

Making It Real: Tools and Pathways for Intersectional Policymaking



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1. Contents

Page 4	1. Introduction
Page 4	2. Participation as the key
Page 5	3. Proposing an Intersectional Participation Method
Page 6	3.1. Behind The Method
Page 6	4. The Method Step-by-Step
Page 7	4.1. Multi-Strand Diagnosis
Page 7	a. Broad consultation
Page 7	b. Separate Focus Groups for Different Strands
Page 7	c. Data Analysis
Page 8	d. Intersectional Categorisation
Page 9	4.2. Intersectional Solutions
Page 9	a. Centralised Solutions Crafting
Page 10	b. 3D Solutions Crafting
Page 10	5. Final considerations
Page 12	6. Bibliography

Making It Real: Tools and Pathways for Intersectional Policymaking

1. Introduction

This resource offers a practical tool for integrating intersectionality into policymaking through a participatory method designed to place intersectional realities, needs, and voices at the centre of policy making. It builds on the concepts and foundations presented in [the Intersectional Data Governance website](#), translating them into a structured approach for action and implementation.

It is aimed at democratic innovation experts and policymakers interested in participatory approaches. Therefore, it uses more technical language than [the Intersectional Data Governance website](#) and is intended for readers who want to explore the method in more depth. Readers seeking a high-level overview of intersectionality may wish to consult the Intersectional Data Governance website, while those looking to design, implement, or adapt participatory processes will find more detailed methodological considerations here.

This method has not yet been tested in practice. It is presented as a proposition and a first draft to stimulate discussion and further development on how to better integrate intersectional considerations into policy co-creation. It should not be read as a final or complete model, but as a starting point to be refined in dialogue with relevant experts.

The structure outlined here is intended as a backbone rather than an exhaustive guide. It does not cover all practical or operational details, and applying it in real-world contexts would require the development of a more detailed methodological guide tailored to specific settings, capacities, and constraints.

2. Participation as the key

To meaningfully identify and understand the needs, priorities, concerns, and lived realities shaped by intersecting forms of marginalisation, it is essential to listen directly to those affected. Effective and responsive intersectional data governance cannot be designed from a distance. It requires genuine, meaningful participation. By actively engaging diverse voices, policymakers can better ensure that data governance frameworks reflect complex realities and respond to them in ways that are inclusive, equitable, and grounded in lived experience.

Intersectional considerations extend across the entire data value cycle, not only the policymaking stage. As highlighted by Perucci and Swanson¹, involving citizens and communities throughout the data value chain is essential not only to strengthen agency and empower marginalised groups, but also to produce data that is meaningful and useful for all segments of the population. As an example, practices such as data disaggregation enable the level of granularity and coverage needed to reflect diverse realities, while participatory approaches help reduce biases and exclusions at every stage of the process.

Our research shows that a growing body of resources already addresses the importance of participation across different phases of the data cycle. For this reason, this resource focuses specifically on providing a method for integrating diverse, intersectional voices into the policymaking process. This approach represents a critical entry point for developing

¹ Perucci, F., Swanson, E. (2024), p.72

genuinely intersectional data governance policies. The World Economic Forum² further emphasises that participative and collective responsibility and decision-making are central to ensuring data equity and fairness, which in turn contributes to building trust in data and data governance processes.

This method also supports policymakers, particularly those in African Union member states, in meeting existing regional commitments³. These include the African Union's Agenda 2063, which envisions a continent where all citizens actively participate in decision-making at every level and where no one is excluded or marginalised on the basis of gender, political or ethnic affiliation, religion, location, age, or other factors. It also aligns with the AU Data Policy Framework, which calls on member states to develop ethical data governance approaches that are responsive to African contexts and that explicitly incorporate the voices of citizens, especially those who are historically marginalised or underrepresented.

3. Proposing an Intersectional Participation Method

Intersectionality is a complex subject which requires intricate, customized strategies and approaches to be meaningfully integrated into policy. As highlighted by Hankivsky⁴, “any effective and transformative intersectionality-informed methods and frameworks must capture the complexities, nuance and reality of policy processes, decisions and outcomes”. As a result, conventional (or general) participation methods risk overlooking crucial details and aspects necessary for formulating truly intersectional policies, in this case specifically in the realm of data governance. Nevertheless, this approach offers a framework potentially applicable to other policy domains aiming for intersectionality-oriented design.

To do so, the new method combines and adapts elements from two complementary approaches. The first is the Multi-Strand Approach, which examines inequalities through multiple lenses and manages the complexity of different strands to avoid one-size-fits-all solutions⁵. The second is the Innovation for Policy Foundation's participation methods, the 3D Consultations⁶, which intends to enhance inclusivity and representativeness of participation processes by empowering diverse local entities to lead the process.

This is not a final product, nor has it been tested in practice. Rather, the proposed method is intended to provoke reflection and dialogue on how participation can be made genuinely intersectional and result in truly intersectional outcomes, whether such an approach is needed in different contexts, and if it could benefit from other intersectionality approaches, such as the multidimensional approach proposed by Jubany, Guell and Davis⁷. Intersectionality is a highly complex concept, particularly when applied in real-world settings. As such, this method does not present a simple framework, because it does not address a simple challenge. It will require real-world testing and will benefit from adaptation and creativity to ensure its relevance and feasibility across different scenarios.

² World Economic Forum (2024), p.6

³ [Gender Data Futures Gender Data Futures: A Handbook on Transformative Data Governance](#), p.21-22

⁴ Hankivsky, O. (2012), p.20

⁵ Parken, A. (2010), p.95

⁶ [3D Consultations Method Guide](#)

⁷ Jubany, O.; Guell, B.; Davis, R. (2011).

3.1. Behind The Method

The method is divided into two phases: the first focuses on identifying affected intersectional strands and their respective problems, while the second aims to develop appropriate intersectional solutions.

The first phase of the method (Multi-Strand Diagnosis phase) was inspired by Parken's⁸ multi-strand approach, which involves the non-hierarchical and parallel consideration of different "strands" or categories. Rather than merging strands, it is designed as an intermediary method that moves beyond single-strand analyses (for example, focusing only on gender, race, or economic status in isolation) and beyond merely additive approaches, where solutions linked to different categories are simply stacked alongside one another. While the analytical pathway remains based on parallel strand analysis rather than full intersectionality, the approach prioritises identifying and responding effectively to the multiple structures of marginalisation that shape people's lived realities.⁹

The multi-strand approach fundamentally changes the focus of the analysis. Unlike single-strand or additive methods, which start by examining one specific strand (like evaluating gender in data governance), the multi-strand approach reverses this. It prioritises the analysis of the policy area first, and then identifies and addresses all the affected strands. Therefore, the first step in the method being proposed would be to start from the perspective of the policy being created (eg. data privacy, AI, digital services, etc), to then identify affected strands and problems/challenges faced by those strands.

The proposed method also intends to go one step further into intersectionality in relation to what is proposed within the multi-strand approach, meaning it looks beyond the strands to actively find the complex overlaps and dynamic relationships between them. This is achieved through an iterative process of problem identification that prioritizes the real-life experiences and narratives of representatives from each strand, aiming to uncover shared, systemic barriers and cross-cutting challenges.

Therefore, the outcome of the first phase of the proposed method, the Multi-Strand Diagnosis phase, would be a clear mapping and understanding of the problems of both of the strands in isolation, but also where they overlap and communicate. It then leads to the second phase of the method, the Intersectional Solutions phase, comprising the development of more cohesive, holistic, and impactful policy solutions that target the critical intersections where the biggest gaps exist, ensuring interventions are inclusive and effective for diverse groups.

4. The Method Step-by-Step

This section will provide suggestions for activities to be carried out during the implementation of the method. Policymakers should bear in mind that there is no one formula for the activities that should be carried out and that the method should take the most adequate form to the specific policy-making process. Therefore, the decision ultimately rests in the hands of those implementing the method. All activities should be goal-oriented and suitable to address the consultative process at hand.

⁸ Parken, A. (2010).

⁹ Hankivsky, O.; Cormier R. (2011), pp. 218, 223, 227.

4.1. Multi-Strand Diagnosis

The first phase of the method is composed of four parts, which are described in details below:

a. Broad consultation

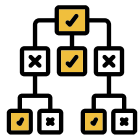
This stage consists of a broad consultation aimed at collecting both quantitative and qualitative data and insights to capture the diversity and complexity of intersectional experiences.



Designing the consultation questions. Consultation questions are designed jointly by data experts and DEI specialists to ensure they capture both technical and inclusion-related dimensions.



Identifying strand representatives and collecting inputs. Participants self-identify across multiple intersectional strands by selecting from a list of options, with the possibility to choose more than one. Based on these selections, participants are invited to provide input through tailored consultation questions. Inputs can be collected digitally through platforms such as AUDA-NEPAD's Citizen Engagement Platform or i4Policy's Shiriki Platform, or through in-person interviews or consultation meetings where access to digital tools is limited.



Decision-tree structure for questionnaire and responses. A decision-tree structure is used to match questions to each selected strand. Participants who identify with multiple strands respond to multiple sets of questions, allowing for more nuanced qualitative and quantitative data collection.

b. Separate Focus Groups for Different Strands

To gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the challenges identified, structured small-group discussions or focus groups, with representatives from different strands, are recommended. These discussions serve as a crucial qualitative step, moving beyond initial problem identification and exploring the root causes, contextual factors, and potential impacts in greater detail.

c. Data Analysis

This stage represents the most complex and critical phase of the diagnosis, involving the systematic synthesis and interpretation of all collected data, both qualitative and quantitative, to uncover patterns, intersections, and overarching policy implications. The objective is to understand how people's experiences are shaped by multiple, overlapping factors.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Uncovering Intersections and Groupings. Systematically cross-checking and comparing responses gathered from the consultation and focus groups across all policy strands. The primary objective is to identify points of convergence (intersections) and divergence between the experiences of different strands. This involves grouping similar issues, framing common structural barriers, and mapping out how different policy challenges overlap or influence one another.

Quantitative Data Analysis: Establishing Statistical Context. Statistics-based analysis of numerical data gathered through the consultation and other existing datasets to describe patterns across individual and combined strands. Rather than treating each strand separately, the analysis compares combined categories to identify patterns, differences, and areas of greater disadvantage. This helps policymakers understand where issues are most concentrated and which intersections require particular attention.

d. Intersectional Categorisation

This stage marks the shift from a multi-strand approach to an intersectional framework. Rather than examining strands in isolation, it focuses on how these strands intersect and interact to shape lived experiences, vulnerabilities, and policy outcomes. By doing so, the analysis moves beyond additive perspectives and enables a more nuanced understanding of compounded inequalities, supporting the development of data governance policies that are responsive to complex, overlapping realities.



Forming an Intersectional Category Identification Panel. A dedicated panel is established, composed of local DEI professionals, data governance policymakers, and data-related civil society organisations. DEI experts provide targeted guidance and training to panel members to help prevent tokenisation, surface implicit biases, and support reflexive decision-making throughout the process.



Identifying intersectional categories from consultation data. The panel reviews and analyses the consultation data holistically to identify intersectional categories that emerge from shared challenges, problems, and needs across multiple strands. The in-depth consideration and intersection of qualitative and quantitative data allow understanding of how different factors interact in practice to shape distinct lived realities and, thus, going beyond the simple combination or addition of different strands. DEI professionals facilitate this process, ensuring continuous bias checks, critical reflection, and attention to power dynamics throughout.



Prioritising intersectional categories for co-creation, where needed. Where resource constraints prevent engagement with all identified categories, the panel collectively deliberates and agrees on which intersectional categories should be prioritised for the co-creation phase, based on criteria such as vulnerability, reach, and potential policy impact. This prioritisation should function solely as a practical sieve for the co-creation process and not constitute a hierarchy of policy importance. Where resources allow, all identified intersectional categories may be included.



Additional analytical value. Beyond informing the co-creation phase, strand-level and intersectional insights generated through this process can support policymakers, civil society organisations, and researchers in guiding further data collection and policymaking. This contributes to addressing existing gaps in intersectional data and analysis across Africa. Subject to available resources, subsequent phases could also be extended to individual strands to enable deeper, more granular analysis.

4.2. Intersectional Solutions

Having mapped the intersectional categories based on the shared problems, patterns and needs, it is then time to co-create solutions, through holding co-creation sessions with representatives of the different intersectional categories, to guarantee responsive and effective policy considerations and outcomes. Once the intersectional categories are mapped based on shared problems, patterns, and needs, the next step is to co-create solutions. This is achieved by holding co-creation sessions with representatives from each intersectional category, which ensures that the resulting policy considerations and outcomes are responsive and effective.

These sessions serve a dual purpose: first, to validate and deepen collective understanding of the problems identified; and second, to co-develop solutions that are context-specific, appropriate, and responsive to the needs of different groups.



Validation and Deepening of Problems. Validation process to ensure the previously identified problems for that intersectional category through the consultation stage are accurately defined, relevant, and comprehensive from the community's lived experience perspective. This step ensures ownership and accuracy before moving to solutions.



Crafting Solutions. The core objective is to collaboratively develop tangible, actionable, and context-specific solutions for the now-validated problems. The sessions must employ inclusive methodologies that ensure all voices are heard, translating community knowledge into policy recommendations that address the unique challenges faced by that specific intersectional group.

This phase can be carried in either a traditional, centralised approach and/or in a decentralised approach:

a. Centralised Solutions Crafting

A Centralized Solutions Crafting would constitute a structured process for engaging representatives of the intersectional categories in deliberations on specific policies to gather informed opinions and potential co-created solutions, fostering more responsive and appropriate policies through active stakeholder participation. It's designed to promote participant's in-depth understanding of the topic, open a space for discussion of various aspects of the policy issue at hand, and to gather and co-create policy solutions. This approach, which stimulates engagement and informed dialogues, is relevant for crafting policies that resonate and effectively address the needs of different stakeholders at multiple levels, be it global, national, regional, or local.

Separate sessions should be facilitated for each intersectional category. Ideally, all identified categories would be included. However, this will depend on available resources. Where resources are limited, sessions should focus on the intersectional categories prioritised by the panel in the previous stage of the method.

b. 3D Solutions Crafting

The 3D Solutions Crafting would focus on empowering community representatives to host and facilitate solution-crafting sessions with members of their communities. Through targeted facilitation training and ongoing support, these local actors convene co-creation spaces where participants from specific intersectional categories can collectively reflect on their realities and co-develop solutions. The outcome of these sessions is a set of concrete, context-specific policy recommendations that respond directly to the needs and experiences of different intersectional groups, translating lived realities into actionable inputs for policymaking.

By operating at a grassroots level, this participatory approach is designed to democratise the policy-making process. This methodology significantly increases the likelihood that the diverse voices, unique lived experiences, and critical perspectives of a broader spectrum of stakeholders are genuinely heard and substantively considered. Crucially, this includes individuals and communities who are typically excluded from traditional policy consultation mechanisms, specifically those from underrepresented, marginalised, and vulnerable populations. This is intended to ensure that policy solutions are informed by the realities and specific needs articulated by those most affected, leading to policies that ultimately achieve intersectional outcomes.

5. Final considerations

When navigating the complexities of overlapping identities and compounding discrimination, it is crucial to recognise the inherent sensitivity of these topics. Discussions around intersectional disadvantage can not only elicit strong, personal, and potentially emotional reactions from participants but also inevitably surface deeply ingrained biases and unconscious assumptions held by the individuals in the room.

Furthermore, it is imperative to have in mind that those who are used to marginalisation are less likely to bring their true selves to open discussions, especially when there are compounding factors at stake, which may silence some people in the room while allowing others to stand out. These power imbalances must be taken into consideration to enable and incentivize participation from people across the board.

Therefore, to manage this sensitive environment effectively, a robust strategy must be put in place for all interactions with participants, including through consultations, discussions, and co-creation sessions. Specifically, this requires that the entire facilitation team be comprehensively trained. This training should go beyond basic facilitation skills and include:



DEI Expertise. Facilitators must possess a thorough understanding of intersectionality, systemic discrimination, power dynamics, and the specific socio-cultural contexts relevant to the identities being discussed.



Trauma-Informed Practice. Training should cover recognizing and responding to signs of distress, creating a psychologically safe space, and maintaining neutrality while facilitating discussions and validating lived experiences.



De-escalation Techniques. The team must be prepared to pre-empt, manage, and de-escalate potential conflicts. This includes skills for interrupting biased or harmful statements respectfully, refocusing the conversation when it veers into unproductive territory, and maintaining a respectful and inclusive atmosphere even when difficult truths are shared.



Bias Recognition and Self-Awareness. Facilitators need to undergo self-reflection training to identify and mitigate their own unconscious biases, ensuring they do not inadvertently perpetuate harm or bias in their facilitation of the discussion.

Thus, in the endeavour to attain truly intersectional outcomes, these are foundational requirements for ensuring that these essential conversations are productive, respectful, and genuinely inclusive.

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