Failure to comply with gender norms can trigger strong social sanctions, such as ridiculing, ostracising or even violence; or less visible punishments, such as exclusion from employment opportunities or marriage. People also self-regulate their own behaviour in order to conform to what they think is expected of them by others. Discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes are harmful because they don't allow people to fully express themselves and their emotions. It's also a way of maintaining unequal power relations, systematically disadvantaging women and girls who have less power in relation to men and boys.

¹⁹ Heise, L. and Manji, K. '[Social Norms](#)' in GSDRC Applied Knowledge Services, January 2016



Some traditional Western examples of gender norms

Girls wear pink; boys wear blue.

Men should be strong and not show emotion.

Women should be caring and nurturing.

Men should do repairs at the house and be the one to work and make money while women are expected to take care of the housework and children.

A man should pay for the woman's meal when going out to dinner.

Evidence suggests that when norms are at play, shifting knowledge or individual attitudes is often not enough to shift behaviour. That is because norms are generally enforced through either positive or negative sanctions. People conform to group expectations out of the human need for social approval and belonging. If individuals depart from a norm, they frequently lose social approval and may be ostracised, gossiped about, or sanctioned in some other way.²⁰

²⁰ Ibid

SECTION B: Operational modalities

Section B provides models, ideas or lenses, in response to the concepts introduced in Section A, to be used in tandem.

Recognising that disability, gender and age are each social constructs, and each of us is a ‘product’ of our own social environments, Section [B1](#) promotes the need to consider our own **conscious and unconscious bias** in the project cycle. Given that inequality is produced, reinforced and reproduced across different levels in society, Section [B2](#) introduces ‘**the social ecological model**’ to support the design of interventions across different levels, to help realise change. Section [B3](#) **focuses on how to identify and work with norms** to sustain change.

To address a person or group’s vulnerability, imbalances of power need to be transformed. **Section [B4](#) explores power and how we can understand power differently.** By reflecting on power and how we engage with different power brokers in our projects, we can be sensitive to not reinforcing and reproducing unequal power relations. Thinking about power differently, can help to support programme staff to unveil the agency and capital of traditionally excluded groups; how traditionally excluded groups influence change and the spaces and pathways they use. These can be harnessed, strengthened and built upon in project design and implementation.

Sections [B5](#) and [B6](#) look at empowerment and participation – key intervention strategies HI uses to support changed power relations.

For additional guidance, we have added some questions to the table in HI’s Theory of Change which illustrates the intermediate changes necessary to address the barriers identified and specifies types of actions that HI proposes to implement, with an adaptation for each setting (see [Appendix 3](#)).

B1. Inclusion and bias

Disability, gender and age are all social constructs, therefore before you even start designing a project it is essential you reflect on your own **conscious and unconscious bias and assumptions**.

Being **conscious of our own (sometimes discriminatory) views** is a critical first step. Even experienced project staff may make assumptions about the context, social dynamics, different groups based on sex, age, physical or mental ability. Ensuring that we ourselves do not further marginalise groups that we aim to serve through our work is vital and should also be done at an organisational level. Without this deliberate attempt to examine our own views and to challenge them where necessary, we may be reinforcing discriminatory norms and unequal power relations.

It goes without saying that the views of your partner organisations, who may have been working with communities for a lot longer and have built up trust and rapport with those communities, are critical here. But bear in mind that they will also come with their own views and perceptions.

Subsequently, understanding that it is the **lived experiences of groups directly affected by the problem** we are trying to solve that know best what their problems and the solutions to this are. So **being guided by their own experiences is critical**.

An intersectional approach helps us to **suspend our assumptions about any given population group**, be they female, male; whether they define themselves as disabled; and whatever age they are.

Without a DGA approach we don't have the full picture. We may miss some of the opportunities and barriers that project participants are facing, and may miss change pathways.

B2. The wider environment

HI's DGA Policy recognises that discriminatory norms, attitudes, behaviours to do with disability, gender and age, **are socially constructed**; and that this **affects how individuals and groups access services; participate in decision-making and realise their rights**. An intersectional approach recognises that it is a combination of **multiple** individual characteristics and environmental (or societal) factors which intersect to **compound the discrimination** individuals and groups face and prevent them from realising their rights.

The social ecological framework²¹ is a useful model to remind us that the wider environment has **four different levels** that we need to consider **when identifying entry points for project interventions**. We have adapted these levels to include:

- **Individual**
- Relationship (which we've adapted to call **family** to highlight the importance of considering inter-relations *within* the household)
- **Community**
- **Society.**

All four levels in the wider environment need to be considered when designing projects as interactions within and between levels are equally important. It helps us understand that systems (such as government policies and laws, services, the market, social relations) are all **interrelated and interdependent**.

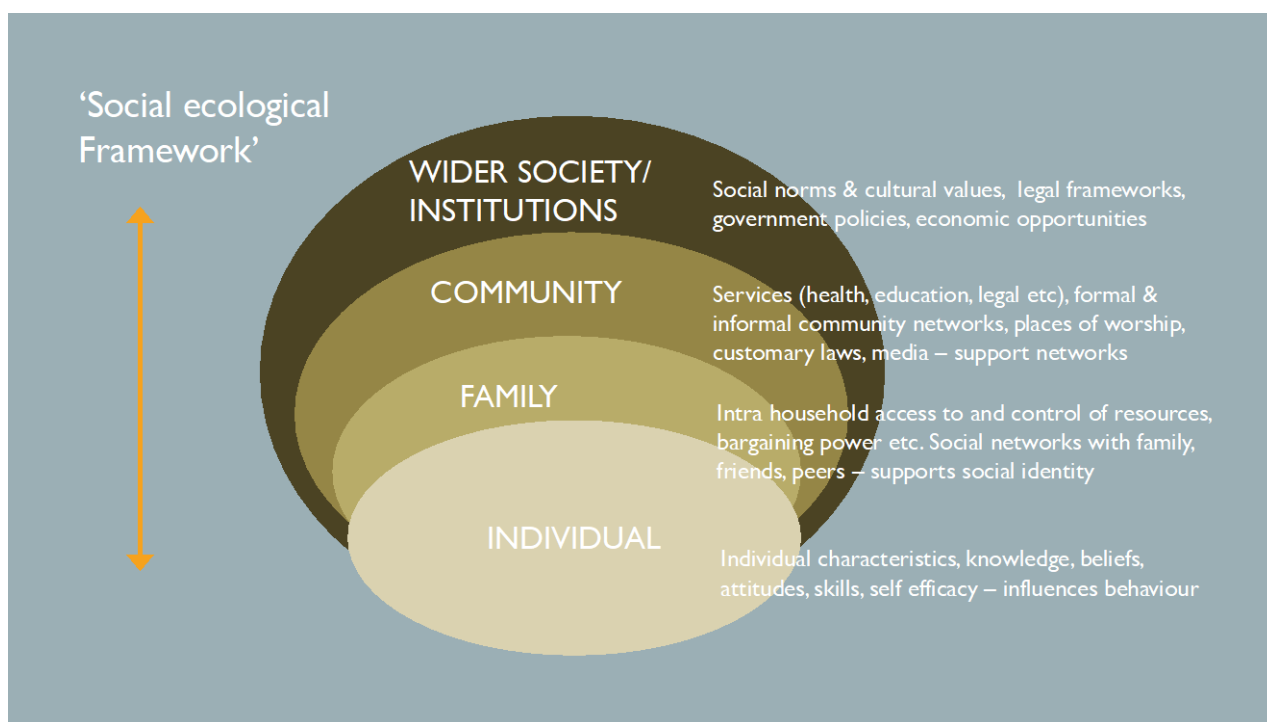
So, if you are trying to ensure inclusive education for adolescent girls, you would need to consider whether schools are physically accessible for girls; what domestic responsibilities may act as barriers to attendance; whether schools are safe to get to/from and be in; whether parental attitudes and societal norms around girls' education enable girls to attend and stay in school, particularly past puberty; whether teachers promote girls to maximise their schooling opportunities; what policies

²¹ The model has been used to examine violence and prevention strategies as well as wider health interventions. See, for example, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's simple diagram and explanation](#) (accessed 27 August 2019).

exist around, for example, pregnant girls and continuing education; what employment opportunities exist if girls complete their education.

The social ecological framework helps us understand that **no single factor** can explain why some people or groups are at higher risk of exclusion whilst others are protected from it. As such, most **projects need to be designed with multiple components targeted at different levels** to enable and sustain long term change.

The model has some alignment with HI's diagram of the myriad of stakeholders involved in education²² and the sphere of influence diagram from HI's Making it Work document.²³



B3. Working on social norms

Discriminatory norms, attitudes and behaviours occur at all levels of society, so it is **not enough to focus on norm change work just at individual level** (be they affected groups of service providers). Intersectional approaches help us to **understand prevailing discriminatory norms** in any given context in relation to the problem we are trying to address and how impacts individuals and groups.

So, it is important to understand the prevailing social norms in the context that you are working in and to be mindful that norms are dynamic – they are constantly evolving depending on the context. Especially in conflict settings, we often assume that **women and men have fixed roles and**

²² HI Policy Paper: '[Inclusive Education](#)' Technical Resources Division, July 2012

²³ HI Practical guide : '[Making it Work: Good practices for disability-inclusive development and humanitarian action](#)' Technical Resources Division, 2015

experiences (e.g. men are often seen only as combatants and women as only victims of violence). We need to think beyond women and girls, or disabled groups, or younger or older age groups, as not having agency; as we can think creatively about how to support the agency they do have. An **emergency may provide a ‘window of opportunity’ to positively change norms** because the ‘usual ways of doing things’ are rapidly changing. This can be a critical time to support changes. For example, after the Indian Ocean tsunami in southern India in 2005, marginalised women had access to and control of assets for the first time, through new homes being registered in joint ownership with their husband and by being given fishing nets to rent and make an income from.

A useful social norms framework reminds us of the need to: (1) identify the discriminatory social norm; (2) change social expectations around the norm; (3) publicise the change; (4) and reinforce the new norm.²⁴

Taking this into consideration, think about the following when you are designing projects:

- 1) What are the prevailing social norms relating to disability, gender and age that are relevant for the issue you are trying to address? How can you identify them?** Remember that social norms drive behaviour, so in order for a project to support behavioural change, you need to understand what behaviour the ‘norm’ is. Some of this may be written up in context analysis or situational reports, but often you may need to conduct formative research and talk directly to affected groups to understand norms – especially as these can vary from community to community and can be affected by a crisis. If you can’t do this, at least talk to civil society actors or organisations that represent grass roots communities to increase your understanding. It may be that this can’t be done when you are writing a proposal, so leave time (and budget) for this to be done at the project inception stage. You need to try and understand what exactly are the norms or shared beliefs affecting the issue you are working on; what social sanctions or rewards reinforce the norms. If you don’t take the time to do this – you may miss critical information vital to ensuring your activities respond to existing norms, as outlined in this case study below:



HI case study: Sexual and Reproductive Health project, Nepal

In a project to improve the health outcomes of pregnant women in Nepal, the women were encouraged not to return to agricultural work straight after the birth of their child. However, due to prevailing norms and expectations around women’s work, women continued to work in the fields soon after giving birth. Over the course of the project, staff recognised that in order to change behaviour it was important to influence the women’s husbands and mother-in-laws, as they had a significant influence over the lives of the target women.

²⁴ The [Equality Institute](#), ‘Literature Review: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls’ for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, August 2019 (pg. 48)

- 2) **Understand how these social norms interact with other contextual factors to drive behaviours** - Harmful behaviours are influenced not only by social norms but other interlinked structural, social, material and individual factors. For example, consider how intersecting forms of oppression, including disability, gender, age, location, religion, ethnicity, class and position in a community reinforce and exacerbate harmful norms related to the issue you are seeking to address.
- 3) Practically, **how will these norms be explored and weakened at different levels?** This must be part of any transformative project. Engage community members about how they think norms could be positively changed; this may involve building on positive norms or challenging discriminatory norms. Some norms may be easier to shift than others – so these may be good ones to start off with. What is important about norm change is creating space for reflection and dialogue to enable communities to understand and question gender norms and subsequently to support people to positively change their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. This involves sustained in-depth dialogue with community members, service providers, decision-makers and especially with power brokers or influencers (e.g. traditional rulers, religious leaders etc.); to enable them to reflect on the impact of discriminatory norms on the issue you are seeking to address and how these could change. Engaging a range of stakeholders (identified in the social ecological framework above) in different ways, helps to create an enabling environment for excluded groups to realise their rights. Try and focus on new positive norms rather than reinforcing negative norms. This work is challenging but is vital to changing attitudes and behaviours towards groups facing compounded discrimination.
- 4) **Identify change makers or influencers to leverage their influence in changing and reinforcing new norms.** Who may be already working in your target areas to positively change attitudes and behaviours around disability, gender and age? Work with local staff and partners to identify the key opinion makers and potential allies to engage in the project. They can help promote new positive norms and publicise the benefits of these, as well as help you create further opportunities for public discussion and engagement. How can they help create new social sanctions and rewards that reinforce new positive norms? Think about what strategies you can use to spread new norms beyond your project, potentially using technologies such as edutainment (or entertainment education where we are entertaining people at the same time as teaching them something) and social media.

B4. Power

As described above in [Section A. 4.2](#):

- **Unequal power relations can create, reinforce and reproduce inequality**
- In order to address a person or group's vulnerability to a 'problem' or 'risk', **imbalances of power need to be transformed.**

This can be achieved by supporting the meaningful participation of excluded groups, and by **directly supporting those experiencing inequality to gain more power at all levels** (from the individual, household, community and societal level).

Changing power relations is necessary if projects are to be transformative. In this section we highlight:

- How project activities can inadvertently reinforce power imbalances (doing harm)
- The importance of using the intersectional lens for inclusion.
- How staff can think about power differently
- Empowerment.

B4.1 Doing harm by reinforcing historical or current power imbalances in project activities

At the project level, when designing a project, analysing the situation, identifying stakeholders most relevant for change; **organisations tend to consult with individuals or groups with well-recognised or official positions of authority; those who are often the most visible.** These individuals may include heads of households, community leaders, government officials, religious leaders or partner organisations. The tendency to work with leaders who are most easily identified or recognised is especially common when staff are not from the local context and therefore rely upon traditional visible forms of knowledge, power and influence.

This means important project processes, from problem analysis to beneficiary selection processes, can start with the dominant power group (usually men) and get stuck there.

When **'women', 'people with disability', 'children' or 'youths', 'vulnerable older groups'** are consulted, these processes tend to focus on understanding their needs or vulnerability only. These groups **may be seen only as passive recipients of services. Their agency, the spaces or mechanisms (formal or informal) they use to bargain or influence may be less visible to 'outsiders' and can often be overlooked.**

The challenge with working with the dominant power group is that (consciously or subconsciously) the dominant power group is likely to reinforce their own vested interests. This can include prioritising their constituencies; their understanding of the problem and preferred solutions; their rules (expressed through national or customary laws, expected social norms and behaviours); their preferred structures, institutions and partners.

Working alongside the current dominant power group (in other words working with the status quo), risks projects reinforcing and reproducing unequal power relations; reproducing inequality and discrimination; essentially ‘doing harm’.

It also risks reversing embryonic social change that may not be visible to outsiders; where traditionally excluded groups (women or youths, for example), have taken on different roles, or claimed new rights or control over resources.²⁵ This is especially the case in fragile and conflict affected contexts. These contexts can be incubating environments for social change. However, limited access to communities to support consultations and analysis processes, means these changes may not be understood.

This is not to advocate that HI should not engage, consult or target project activities at privileged groups. Indeed if we expect those with power to give up some of their privilege, it is necessary to engage privileged groups; otherwise there is a risk of backlash. Projects aimed at transformation will often engage privileged groups, recognising their roles in shaping social norms and behaviours, enacting legislation or allocating budgetary resources.

- Being aware of power and thinking about different forms of power and how power can be exercised can support staff to reduce the risk of reinforcing **and reproducing unequal power relations**. (See the [next section](#))
- Applying an intersectional lens to reveal the characteristics of privilege can also be used to reduce the risk of reinforcing the status quo and to identify *different* criteria for selecting participants for inclusion in different project cycle management processes; e.g. needs assessments, participatory problem analyses, beneficiary selection processes and project activities.
- **Be careful not to presume that by simply ‘adding women’, ‘persons with disability’, or different age groups into processes, that this safeguards against reinforcing unequal power relations.** As both vulnerability and privilege is built on a number of intersecting individual and environmental factors. The **individual and environmental characteristics which create privilege** (e.g. ethnic identity, religious status, familial connections, socio-economic status) **can be reproduced across genders, disability status and ages.**

When considering who to include as participants in different project design processes and project activities, consider the following:

- **Use the intersectional lens of identity characteristics and environmental factors to identify (prioritise) ‘which’ women / men / disabled persons/ targeted age-groups**
- **Consider who is unrepresented? Who remains invisible?**
- **Reflecting on i) the context and ii) the purpose of the project (and activities) are those prioritised groups and those ‘excluded’ groups the ‘correct’ groups?**

²⁵ See pages 5-6.

It is not feasible to include everyone in all design processes or activities. Prioritisation is necessary.

- **Reflect on who has identified the individuals or groups to be consulted.**
- Thinking about partner organisations, Disabled People's Organisations, Women's Rights Organisations, Community Based Organisations – **who do partner organisation's represent?** Is their work informed by an intersectional approach, or do they work with groups in siloes?

B4.2 Think about power differently ²⁶

When we think of the word 'power', we usually associate it with individuals who have 'visible' forms of power; for example, people in official roles. These people might include heads of house-holds politicians, government officials, traditional leaders, councillors, community elders, judges, religious leaders, the police or the military. The type of power usually exercised by these individuals is 'power over', authority or control over others to do something.

Academics now understand 'power' as being much more complex and have identified three different forms of power²⁷ and different ways individuals and groups exercise power.²⁸



Thinking about power differently

Three forms of power:

- **Visible power** is held by people with official positions or well-recognised authority.
- **Hidden power** describes the tactics people use to protect their interests and privilege. These tactics can often be done in private.
- **Invisible power** describes the dominant ideologies, values and social norms that shape people's expectations and behaviour.

Visible, hidden and invisible power tend to work together to maintain the position of privileged groups, allowing them to control rules and norms in society.

Five ways to exercise power:

- **Power from within** is a person's sense of self-worth and self-confidence.
- **Power to** is a person's ability to shape their own life and environment.
 - ➔ Both 'power from within' and 'power to' are also referred to as agency – the ability to make choices and to act on them.
- **Power with** is people coming together around shared interests to build a common cause.

²⁶ Adapted from '[Putting gender in political economy analysis: Why it matters and how to do it](#)', Practitioners Guidance Note, R. Haines, T. O'Neil (Gender and Development Network), May 2018, pp. 5-6, 23-24.

²⁷ John Gaventa developed and popularised these [three dimensions of power](#).

²⁸ Jo Rowlands developed the well-known four-part categorisation of power (over, to, with, from within), and Srilatha Batliwala added the fifth category (under). [Questioning Empowerment: working with Women in Honduras](#). J Rowlands (Oxfam, 1997) / [Feminist leadership for social transformation: Clearing the conceptual cloud](#) S. Batliwala (CREA, 2011).

'Power with' refers to collective power and involves people coming together around shared interests. 'Power with' is an important way for marginalised or disadvantaged people to exercise their power.

- **Power over** is controlling others and making them do something.
- **Power under** is the acts of resistance and subversion by people who are subject to domination and control by others exercising power over them.

Exercises in 'power under' can include online netizen campaigns to expose corruption, civil rights-sit-ins or violent acts of protest. Acts of resistance or subversion are more common in contexts where there is limited civil and political space.

Understanding different forms of power and how power can be exercised is important because:

- It can help safeguard against **projects reinforcing and reproducing unequal power relations; reproducing inequality and discrimination; essentially 'doing harm'.**
- **It can reveal the agency and capital of traditionally excluded groups; how traditionally excluded groups influence change and the spaces and pathways they use. These in turn can be harnessed, strengthened and built upon in projects.**



Thinking about power differently

Drawing on the definitions of power above, below are some useful questions to consider when designing a project?

- When and how does HI engage with 'visible power brokers' in the project cycle?
- Do these visible power brokers have shared (individual and environmental) characteristics?
- Reflecting on these characteristics, and considering the context and purpose of the project, who is missing?
- What might be the risks and opportunities of engaging visible power brokers?
- Do we understand the 'hidden' and 'invisible' forms of power' which impact on our project? What is the implication of these forms of power on the impact of our project?
- Considering the different ways to exercise power, which of these does the project support or interact with?
- If you use Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices surveys, think about what questions you are asking and whether you can integrate/strengthen questions around power within.

B5. Empowerment



Empowerment is an iterative process that is fundamentally about shifts in power relations.

It may involve some, or all, of the processes below.

Consciousness Raising – increased awareness individuals have of themselves, their situation and the society in which they live. Consciousness raising is a process through which people see and experience the world that can raise awareness of social injustice, recognise their own capacity and the power to express and act together to change society.

Information – basic information about rights and entitlements; providing information ensures that people are better equipped to take advantage of opportunities. Information must be accessible. For example in local languages or braille; relevant, timely and presented in forms that that can be understood (for example based on a person's impairment, or a child's capacity).

Capacity building – to support the required skills and knowledge to access services, exercise their rights, negotiate effectively and hold duty-bearers accountable. It is about exposing individuals to different ways of framing their social worlds, providing them with a new language and lens through which to view their realities. Gaining skills and knowledge can lead to increased confidence and self-esteem, which is an important part of the empowerment process.

Peer support and collective action – For example support to groups, e.g. women's rights organisations or disabled people's organisations, youth organisations, or peer to peer exchanges. Peer support can increase the visibility of excluded groups, provide mutual support, encourage a sharing of resources and find common solutions. Peer support also supports consciousness raising. For example, many people with disabilities feel they are the only ones facing a particular problem, but when they meet people with similar problems they may find that their problems are shared and that there are common solutions to the discrimination they are facing. Peer to peer learning and exchange is also an effective way to build capacity and address internalised oppression. Peer support can lead to **collective action**, which refers to action taken together by a group of people whose goal is to enhance their status and achieve a common objective on issues that are important to them. This action is led by target beneficiaries at every stage - from deciding on issues to selecting and implementing actions and evaluating successes and challenges.

Participation – Being a participant is critical step in the empowerment process. But participation must however be meaningful and not tokenistic, if it is to support empowerment. For more information on Meaningful Participation See [Section B.6](#).

Alliances, partnerships and movement building – as communities mobilise they may join hands with other groups, coalitions or alliances for a common purpose. This helps them gain and then build a critical mass for positive change.

²⁹ Adapted from [Community Based Rehabilitation Guidelines, Empowerment](#) (WHO, 2010) and A. Cornwall's 'Women's Empowerment: What Works?', Journal of International Development, pp. 342–359.

When designing interventions aimed at supporting empowerment, it is important to remember that:

- **Empowerment is aimed at changing power relations.**
- **Empowerment is a process with interdependent steps. It is not an activity; and empowerment cannot be achieved with a focus on only one intervention or activity type.**
- **Arguably not all 'empowerment interventions are equal'.** Longwe, for example, argues that empowerment interventions have different levels of importance. Focus on excluded groups having an equal taking of decisions and gaining control over decisions and resources, she argues, will have a greater impact on addressing inequality than when basic needs and equal access to resources is assured. Although the Longwe Empowerment Framework also suggests that 'lower' degrees of empowerment (welfare and access) are still a prerequisite for achieving 'higher' levels of empowerment.³⁰
- **Empowerment must be defined and lead by the targeted individuals or groups.**



Girls Empowerment³¹

Plan International, who focus on the rights of adolescent girls, developed a girl-led tool to monitor girls' perceptions of their barriers and the required changes to support their empowerment. The tool, the Girls Empowerment Star, was developed following consultation with over 7000 adolescent girls and boys in 11 countries aged between 12 and 16 years.

The participatory Girls Empowerment Star monitors girls' perceptions across eight domains: allocation of household work in relation to adolescent boys; completion of 9 years of schooling; their ability to speak-up on important issues in front of an adult male; their ability to make decisions about money; whether they can choose who they marry; if they can decide to get pregnant; whether they feel safe in the community; and whether the concerns of adolescent girls matter in their community.

³⁰ [Longwe's 'Women's Empowerment Framework'](#) (1991) distinguishes between different degrees of empowerment (with the numbered list below moving up towards increased empowerment i.e. 5 being the highest): **1.** The welfare 'degree': where basic needs are satisfied. This does not necessarily require structural causes to be addressed and tends to view those involved as passive recipients. **2.** The access 'degree': where equal access to education, land and credit is assured. **3.** The conscientisation and awareness-raising 'degree': where structural and institutional discrimination is addressed. **4.** The participation and mobilisation 'degree': where the equal taking of decisions is enabled. **5.** The control 'degree': where individuals can make decisions and these are fully recognised.

From C.Luttrell, S.Quiroz's, ['Understanding and operationalising empowerment'](#) (ODI, November 2009), p5. See also the findings from Humanity& Inclusion's Kigali Seminar on Participatory and Personalised/Person Centred Approaches, [People at the Center](#), 11-15 December 2017, which noted that in processes aimed at empowering persons with a disability, responding to fundamental needs (including safety and food) was a prerequisite to other empowerment processes.

³¹ Presentation by Sarah Hendriks (2015) on Plan's ['Hear our Voices'](#)

When you design projects, try and **start with the target beneficiaries themselves** in terms of what are their priorities and design around this as much as possible; rather than be led just by donor priorities.

Consider, for example:

- At the design stage of the project, how can you explore with different project beneficiaries **what they feel is important to them** in relation to the problem you are trying to address? Have you prioritised this in your project approaches and activities? If you can't do this at the design stage can you build in focus group discussions with target beneficiaries in at the inception stage of the project?
- What work is done with project beneficiaries to **support individual and collective reflection and dialogue** around how the intersection of disability, gender and age discrimination affects their lives and what solutions they consider important. Can you **facilitate spaces for groups to regularly meet and discuss** these issues and to organise around them? What do they need to be their own advocates – how can you support this through your project?
- Speak to project beneficiaries to understand how they are working with the barriers they face. What sort of agency is being exercised currently by affected groups to **navigate these inequalities** and how could you support this further in your project activities.
- How can you **support collective action** by affected groups? Can you link them up to other partner organisations, or broad-based coalitions, alliances or movements to advocate for change from duty bearers?
- How can you **give over some of the policy spaces** you access to project beneficiaries to share their perspectives and concerns with policy makers and service providers?

B6. Participation

“Nothing about us without us”. The right to participation for all individuals, based on the principle of non discrimination, is protected in international human rights law and is considered by HI as an important element of the processes which can support the empowerment of individuals and groups.³² Participation is one of HI's twelve quality criteria.

Supporting meaningful participation is one of the direct ways HI can contribute to transforming power relations and be transformational in its programming.

Institutional, attitudinal and environmental barriers all act to exclude an individual or group from participating. Addressing these barriers and creating an ‘enabling environment’ to support participation is a pre-requisite to participation. Creating an enabling environment will need to respond to the complex web of intersecting individual and societal factors (disability, gender, age, ethnic or faith identity, ‘victim’, ‘survivor’ ‘aggressor’ labels etc) that create prejudice, discrimination and exclusion.

³² HI - Kigali Seminar on Participatory and Personalized/Person Centred Approaches, [People at the Centre](#), 11-15 December 2017.

Institutional barriers: laws (customary and statutory), policies and even institutional practices can directly or indirectly act as barriers to participation.

Attitudinal barriers rooted in conscious or unconscious bias, stigma, social norms and unequal power relations also act to exclude a person or a group. Attitudinal barriers are at the root of discrimination and exclusion.³³

Environmental barriers include physical obstacles in the natural or built environment and inaccessible communication systems.

B6.1 Meaningful participation

Meaningful participation should be understood as a process, not a one event. Creating a platform for a female disabled land mine survivor to participate in a one-off community event doesn't qualify as meaningful participation, would not remove the wider environmental barriers limiting her participation, and also risks her being instrumentalised. **Supporting meaningful participation is a process which requires time and investment.**

Creating an 'enabling environment' is a necessary pre-requisite. Supporting a change in 'mind-set' of both the participant as well as the 'listener', is often a required change to ensure participation is not a cosmetic or tokenistic.³⁴

Drawing on good practice³⁵ meaningful participation can also be measured as a process which is:

- **Accessible:** ensure access to the physical environment; to transportation, to information and communications technologies and systems, to enable participation on an equal basis with others. This may require information in accessible formats or other forms of reasonable accommodation. For example, access to assistive technology or devices to improve hearing, vision, or the capacity to communicate for persons with a physical impairment; dissemination of resources in a child-friendly format or having women only spaces in refugee camps where women survivors of violence may be able to access psycho-social support.

³³ [Guidelines: Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action](#), Inter-Agency Standing Committee, July 2019, p. 8 (IASC Guidelines)

³⁵ These criteria draw on good programme practice and principles for participation elaborated in: [IASC Guidelines](#) p. 8; General Comment 12, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'The Right to be Heard', CRC/C/GC/ 12 20 July 2009; General Comment 7, United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disability, 'General Comment No. 7 on the participation of persons with disability, including children with disability, through their representative organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disability', CRPD/C/GC/ 7, 12 September 2018, The basic requirements of ethical participation with children, [A Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation](#), Gerison Lansdown and Claire O'Kane (Plan, The Concerned for Working Children, Unicef, World Vision, Save the Children, 2014), pp.14-15, 10 Guiding Principles for Good Practice, Plan International [Citizenship and Governance Programme Strategy 2013-2017](#), pp. 8-10.

- **Transparent and informed:** participants should understand the weight their views will receive and agree to participate based on an understanding of the type of participation being supported; consultative, collaborative or participant-led (or person-centred).
 - **Consultative:** Opinion-seeking in order to build knowledge and understanding. Participants do not control outcomes of the consultation. It recognises the knowledge and or expertise of the person being consulted and the importance of their perspectives to the outcome of the process. Consultative processes do not allow for the delegation of decision-making authority.
 - **Collaborative:** provides opportunity for participants to influence both the process and the outcomes of the consultation. It supports shared decision-making.
 - **Participant-led (person-centred):** issues prioritised and discussed would be identified by the target-group, with participants controlling the process. Participant-led or person-centred consultation doesn't have to exclude other participants but ordinarily their roles would be as facilitators or as experts providing technical insights or learning from other contexts or processes.³⁶

Different categories of consultation have different values and roles to play, but consultation should be undertaken with the participant's full understanding of their role and influence. False expectations regarding the capacity to influence and control the outcome of a process can lead to disillusionment; and can lead to individuals and shared-interest groups seeking alternative pathways to change other than through constructive engagement.

- **Respectful, voluntary, safe and sensitive to risk** – Participation may not always be without risk, especially in contexts with limited civil or political space, or where different stakeholders may have limited experience or tolerance for processes that support participation; and particularly in the case of more traditionally excluded-or marginalised groups. Social attitudes prejudicing the participation of particular groups may also lead to a back-lash, so it is important to think about identifying and mitigating risks where possible.³⁷ Assessing the risk to participants can be highly problematic; there may be multiple unknowns and a limited evidence base to assess risk types and likelihood. Equally the tolerance for risk of the facilitating agency may be lower than the participants'. When assessing and managing risk, it is critical this is done with the informed participation and understanding of the person(s) involved in the process; involving the participant(s) in assessing the context and the risk types; and being clear about the level of support a facilitating partner is able to provide in certain situations. The autonomy of the participant should be respected and supported.

³⁶ See Section 3.3. Levels of Child Participation by Gerison Lansdown, Essential Reader on Strengthening Meaningful and Ethical Participation of Children and Young People-Forwarding Civic Engagement, January 2011.

³⁷ In Nigeria, according to a 2019 report by Peace Direct, women are targeted in the public and private spheres to prevent them from participating in rallies, casting their vote or running as candidates for political office. In some cases (British Council Nigeria, 2012) gangs have been hired by politicians to stop female candidates from standing. [Barriers and enablers for women's participation in governance in Nigeria](#), by Luke Kelly (K4D, Helpdesk Report, Brighton, Institute for Development Studies)(May 2019)

- **Supported by training and mentoring** – Participants should be provided with the necessary skills, information and understanding of the process to meaningfully engage. For Plan International UK for example, this includes political literacy, ensuring supported youth participants understand how decision making institutions work when they engage duty bearers. Training could include support for participants to collect, analyse evidence for use in influencing or decision-making spaces or more direct skills in media, public-speaking or presentation skills. Mentoring is often cited as an effective supportive mechanism. Understanding the specific needs and designing different strategies to strengthen the capacities of traditionally excluded groups to enable meaningful participation is critical. Consideration also needs to be given to skill gaps and knowledge of those engaging with traditionally excluded groups, to ensure that they value the participation and engage with it in a meaningful way.
- **Relevant** – Spaces need to be created to enable participants to highlight and address the issues they themselves identify as relevant and important. Participation for people with disabilities should, for example, not be limited to simply including them in lobbying for improved national disability policies but they should have space to collectively critically analyse the problems they face critically and seek collective action. Applying an intersectional lens recognises that identity, experiences, privilege and vulnerability are shaped by different intersecting personal and societal characteristics; a person's interests and needs will also intersect across multiple issues
- **A safe shared space** which provides opportunities for different individuals and groups, with potentially competing positions to work constructively together to identify shared interests and needs.
- **Accountable** – Participation needs to be monitored and evaluated, including examining the outcomes of participation. Participants should know how their views have been interpreted; be given the opportunity to challenge and influence the analysis of findings; and be able to understand (know) how their participation has influenced any outcomes. Accountability should extend to supporting participation to ensure the implementation of agreed changes or reform.
- **Sustained** – Meaningful participation should be supported throughout the project cycle.
- **Inclusive** – Participation must be inclusive and avoid replicating existing patterns of discrimination or exclusion, or indeed reinforce privilege. **'Who' is selected to participate and 'why' should be a reflective process through which HI can support transformation and contribute to positive changes in relation to attitudes and power relations.** Applying an intersectional lens, recognising that it is different and intersecting individual and societal factors which create both exclusion and privilege; and acknowledging these factors change dependent upon the context and the problem (risk, or issue) being addressed; can safeguard against assumptions that an "add woman/ youth/ person with a disability" approach supports inclusion of the most-excluded or vulnerable. The 'add and stir' model, not only risks being tokenistic, it neglects the fact that it is not a singular factor that creates discrimination or privilege and creates the risk that participation actually reinforces privilege, vested powerful interests and discriminatory attitudes. Rather than driving change, it can simply reinforce the status-quo and therefore inequality.

Be aware of existing power relations and biases and remember that development work is not power neutral; elites and discrimination are realities of this work. As well as considering who is being included into a process, also consider who has selected an individual or group to be represented and the implications of this. But be careful, as well as reflecting on who is being added to a process to support more inclusion, also apply this same intersectional lens to consider who is already present, has voice, agency, and the capacity to influence decisions and control resources.

When trying to support inclusion of excluded groups, use an intersectional lens and consider different forms of power and how power can be exercised, map who is present and who is absent (or excluded), and the implications of that given the context and the goal of the process.

Appendix 1 – Organisational capacity to undertake a more intersectional approach

Undertaking an intersectional approach to projects, (specifically one that looks at the lenses of disability, gender and age) is a **highly political decision** by any organisation; it is not neutral. An analysis of disability, gender and age reflects a particular understanding of the world in relation to **unequal power relations between and amongst groups experiencing compounded discrimination**. This is not just a technocratic choice.

For example, ways in which different international development actors approach women's rights and gender inequality reflect very different understandings of women's concerns, the relationship between gender inequality and poverty and an understanding of poverty itself and its causes. **Often there is a focus on women only**, rather than on the **social and economic dynamics of gender relations**; a lack of focus on the **underlying beliefs which enforce gender inequality**; and lack of attention to the **underlying gender relations** which explain and perpetuate unequal gendered roles and responsibilities.³⁸ So, using a gender analysis (and even which type of gender analysis framework) reflects a particular understanding of the relationships between gender roles and gender inequality, and how this may link to marginalisation. Analysis is **inherently political and is not neutral**. The same argument can equally be applied to disability or age analysis. A political understanding of social and cultural identities, and how these are informed by **structural inequality**, is crucial to accurately assessing the marginalisation of different project beneficiaries.

Thus, as HI increasingly promotes an intersectional approach, with a particular focus on the characteristics of disability, gender and age; it must have a **clear position on why it is promoting greater equality** as this will shape the factors and methodology it prioritises in an analysis process, as well as clear lines of accountability in relation to this approach being implemented.

Any work transforming discrimination on the basis of disability, gender and age **requires examination; both within programmes but also within HI itself**. For example, we understand inequality to be related to structural injustice within and beyond organisations and that tackling this requires looking at both systems and structures as well as individual attitudes and behaviour - both externally in HI's project work but also internally in HI's organisational policies and culture. To what extent is HI supporting staff to reflect on their own unconscious bias and potentially discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in relation to gender equality, ensuring, for example, the meaningful contribution of staff in decision-making at all levels regardless of age, gender or disability status? For example, how many women from minority ethnic groups; or younger men who

³⁸ Emily Hillenbrand, Pardis Lakzadeh, Ly Sokhoin, Zaman Talukder, Timothy Green & Judy McLean (2014) ['Using the Social Relations Approach to capture complexity in women's empowerment: using gender analysis in the Fish on Farms project in Cambodia'](#), Gender & Development, 22:2, 351-368. - accessed 18 July 2019

identify as disabled, hold senior positions? What formal policies or informal practices may inadvertently hinder this? How is HI monitoring and adapting to learning about inclusion within its own offices?

Any work to integrate intersectionality in projects should go hand in hand with work at the organisational level to ensure that it 'sticks.' This requires a process of organisational change where staff are supported to reflect on practices within the organisation and how this affects projects. We use the term 'reflection by staff', as this requires a process of face-to-face reflection and dialogue with skilled facilitators to support staff to identify gaps and opportunities for change. For this organisational culture work to be meaningful, it needs to be clearly understood, championed, resourced and role modelled by senior managers.

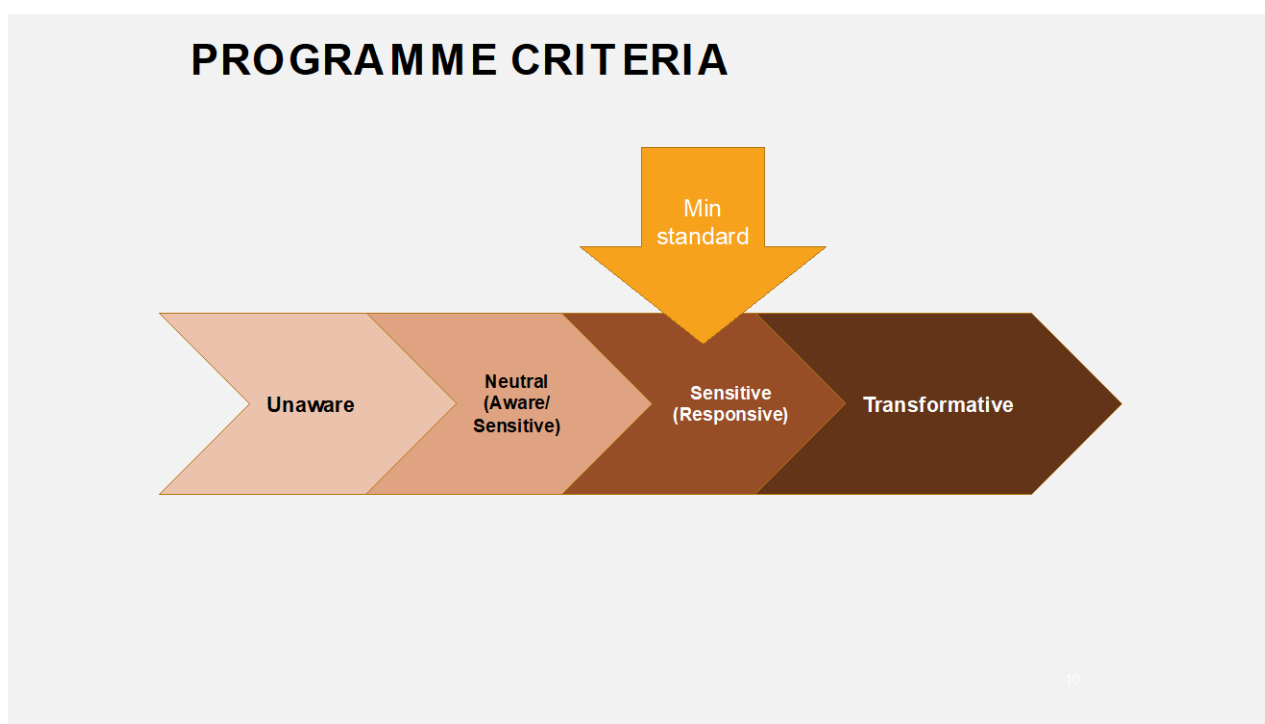
Strengthening project work on intersectionality requires dedicated experienced staff. To support a meaningful change in project practice (from design through to learning and adaptive practice) requires going beyond simple frameworks or instrumentalist approaches to processes that engage the 'hearts and minds' of staff for them to reflect on their own practice; unconscious bias; and often, deeply held beliefs and assumptions. After all, we are all influenced by the society in which we operate. Thus, lessons from effective mainstreaming inform us that sufficient resourcing of this work is vital. Notably this requires starting with **staff with relevant expertise; not only on disability programming but also on gender equality and meaningful participation of different age groups** in order to sensitise staff as well as provide accompaniment in supporting the integration of new ways of working. **The effectiveness of any intersectional approach is dependent on the skill and the motivation of the project practitioner and so this reflection process helps to guard against a 'tick-box' approach that may shut down the questioning and political lens required when working towards equality and the empowerment of different beneficiary groups, discriminated against on the basis of disability, gender and age.** In our experience, trying to integrate these skills into the work plans of existing, already over-burdened technical staff, is ineffective. Over time, dedicated staff can support technical staff and others to build their skills and confidence in integrating a more intersectional approach into projects; whilst at the same time supporting work internally on organisational practice.

Appendix 2 – An analysis tool: The programme sensitivity criteria

HI's DGA Policy promotes a **two-pronged approach**:

- To be **disability, gender and age responsive** in *all* areas of HI work
- To be **transformative** wherever possible
- Using the DGA programme sensitivity criteria helps us determine **to what extent DGA issues are integrated into project design**, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning.

HI's programme criteria (see diagram below) draws from gender sensitivity models widely used in the sector by both civil society organisations and donors alike, albeit with slightly different language,³⁹ but still usefully integrates disability and age. HI, as well as the wider sector, set responsive as a minimum standard for all projects with the understanding that anything less than this is likely to reinforce unequal power relations. One thing to note is that it is useful to consider the criteria as a continuum; that work to advance equality can progress forward or go backwards depending on a range of factors, both internal to an organisation and external in your project work.



In the table below, we have unpacked further things to consider when assessing your project proposal for sensitivity towards disability, gender and age. Please use the criteria below as a guide to determining the extent to which project proposals integrate D, G and A. Some are easier to distinguish, i.e. those that may be unaware, but the difference between responsive and transformative is more nuanced. However, the key difference is if the project seeks to **positively change the status quo of an affected group's subordination in society**.

³⁹ In other models aware/sensitive is termed neutral, and responsive is termed sensitive.

If, when you are designing your project, you assess the proposal (including the project outcomes, approaches and activities) to be unaware or aware; **you need to re-look at your project to see how you might strengthen it to be responsive as a minimum across all projects, including emergency response projects.** Whilst you may be more constrained by time in short term emergency response projects, remember that it may be that you can support certain parts of your project to be transformative and there are opportunities that exist during and after emergencies to shift social norms due to changes in existing structures and roles.



Unaware: Project documents refer to generic groups and don't specify how groups are differently affected by the issue. Programming ignores norms, roles, relations and needs related to D, G & A. Reinforces inequalities.



Aware/sensitive: Programming considers norms, roles, relations and needs, and indicates awareness on D, G & A but actions are not adapted to ensure equal benefit from interventions. Reinforces inequalities.



Responsive: Project documents state how groups are discriminated; robust DGA analysis conducted using DGA disaggregated data; project outcomes explicitly state intention of closing gaps; activities focus on improving everyday lives or **conditions (practical needs)**. Implementation team has expertise on D, G and A.



Transformative: The above PLUS - programming addresses root causes of inequalities or systemic barriers where D, G & A intersect, e.g. discriminatory norms, stereotypes, unequal power relationships. Supports agency and empowerment. Activities focus on improving the **position** of groups (strategic interests).

For further guidance on the difference between practical needs and strategic interests⁴⁰ see below. Please note however, that this is just a guide as it is only affected groups themselves that can determine their practical and strategic needs as this will differ greatly from one context to another.

⁴⁰ Draws from the work of Caroline Moser (1989); see more [here](#) – accessed July 18 2019

Practical needs	Strategic interests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term, immediate, practical assistance for affected groups according to perceived need to assist their survival • Responses may be more short term and tend to include ensuring adequate living conditions e.g. access to health care, food security but also access to income opportunities • In relation to women and girls, responses reduce their work burdens – gives them more time to perform their triple roles (reproductive, productive, community) • Reinforces existing socially accepted roles – doesn't challenge the subordinate position of affected groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interests identified by affected groups themselves that require strategies to challenge (negative) power and privilege • Responses are likely to challenge existing discriminatory norms, stereotypes, beliefs and behaviours around groups discriminated against on the basis of disability, gender and age • In relation to gender, responses tend to relate to gender division of labour, ownership and control of resources such as land and property, tackling violence • Work to support empowerment is perceived as more political, more feminist in nature due to the aim of transforming the unequal status of affected groups; this work is far more likely to be resisted than work to support practical needs • Ensuring affected individuals and groups become active agents of change in the development process

Appendix 3 – HI's adapted ToC table of identified barriers, changes and points to consider

The table below from HI shows the intermediate changes necessary to address the barriers identified, and specifies the types of actions that HI proposes to implement with an adaptation for each setting. We have added a column to identify additional points for programme practitioners to consider **during project design**, when adopting a DGA approach. The questions posed are not comprehensive but are questions to start a process of reflection with a view to improving project practice and quality.

Identified barriers	Expected Intermediate changes	HI's action throughout Emergency-Rehabilitation-Chronic Crisis-Development Continuum		Additional points to consider when adopting an intersectional (DGA approach)
		Examples of actions more specific to emergency settings	Examples of actions more specific to stable settings	
1. Inadequate policies - Policies are inadequate or non- existent, are not implemented, not funded and/or their application and impact are not monitored	Fair and relevant policies are defined, funded, implemented and monitored in order to guarantee access to all services for all vulnerable populations and	Provide relevant and targeted technical assistance to humanitarian response actors for the definition, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian response standards and policies satisfying the needs and priorities of people	Provide relevant and targeted technical assistance to national and local decision-makers for the definition, implementation and evaluation of inclusive policies, satisfying the needs and priorities of people with disabilities and vulnerable populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies are not written in a power neutral way. Policy makers are influenced by prevailing social norms around D, G and A in writing and implementing policies. • Examine to what extent policies and laws (both customary and national) are being implemented to maintain the interests of a particular group for who and where and by who in different contexts. To what extent do these policies or laws support the realisation of human rights for population groups affected by compounded discrimination through disability, gender and age (or not)?

	people with disabilities	with disabilities and vulnerable populations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does this affect the problem you are seeking to solve and how should you adapt your interventions, particularly around policy and advocacy work, accordingly?
2. Inadequate services - Services are inadequate, service provider and professional capacities are inadequate, and a multitude of difficulties arise during the provision of services	Nature and quality of services, including service provider and professional capacities, satisfy the needs, and priorities of people with disabilities and vulnerable populations	Provide directly delivered services alongside or, if necessary, substituting for normal service providers, while reinforcing their capacity to provide essential emergency response services	Reinforce capacities of service provision systems and actors in all necessary sectors, including via training of professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services are not delivered in a power neutral way. Service providers are influenced by prevailing social norms around D, G and A in delivering services. Undertake a power analysis to understand what services are being provided by who, for who and in what contexts. Use this analysis to design interventions relating to the delivery of services and advocacy work with policy makers and service providers.
3. Insufficient implication and participatory approaches - People with disabilities and vulnerable populations are not consulted or	Active participation of people with disabilities and vulnerable populations in decisions concerning them is ensured,	Consult representatives of people with disabilities and vulnerable populations in order to identify their needs and priorities and provide rapid responses	Support civil society organisations (specifically organisations of people with disabilities) in self-structuring and developing their capacities for representation, advocacy and monitoring of the rights of people with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certain population groups, particularly those experiencing compounded discrimination on the basis of D, G and A face heightened barriers around meaningful participation. This is due to the fact that they have less status and power than their peers and prevailing discriminatory norms and attitudes prevent them having a say in their communities. Speaking out can also carry personal risks.

sufficiently represented and do not participate in decision-making concerning them	including via their representative organisations		and vulnerable populations; support their participation in the decisions concerning them, at all levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consultation processes, think about which women, which men, which girls, which boys you are including. Who is missing and why? How can you reach them? How is disability, gender or age creating additional barriers to full and equal participation in their communities? What power and influence do they have and with whom? How can you capitalise on this in your project activities? • Which civil society organisations are you working with and why? How do you know that they represent those groups most impacted upon by the problem you are seeking to address? Are they looking at D, G and A in a holistic way or do they take a siloed approach? • How can you amplify the advocacy asks of partner organisations at different levels (local to global)? How can you support them to participate in spaces that HI currently occupies? • How can you mitigate risks of activists speaking out? <p>At organisational level – What is the role of HI in relation to partners? Do you design projects together, have transparent budgeting processes, strive to learn from partners as much as you intend to build capacity? How do you try to re-dress power</p>
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				imbalances between partners and HI? Does your partnership approach need more consideration?
4. Negative attitudes - Communities and societies stigmatise people with disabilities and vulnerable populations, adopting negative attitudes and behaviour towards them	Stereotypes and discrimination in attitudes and practices towards people with disabilities and vulnerable populations are reduced	Combat discrimination and promote a culture of inclusion among emergency response operators and concerned communities	Promote a culture of inclusion and support representative associations in combating discrimination and stereotypes, including through alliances between civil society organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D, G and A are social constructs. They are propped up by discriminatory social norms, gender and age stereotypes, rigid and limiting gender roles, negative attitudes around the role of people discriminated against on the basis of D, G and A. Transgressing social norms can lead to severe social sanctions for affected groups, including violence and death. • Social norm change work involves long term change working with whole communities to enable reflection and dialogue. Many local organisations do this work – how can you work with them to learn from them? • Social norm change can be more challenging in emergency contexts in short time frames, but there are windows of opportunity where, for example, gender roles are substantively changed for the better. For example, enabling marginalised women to have ownership of assets (new homes and fishing nets) following the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2005. • Ensure your analysis examines prevailing norms around D, G and A and how this impacts on the problem that you are trying to solve. What project methodologies and activities do you need to design to challenge discriminatory norms?

				<p>Who is best placed to deliver this work – HI or partners?</p> <p>At organisational level – internal reflection is needed to build staff understanding and buy in in relation to HI's mandate to work on women's and girls' rights and gender equality issues, social norms affecting D, G and A and more broadly, human rights. This needs to be supported with investment in building the capacity of staff to integrate this into their projects.</p>
<p>5. Insufficient and inadequate funding - Funding, including the funding from international cooperation agencies upon which many people with disabilities and vulnerable populations living in poor countries depend, is</p>	<p>Sufficient funding is allocated to programmes, policies, services and measures that enable a response to the needs and priorities of people with disabilities and vulnerable populations and the improvement of</p>	<p>Promote funding of national and international programme and actions providing emergency response to the needs and priorities of people with disabilities and vulnerable populations</p>	<p>Promote funding of national and international policies, programmes, services and actions fostering effective participation of people with disabilities and supporting the engagement of organisations of people with disabilities in effective budget advocacy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for policies and programmes is not allocated in a power neutral way. Policy makers are influenced by prevailing social norms around D, G and A funding work. • Undertake analysis on the allocation of funds for policies, services and measures that support the advancement of human rights and empowerment of population groups affected by D, G and A at all levels (local, district, national, regional, international). How can project activities support advocacy work on these issues? How can affected communities lead this advocacy work?

insufficient or inadequate to address the needs and priorities of people with disabilities and vulnerable populations	their participation in community life			
6. Insufficient data -Data is insufficient to understand and help others understand the situation of people with disabilities and vulnerable populations and to provide a satisfactory response	The situation of people with disabilities and vulnerable populations and their access to services is fully understood and monitored through systems of collection and analysis of data that takes inequality factors into account	Ensure - and support humanitarian response actors in ensuring - swift and coordinated collection and analysis of data relative to the situation of people with disabilities and vulnerable populations in emergency situations	Contribute to and support the collection, coordination, analysis and sharing of information and data enabling the realisation of the rights of people with disabilities to be monitored, while promoting data comparability through the use of the best international standards available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collecting sex, age and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD) has become an integral part of international development cooperation for many bilateral and multilateral agencies. This should be a minimum standard for all HI projects. However, collecting data is only important if it is analysed with a view to influencing project methodologies and activities. How are you analysing SADDD data to influence your project at the design stage (and also throughout the project cycle) to ensure learning is captured and factored into new projects? <p>At organisational level – how can Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning systems in HI capture data across projects on different thematic areas at outcome level? What spaces can be created for regular reflection on emerging learning at different</p>

				levels (HQ to country offices) to ensure reflexive, adaptive practice?
7. Lack of individual opportunities - People with disabilities and vulnerable populations lack access to opportunities that would enable them to acquire the skills and confidence required to actively engage in improving their situation	People with disabilities and vulnerable populations have access to the opportunities empowering them to be actors of change	Involve people with disabilities and vulnerable populations as full actors in crisis response	Support the capacity development and self-determination of people with disabilities, including via access to information on their rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the human rights abuses taking place amongst beneficiary groups in relation to the problem that you are trying to address? How are groups discriminated against on the basis of D, G and A trying to navigate around this? How can you work directly with these groups to understand what will make a difference to them in their lives and how you can support this? What methodologies and activities are required to support the empowerment of different groups? <p>At organisational level – is there a clear organisational understanding of empowerment and is HI's Theory of Change clear on what changes you want to see for which population groups and how this will happen?</p>



Towards more inclusive practices: A Disability, Gender and Age Intersectional Resource

This Disability, Gender and Age Resource aims to support Humanity & Inclusion's staff to better understand intersectionality.

An intersectional approach reminds us of the need to look deeper at the way multiple individual characteristics and societal factors intersect to compound discrimination in any given context.

In Section A, we introduce the concept of intersectionality, its use as a lens to understand vulnerability and the relevance of context. It also introduces a few critical concepts: the fact that disability, gender and age are all social constructs, the centrality of power and the need to transform unequal power relations.

In Section B, we provide some guidance on inclusion and bias; the need to consider the wider environment; how to work with social norms; how to understand power differently; and empowerment and participation processes.

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