

Examining the intersectionality of gender, COVID-19 and artificial intelligence (AI) in health decision making in Kenya and Malawi

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Introduction

The Gender Action Learning is a technical research project of the SIDA/IDRC's Global South Artificial Intelligence (AI) for COVID-19 (AI4COVID) program. Global South partners with support from Gender at Work and Lady Smith aim to build capacity to gain new insights on gender equality and intersectionality (GEI) and integrate in our AI research into a change project in Kenya and Malawi.

The Gender Action learning experiment will identify pathways to speak to the challenges in getting adequate data on gender and intersectional issues for in-depth analysis of those risks. AI models and algorithms have inherent biases linked to either gender or other intersectionalities.

The approach is based on an action-learning premise and can be more efficiently addressed through engaging various stakeholders who are collecting information on COVID-19 in the process of developing the tool, and also on the need for gender and intersectionality sensitive information. The strategy consists of evidence-based engagement, co-design of the tool and raising



awareness consistently with stakeholders. The Pandemic has impacted different genders disproportionately, particularly in low-income households. School closures, unpaid care-work sexual and gender-based violence and low access to EdTech (Education Technology) affected female participation in education and work.

Exploring intersectionality for COVID-19 mapping

Intersectionality is a research paradigm that seeks to "move beyond single or typically (e.g. sex, gender, race, etc) factors to consider simultaneous interactions between different aspects of social identity, as well as the impact of systems and processes of oppression and domination."

Intersectional analysis, therefore, enables a multi-faceted exploration of how factors of privilege and penalty may alternate between contexts or occur simultaneously. It means that instead of assuming people as homogenous groupings consisting of women or men, male or female, it requires stakeholders to delve deeper and ask specific questions to understand different overlaps with varied forms of systemic discrimination, such as racism, ableism and homophobia, to increase barriers to basic rights and services. It is this intersectionality that has affected how different genders have experienced the COVID19 pandemic, both directly and indirectly.

With regards to Gender Intersectionality, it may mean probing further to understand “which women/men and girls/boys” and “how” gender inequality interacts with other barriers to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRH).

The Approach

COVID-19 remains a threat to the entire world. In an attempt to curb its spread and facilitate its treatment, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being explored as a potential alternative to conventional data collection methods.

The application of this technology is to enhance healthcare provision and access by ensuring evidence-informed decision-making. In collecting and analyzing accurate COVID19 data, governments can formulate and implement responsive strategies for current and future pandemics.

The Gender Intersectionality (GI) Tool

The tool is a checklist used as a guide to ensure stakeholders including experts, developers and analysts get adequate information to incorporate gender and intersectionality in the data life cycle which includes data investments, collection, processing, analysis and use.

The tool aims to ensure that data goes beyond counting the numbers to address the unintended risks and consequences of communities that are excluded or under-represented (from incomplete data collection). The tool is co-designed with stakeholders in the policy domain and dedicated to gender and social justice domains including grassroots organizations. It includes what should be done, who and what might be involved in the co-design and mechanisms for monitoring and mitigation. The tool will inform rules that guide models and algorithms to be gender and intersectionality sensitive.



Policy Asks

- Recognize that the COVID-19 Pandemic is more than just a health issue, and therefore its impact on different groups is dependent on various issues, key among which is gender.
- Aligning different initiatives, within the public and private sectors, to provide an all-around perspective on the Pandemic for future forecasting and planning. This includes greater gender mainstreaming at all levels of governance including the involvement of the National Gender and Equality Commission.
- Developing accountability tools to monitor and evaluate the adoption of the GI tool in COVID-19 data collection and overall response; and, the establishment of Communities of Practice (CoPs) at different levels.
- Leveraging on the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (Kenya) and National Commission for Science and Technology (Malawi) mandate to ensure that the GI tool (with minimum disaggregation categories) is incorporated in the data collection and analysis process.
- Engagement with stakeholders to report progress regularly on gender and intersectionality (with a minimum of annual reporting).



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