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# 15. Intersectional inequalities and how to fight them

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## Abstract:

This chapter discusses how different systems of social inequality – such as those related to gender, marital status, and social class – intersect and create intersectional inequalities experienced by groups and individuals. As an example, we discuss inequalities experienced by women working on their husbands' coffee farms in Tanzania. Intersectional theory helps us to understand how systems of inequality have emerged historically and enables us to look for solutions for more responsible organising. However, as most of the intersectional research is American- and European-focused, the chapter highlights the necessity to explore contexts in the Global South on their own terms, openly discussing the social categorisations that need to be considered.

## Introduction

This chapter discusses how different systems of social inequality – such as those related to gender, marital status, and social class – intersect and create intersectional inequalities experienced by groups and individuals. As an example, we discuss inequalities experienced by women working on their husbands' coffee farms in Tanzania. Understanding how and why unequal systems have emerged helps in fighting them. We argue that equality needs to be promoted at the local level, in organising families and societies, as well as at the structural level, including in legislation and frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This chapter addresses several SDGs in the context of responsible coffee production (SDG 12): in addition to promoting gender equality (SDG 5) and reducing inequalities (SDG 10), we address quality education (SDG 4) and decent work (SDG 8).

The strengths of intersectional analyses lie in the simultaneous focus on multiple social categorisations and related inequalities, and the emphasis on the role of power relations in causing social inequalities (Collins & Bilge, 2016, pp. 1–13). By recognising power relations that are causing inequalities, our chapter addresses some of the shortcomings of the concept of diversity discussed in Chapter 3. In addition, our discussion highlights the necessity to explore contexts in the Global South on their own terms, openly discussing the social categorisations that need to be considered in intersectional analysis.

## Intersectionality as an analytical lens

The concept of intersectionality is an attempt to refocus diversity research and practical equality and diversity work. Many critical researchers (Castro & Holvino, 2016; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Lykke, 2010) and practitioners alike use the term intersectionality instead of, or in addition to, diversity. We draw on a Nordic scholar, Nina Lykke (2010), who defines intersectionality as a tool to analyse how historically specific kinds of power differentials and constraining normativities – based on categorisations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age, and dis/ability – interact and produce societal inequalities and unjust social relations.

In comparison to the concept of diversity, the strengths of intersectionality are that it reminds us of power relations as a cause of social inequalities and of the need to focus on multiple social categorisations at the same time. It is not enough that one focuses on diversity of people; one also has to consider how these diversities are used in constituting a myriad of inequalities. With its roots in the inequalities experienced by black women in the USA (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991), intersectionality also emphasises the need to discuss racism and colonialism.

However, there are some precautions that need to be considered before applying intersectional analysis in African contexts. Although intersectional analyses have been used by many authors globally, including many authors in the Global South, most research that uses the term intersectionality is American- and European-focused. African contexts need to be explored on their own terms; the range of meaningful social categorisations may be considerably different to the earlier literature (Meer & Müller, 2017). For example, we consider the category of marital status, which is explored less in American and European intersectional research but very meaningful in our Tanzanian example. The specific history of Tanzania must be considered in investigating how the current power differentials and inequalities have emerged.

Often, intersectional inequalities have emerged when practices, structures and legislation are designed for those who fit into the prevalent norms that usually reflect dominant groups in the society at the current time. For instance, colonial times and norms during those times have influenced the current (irresponsible) organisation of coffee production in Tanzania. Although gendered divisions of labour were not invented only by colonial powers, the colonial state – as well as the post-colonial state today – were complicit in efforts to sustain patriarchal structures of power, which underpin the local peasant economy (Mbilinyi, 2016). The current way of irresponsible organising benefits not only the former colonial powers that enjoy coffee products in the Global North, but also certain (although not all) local groups of men in the coffee industry in Tanzania.

## Intersectional inequalities in Tanzania

> *I used to sell my coffee through a colleague for many years. One day I gave her about ten kilograms. She never gave me the payment. I couldn't complain since it was a stolen coffee from my husband.* (Participant in coffee theft network, as cited in Komba, 2021).

We draw on the socio-economic histography of coffee production in the Mbinga district in Tanzania, written by Yustina Komba (2021), and discuss why married women are still today

excluded from reaping the benefit of their labour in coffee production. Coffee has historically been a male dominated product, with women being side-lined from collecting income despite their labour being crucial in coffee production (Fowler-Salamini, 2002; Komba, 2021). Due to their exclusion, women may end up selling coffee unofficially without telling their husbands, as described in the extract above.

Coffee is a significant export product for Tanzania, generating five per cent of its total export earnings and contributing about three per cent of Tanzanian GDP. As smallholder farms produce nearly 90 per cent of the coffee, it provides a direct income to approximately 400,000 households. It is a crucial income for many families and helps in achieving various SDGs (Pyk & Hatab, 2018). For instance, coffee is an important source of income for farmers to pay their children's school fees (Anderson et al., 2016).

However, all people involved in growing coffee do not benefit equally. As shown in the histography of coffee production in the Mbinga district (Komba, 2021), women hold a weak position in coffee production due to patriarchal land tenure systems and farming practices. When coffee production was introduced during the colonial era, only men were given coffee seeds to plant, as they were considered permanent residents on the land while women were considered temporary residents because they would get married and relocate. Due to patrilineal inheritance, married women owned neither their fathers' nor husbands' land (Komba, 2021). Reforms to the Tanzanian land act were made in 1999 to ensure a more equitable distribution of land, but the reforms did not touch the general statutory recognition of customary laws that govern women's inheritance of land (Dancer, 2017).

Despite their inability to own land and coffee farms, women have always worked on their fathers' or husbands' farms, doing nearly everything alongside them. During the colonial era, there were only a few tasks, which women were not considered suitable for. These tasks included pest control and pruning, which were considered more "professional" and hence masculine, and required training that only men could receive during that time (Komba, 2021, p. 237). The inequal distribution of agricultural education further contributed to the exclusion of women in key areas of coffee production and decision making. Both women and men were, however, irrigating seedlings, planting them, weeding, mulching, using fertilisers, harvesting coffee, pulping, drying, sorting, and delivering coffee to the market centres, and selling it. Despite this, women were not allowed to collect the payments by themselves – a legacy that continues today.

The intersection of gender, marital status, and social class creates exploitation of women in coffee production. Although today women can legally own land, many women working in their husbands' coffee farms do not have the resources to purchase land, which their brothers or husbands often have inherited. By rendering them unable to own land, the women are also excluded from co-operative unions that are the primary means for coffee selling and marketing decisions.

Since coffee is a cash crop for export, coffee farmers are a bit better off compared to some other groups of smallholder farmers. However, most of them are still rather poor; most coffee farmers rely on family labour to produce coffee and own less than five acres of land (Ruben et al., 2018). Many coffee producers lack social safety nets and are vulnerable to global price fluctuations, increasing input prices, and climate change. As an example, when faced with medical bills or school fees, many smallholder coffee farmers are forced to sell their produce at unprofitable prices. Smallholder farmers produce 95 per cent of the coffee in Tanzania but only gain 41 per cent of the value, the rest going to other players in the value chain (Ruben et

al., 2018). These economic and social conditions, together with patriarchal systems, contribute to keeping married women in smallholder farming as unpaid labour on their husbands' farms, without having a voice in coffee production.

Recently, the number of women in cooperatives in Mbinga have increased to meet the requirements of certifications such as Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance (Komba, 2021). However, reforming existing inequalities requires a combination of efforts. In the case of Tanzanian agricultural labour, repealing discriminatory customary laws of inheritance, combined with education and societal engagement in these reforms would improve the position of women in land tenure practices (Dancer, 2017). In addition, increasing women's educational level would improve women's share in land ownership and increase agricultural labour returns (Palacios-Lopez et al., 2017). Agricultural training of both women and men is also important and improves the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices and increases agricultural returns (Pyk & Hatab, 2018). Furthermore, initiatives that promote equality and equity at family level such as Kahawa ya Kesho, which promotes gender equality and joint decision making (at family level) among smallholder coffee farmers (Baxter, 2019), are needed to improve women's position in agriculture.

## Conclusion

We have used an intersectional approach and historical research to analyse inequalities experienced by married women working for their husbands' coffee farms in Tanzania. Our example highlights that it is crucial to critically examine which are the relevant social categorisations to include in the analysis in each local context. In our Tanzanian example, it was relevant to consider the intersection of gender, marital status, and social class, even though marital status is mostly not mentioned in the American- and European-focused literature. While the coffee example demonstrates the inequalities (SDGs 5, 10) that exist in agricultural labour and income in Tanzania, the core of the problem lies in how society is organised around land ownership, provision of education (SDG 4), division of labour, and family decision making. Also, specific colonial and post-colonial histories of Tanzania are relevant for understanding how power differentials related to social categorisations have emerged in this context and continue to operate today.

An intersectional approach encourages to examine how various inequality systems impact simultaneously. Although women can legally own land in Tanzania – and some unmarried or widowed women smallholder farmers or women from higher social classes do – owning land is very difficult for married women in smallholder farming because they often lack means to earn income to purchase land. Decent work (SDG 8) for these women would mean that they could profit from their labour and be included in decision making in the co-operatives.

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