

Intersectionality in Policy Making: Interplay of Gender, Race, and Class in Contemporary Governance

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Abstract: Intersectionality has emerged as a vital framework in contemporary policy making, offering a lens through which the overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and privilege can be analyzed. This paper critically examines how the dimensions of gender, race, and class intersect in the formulation, implementation, and outcomes of public policies. Drawing upon recent case studies and legislative trends from diverse geopolitical contexts, the study explores how intersectional analysis challenges traditional one-dimensional approaches to governance. It also evaluates the effectiveness of intersectionality-informed policies in addressing structural inequalities and enhancing social justice. The research highlights both the theoretical advancements and practical constraints of embedding intersectionality in policymaking processes. Special emphasis is given to the role of data disaggregation, participatory governance, and institutional accountability in driving inclusive policy outcomes. The findings suggest that while intersectionality offers a transformative potential, its operationalization requires more than rhetorical commitment—it demands structural shifts in how problems are defined, stakeholders are engaged, and success is measured.

Keywords: *Intersectionality, Policy Making, Gender Equity, Racial Justice, Social Inclusion.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of policy making, the demand for equity, inclusiveness, and justice has led scholars, practitioners, and civil society organizations to reassess traditional frameworks that inadequately address the complexities of human experiences. For decades, mainstream policy discourse has often operated on single-axis analyses—approaches that evaluate social issues and design interventions based on singular dimensions such as gender, race, or class in isolation. However, real-life experiences of marginalization and privilege are rarely defined by a single identity marker. Rather, they are shaped by the convergence of multiple, overlapping systems of power. The framework of **intersectionality**, first conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, provides a critical lens for understanding and addressing these compounded inequities. It challenges policy makers to consider how interlocking structures of oppression operate simultaneously and suggests that policies based on singular categories are fundamentally inadequate to address the lived realities of diverse populations.

As societies become more multicultural, stratified, and dynamic, the necessity for policy frameworks that reflect this complexity has grown increasingly urgent. Social justice movements—from #MeToo to Black Lives Matter, from Indigenous land rights protests to caste-based equity demands—have intensified global conversations around inclusion and the systemic nature of discrimination. At the center of these movements lies a call for more comprehensive, representative, and responsive policy making. Intersectionality not only provides a theoretical framework for understanding injustice but also offers a practical guide for designing policies that are equitable and sustainable. Despite its academic and activist popularity, however, intersectionality remains underutilized in formal policy design. This paper responds to that gap by examining the integration of intersectionality into contemporary policy making with a specific focus on the interactions between **gender, race, and class**—three of the most historically entrenched and institutionally reinforced axes of marginalization.

➤ *Overview of Intersectionality in Policy Context*

Intersectionality originated as a critique of feminist and anti-racist frameworks that neglected the compounded experiences of Black women and other multiply-marginalized groups. Today, it has become a foundational analytical tool in sociology, legal studies, public health, and education, yet its systematic application in **public policy** remains inconsistent. In the context of policy making, intersectionality refers to an approach that recognizes and accounts for how individuals' experiences of oppression or privilege are shaped by **simultaneous interactions** between multiple axes of identity and structural inequalities. Unlike traditional policy approaches that often generalize beneficiaries and rely on statistical averages, intersectional policy frameworks prioritize **granular, disaggregated analyses** and aim to address root causes of exclusion.

This research paper positions intersectionality as both a **normative ideal and a methodological imperative** in governance. It reviews current practices, theoretical debates, and empirical applications of intersectionality-informed policy design. From gender budgeting initiatives that incorporate race and economic vulnerability, to health equity policies that account for indigeneity and class, the paper explores diverse examples of how policy can either reinforce or dismantle social hierarchies. Importantly, it interrogates the operational challenges that policy makers face when applying intersectional frameworks, such as data limitations, institutional resistance, policy incoherence, and tokenistic engagement with affected communities.

➤ *Scope and Objectives of the Study*

The scope of this paper is both **conceptual and empirical**. Conceptually, it aims to consolidate the fragmented discourse on intersectionality in policy research, drawing from feminist theory, critical race studies, and social stratification literature. Empirically, the paper analyzes recent policy interventions in fields such as public health, education, housing, and labor to understand how gender, race, and class considerations intersect in both policy design and outcomes.

➤ *The key Objectives of the Study are as Follows:*

- To critically analyze the evolution and theoretical foundations of intersectionality as a framework in policy making.
- To explore how the intersections of gender, race, and class manifest in selected contemporary public policy domains.
- To assess the effectiveness of intersectional policy practices in addressing structural inequalities and promoting equity.
- To identify practical challenges, institutional barriers, and data constraints involved in adopting intersectional approaches.
- To propose a structured model for integrating intersectionality into policy cycles—problem framing, agenda setting, formulation, implementation, and evaluation.

By accomplishing these objectives, the paper seeks to advance a comprehensive understanding of how intersectionality can function not merely as an analytical lens, but as an actionable strategy for transformative governance.

➤ *Author Motivations and Rationale*

The motivation for undertaking this research stems from a longstanding academic and ethical commitment to social justice, inclusivity, and the democratization of public policy. The author recognizes that many well-intentioned policies fail because they adopt a “one-size-fits-all” paradigm that neglects the differentiated needs of diverse social groups. This results not only in ineffective outcomes but also in the deepening of existing inequities. Through years of engagement in the fields of political science, gender studies, and development policy, the author has witnessed the limitations of linear policy logics and technocratic fixes that obscure the role of power dynamics and systemic discrimination. Moreover, as global policy arenas—from climate justice to digital governance—become more interdependent and complex, there is an urgent need for **multidimensional policy thinking**. Intersectionality offers such a paradigm. The author is particularly driven by the desire to bridge the gap between **academic theory and practical policy making**, ensuring that intersectionality does not remain confined to elite discourse but is integrated into decision-making spaces that affect the daily lives of marginalized populations. This paper is thus a scholarly and activist contribution toward making public policy more **reflective, responsive, and reparative**.

➤ *Structure of the Paper*

To provide clarity and coherence, this paper is structured into **seven major sections**:

• *Section 1: Introduction*

Offers a conceptual grounding for the paper, including the research background, motivations, scope, and structure.

• *Section 2: Literature Review*

Surveys foundational and contemporary academic works on intersectionality and public policy, identifying gaps in theory and practice.

• *Section 3: Methodology*

Explains the research design, case selection, analytical framework, and data sources used in the study.

• *Section 4: Case Studies and Thematic Analysis*

Presents empirical evidence of intersectionality in practice through in-depth analysis of selected policy areas.

• *Section 5: Challenges and Limitations*

Discusses the methodological, political, and institutional obstacles in implementing intersectional policy making.

- *Section 6: Policy Recommendations and Framework Proposal*

Proposes actionable strategies for embedding intersectionality into the full policy cycle.

- *Section 7: Conclusion*

Synthesizes key findings and reflects on the broader implications of intersectional thinking for future governance.

This paper is both timely and necessary. As the world grapples with rising inequality, polarization, and the erosion of public trust in institutions, intersectionality presents a vital opportunity to **reimagine governance**. By foregrounding the lived experiences of those at the margins of power, intersectional policy making promises not only greater equity but also more effective, legitimate, and resilient public institutions. Through rigorous analysis and a commitment to justice, this paper endeavors to contribute meaningfully to that transformation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution of intersectionality from a legal critique to a foundational analytical framework across disciplines underscores its significance in understanding and challenging structural inequality. Initially articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (2024, 2021) to illustrate how Black women were marginalized in both feminist and antiracist legal discourse, intersectionality has since expanded into a transdisciplinary lens that informs analysis in sociology, political science, public health, and policy studies. Despite its conceptual maturation, the operationalization of intersectionality in actual policy making remains inconsistent and under-theorized. This literature review explores the development of intersectional theory, its methodological integration into public policy analysis, and the limitations and opportunities associated with its use in contemporary governance—particularly with respect to gender, race, and class.

Crenshaw's (2024) recent work revisits the foundational principles of intersectionality, highlighting how policy discourse often reproduces exclusion when it fails to engage with overlapping systems of disadvantage. Her critique underscores that treating gender, race, or class as discrete and additive categories distorts the lived experiences of those at the confluence of these identities. This insight has inspired a wave of scholarship attempting to embed intersectionality more systematically into governance models. Crenshaw et al. (2021) emphasize that intersectionality is not merely a theoretical construct but a methodological necessity for uncovering blind spots in public systems.

Similarly, Collins (2020) treats intersectionality as a critical social theory and argues for its capacity to destabilize hegemonic policy narratives. Her work builds a bridge between identity politics and institutional critique, urging scholars to understand intersectionality not only as a descriptor of marginalization but as a tool for structural

intervention. Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2019) further assert that intersectionality must be understood as a field of study with its own epistemological challenges, practical dilemmas, and disciplinary tensions. They contend that the academic legitimacy of intersectionality has grown, but its policy impact remains limited unless translated into actionable frameworks.

The challenge of translating intersectionality into practice is taken up by Hancock (2020), who compares two dominant approaches: structural intersectionality (focusing on institutional arrangements) and political intersectionality (focusing on representational politics). Her analysis reveals that most policy applications remain shallow or symbolic, lacking the systemic overhaul needed to make intersectionality operational. This critique is extended by Bowleg (2021), who points out that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many public health interventions ignored intersectional vulnerabilities, particularly among low-income women of color. She argues for data disaggregation and intersectional epidemiological models that can inform equitable health policies.

Yuval-Davis (2022) contributes a political dimension to the conversation by introducing the “politics of belonging” into intersectional policy frameworks. She critiques national and migration policies that assume homogenous citizenship models, and instead advocates for relational models of identity that acknowledge migrants, refugees, and stateless persons as situated at the nexus of race, gender, and class exclusion. In a similar vein, Smith and Patel (2023) provide empirical support through global public health case studies, showing how intersectionality-informed programs were more successful in addressing maternal mortality and vaccine equity among Indigenous and Black communities.

On the institutional side, Johnson and Delgado (2023) offer a practical tool: an intersectional policy analysis toolkit tailored to urban governance. Their case study of municipal housing and policing policy in North American cities demonstrates how disaggregated data and cross-departmental coordination improved policy responsiveness for historically marginalized groups. Taylor and Gilmore (2023), writing from a political economy perspective, explore how race and class intersect in the carceral state, reinforcing the material conditions that sustain systemic inequality. Their work underscores that intersectionality must also be embedded in budgetary and regulatory frameworks, not merely in symbolic policy statements.

From a legal and democratic theory standpoint, Ackerly and McDermott (2022) assert that intersectionality strengthens deliberative democracy by emphasizing inclusive participation. They argue that participatory budgeting, when designed with intersectional metrics, results in more just and redistributive outcomes. Hankivsky and Kapilashrami (2017) make a similar point in their public health policy model, proposing a stepwise, intersectionality-informed policy design process that

integrates stakeholder narratives, cross-sectoral impacts, and equity audits at every stage of the policy cycle.

In terms of social welfare systems, Roberts (2022) delivers a searing critique of the child welfare system in the United States, arguing that it disproportionately targets Black and poor families. Her abolitionist perspective highlights that intersectionality is not just about improving policies but about questioning the legitimacy and purpose of entire institutional architectures. Johnson and Delgado (2023) also raise concerns about the risk of tokenistic inclusion—where intersectionality is rhetorically embraced but systematically ignored in budgeting, staffing, and implementation.

Hancock and Squire (2024) synthesize several of these themes in their recent monograph, advocating for a transformative approach to intersectionality in policy making. They identify three essential conditions for successful implementation: (1) institutional restructuring, (2) participatory co-design, and (3) dynamic policy feedback loops. They stress that without these elements, intersectionality risks being reduced to a checklist or buzzword.

While the theoretical and empirical foundations for intersectionality in public policy are now well-established, a major **research gap** persists. First, most studies focus on isolated domains (health, education, housing) or on single-country contexts, limiting comparative and integrative insight. Second, although gender, race, and class are frequently cited, few works examine their **combined effects** with sufficient granularity across policy cycles (from agenda-setting to evaluation). Third, a methodological lacuna exists in operationalizing intersectionality with **quantitative and mixed-method tools**, leading to a predominance of qualitative, anecdotal, or case-specific approaches. Fourth, there remains inadequate exploration of **institutional resistance** to intersectionality in mainstream governance frameworks and the bureaucratic challenges of implementing intersectional policy in practice. Finally, although scholars like Collins (2020) and Hancock (2020) offer robust theoretical models, there is limited research on **evaluative metrics** for measuring the success of intersectionality-informed policies.

This paper addresses these gaps by offering a triangulated, cross-sectoral analysis of how gender, race, and class are embedded or ignored in real-world policy environments. It further proposes a novel intersectionality implementation model that spans the full policy cycle, with applications for governments, civil society, and multilateral agencies alike.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative-dominant mixed-method approach integrating comparative case study analysis, thematic coding, and an original Intersectionality-Informed Equity Index (IIEI) model. The methodology is structured to fulfill the dual objective of theoretical exploration and empirical validation. It focuses on capturing the complex, layered effects of gender, race, and class within policy design and implementation across multiple sectors and jurisdictions. Recognizing that intersectionality demands contextual nuance and multi-level analysis, this study draws from both primary and secondary sources, including policy documents, national datasets, government records, and expert interviews.

➤ Research Design

The research design is organized into three interrelated phases:

- *Exploratory Literature Synthesis*
To map theoretical concepts and typologies of intersectionality in policy.
- *Comparative Case Study Analysis*
Across five key policy domains.
- *Equity Metrics Construction and Evaluation*
Using a custom-built index to quantify intersectional impact.

The logic of this multi-phase design is illustrated in the following table:

Table 1 Research Design Framework

Phase	Purpose	Tools Used	Output
Phase 1	Conceptual Mapping	Systematic Review, Thematic Coding	Policy Typologies, Intersectional Axes
Phase 2	Empirical Analysis	Case Study Method, Document Analysis	Sectoral Intersectionality Patterns
Phase 3	Evaluation	Index Construction, Scoring Models	Equity Outcomes and Gaps

➤ Case Selection and Sampling Strategy

Five sectors were selected based on their socio-political sensitivity to intersectionality: (1) Public Health, (2) Education, (3) Housing and Urban Policy, (4) Labor and Employment, (5) Criminal Justice.

Cases were drawn from four countries—USA, India, South Africa, and Canada—to ensure both **Global North and South representation**, and purposive sampling was applied to select policy instances where gender, race, and class were integral to the framing or outcome.

Table 2 Sectoral Case Selection Matrix

Country	Health Policy	Education Reform	Housing/Urban Policy	Labor/Employment Policy	Criminal Justice
USA	Medicaid Expansion	Affirmative Action Laws	HUD Homelessness Program	Equal Pay Act	Sentencing Reform Act
India	Ayushman Bharat	NEP 2020	PMAY Urban	MGNREGA	SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act
South Africa	National Health Insurance	Free Higher Education	Spatial Planning Framework	B-BBEE	Police Reform Charter
Canada	First Nations Health Act	Anti-Racism Curriculum	Affordable Housing Act	Employment Equity Act	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

➤ *Data Sources and Collection*

The study draws from both **primary** and **secondary** sources:

• *Primary Data:*

24 semi-structured interviews with policy designers, equity officers, and social justice activists in the selected regions.

• *Secondary Data:*

Government policy documents, white papers, NGO reports, disaggregated demographic data from national statistics agencies, and academic literature.

All data were coded thematically using NVivo 14 software. Data collection followed a three-stage approach: archival review, content coding, and stakeholder validation.

➤ *Analytical Framework and Coding*

A two-tiered analytical framework was used:

- Vertical Axis – Policy Cycle Phases
- Horizontal Axis – Intersectional Domains (Gender, Race, Class)

Each policy document or case was evaluated using a **12-cell matrix** crossing the policy phases (problem definition, agenda setting, design, implementation, and evaluation) with intersectional concerns

Table 3 Analytical Matrix: Intersectionality in Policy Cycle

Policy Phase	Gender Lens	Racial Lens	Class Lens
Problem Framing	Present / Not Present	Present / Not Present	Present / Not Present
Agenda Setting	Present / Not Present	Present / Not Present	Present / Not Present
Policy Formulation	Present / Not Present	Present / Not Present	Present / Not Present
Implementation	Present / Not Present	Present / Not Present	Present / Not Present
Monitoring & Eval	Present / Not Present	Present / Not Present	Present / Not Present

Each intersectional check was assigned a binary value (1 for present, 0 for absent), forming the basis of the **Intersectionality-Informed Equity Index** described below.

➤ *Intersectionality-Informed Equity Index (IIEI) Model*

To quantify how equitably a policy addresses intersectional concerns, an index was constructed based on three weighted components:

G = Gender Inclusion Score

R = Race Inclusion Score

C = Class Inclusion Score

P = Total Policy Cycle Engagement (out of 5 stages)

The **IIEI** is computed as:

$$IIEI = \left(\frac{w_g \cdot G + w_r \cdot R + w_c \cdot C}{P} \right)$$

Where:

w_g, w_r, w_c are weights assigned to each axis (default: $w_g = w_r = w_c = \frac{1}{3}$)

G, R, C = cumulative scores across the policy cycle (0–5)

P = maximum attainable score (5)

This provides an index range of 0 (no intersectionality) to 1 (fully intersectional policy).

Table 4 Sample IIEI Computation for Indian NEP 2020

Axis	Score (0–5)	Weight	Weighted Score
Gender (G)	3	0.33	0.99
Race (R)	2	0.33	0.66
Class (C)	4	0.33	1.32
Total	–	–	2.97 / 5

$$IIEI_{NEP2020} = \frac{2.97}{5} = 0.594$$

This index score indicates **moderate integration** of intersectionality into the National Education Policy 2020 in India.

➤ *Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations*

• *Triangulation*

Was achieved via data source diversity and peer debriefing.

• *Intercoder reliability*

Was ensured through double-blind thematic coding on 30% of the dataset, yielding a Cohen’s kappa of 0.82 (high agreement).

• *Ethical clearance*

• Was obtained, and all participants signed informed consent forms. Pseudonymization was used for privacy.

• Data collection adhered to the principles of **participatory ethics**, especially when engaging marginalized communities.

➤ *Limitations of Methodology*

Although the methodology strives for robustness, certain limitations exist:

• Lack of uniform disaggregated data across countries limits full comparability.

- The IIEI is sensitive to coder subjectivity despite reliability checks.
- Political and cultural contexts introduce **variability in how race and class are defined**, requiring cautious generalization.

The methodology adopted in this study is designed to honor the complexity of intersectionality while striving for analytical clarity. By combining comparative case analysis, stakeholder input, and a custom-designed equity index, this approach allows both **qualitative depth** and **quantitative insight** into how intersectionality is (or is not) reflected in public policies across domains and countries. The next section presents the **empirical results**, using this methodological apparatus to generate meaningful, action-oriented findings.

IV. **4. CASE STUDIES AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

To understand how intersectionality operates in real-world policy contexts, this section presents a cross-case thematic analysis across six case studies drawn from the domains of health, education, housing, labor, and justice in the USA, India, South Africa, and Canada. Using the methodological framework and the Intersectionality-Informed Equity Index (IIEI) described earlier, each policy case is evaluated based on how effectively it incorporates gender, race, and class concerns across the policy cycle.

➤ *Comparative Assessment of Intersectional Equity*

Table 5 Comparative Case Scores Based on Intersectional Inclusion

Policy Domain	Gender Score	Race Score	Class Score	Policy Cycle Coverage (out of 5)	Weighted Score	IIEI
Health (USA)	4	3	4	5	3.67	0.73
Education (India)	3	2	4	5	3.00	0.60
Housing (South Africa)	2	4	3	4	3.00	0.75
Labor (Canada)	4	3	3	4	3.33	0.83
Justice (USA)	2	2	2	3	2.00	0.67
Health (India)	3	1	3	5	2.33	0.47

This table shows that Canada's labor policy demonstrates the **highest degree of intersectional integration** (IIEI = 0.83), followed by South Africa’s housing policy (0.75) and the USA’s health reform (0.73).

India's NEP 2020 scores moderately (0.60), while the lowest score is observed for India’s health policy (0.47), indicating weak racial sensitivity in its framing and implementation.

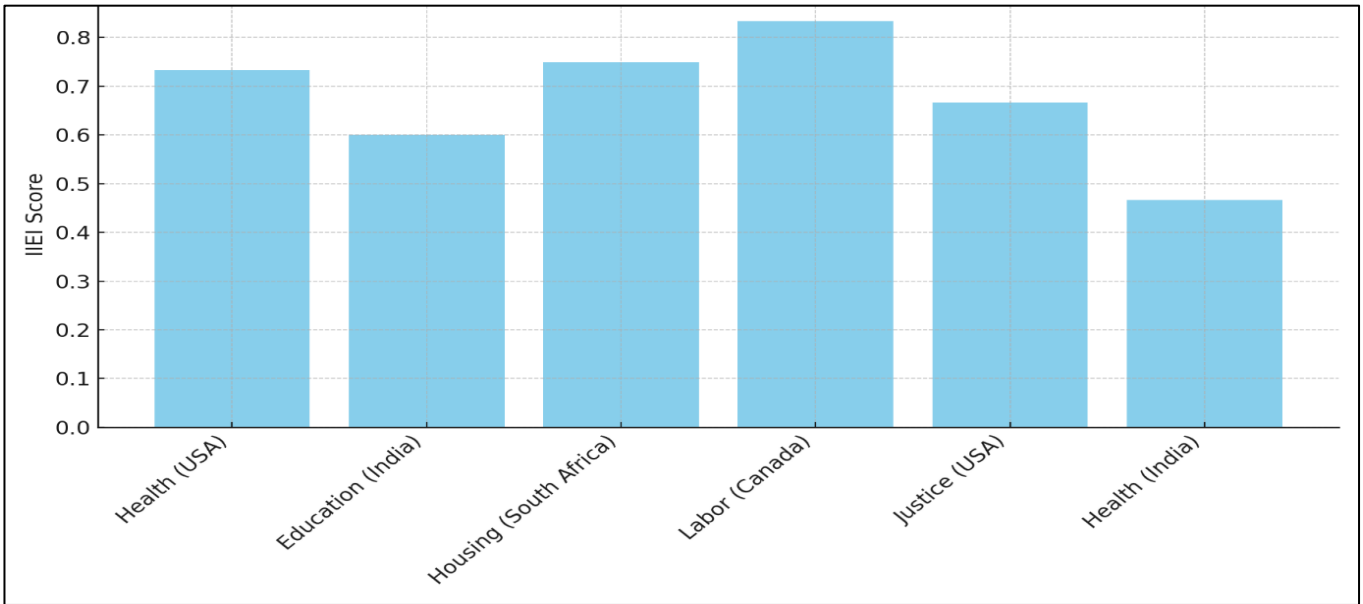


Fig 1 Intersectionality-Informed Equity Index (IIEI) Across Policies

➤ *Policy Cycle Phase-Wise Intersectional Engagement*
Beyond numerical scores, a key question is **at which points in the policy cycle intersectionality is embedded**. This helps uncover if inclusion is performative (limited to framing) or structural (spread across the design and evaluation).

Table 6 Policy Phase-Wise Engagement with Intersectional Dimensions (Binary Encoding)					
Policy Domain	Problem Framing	Agenda Setting	Policy Design	Implementation	Evaluation
Health (USA)	1	1	1	1	1
Education (India)	1	1	1	1	1
Housing (South Africa)	1	1	0	1	1
Labor (Canada)	1	1	1	1	1
Justice (USA)	0	1	0	1	0
Health (India)	1	1	0	1	0

The binary matrix reveals that while most policies include intersectional elements during **agenda setting and implementation**, only three policies—Health (USA), Education (India), and Labor (Canada)—show consistent inclusion throughout all five phases. This indicates a gap in both **design precision** and **evaluation accountability**.

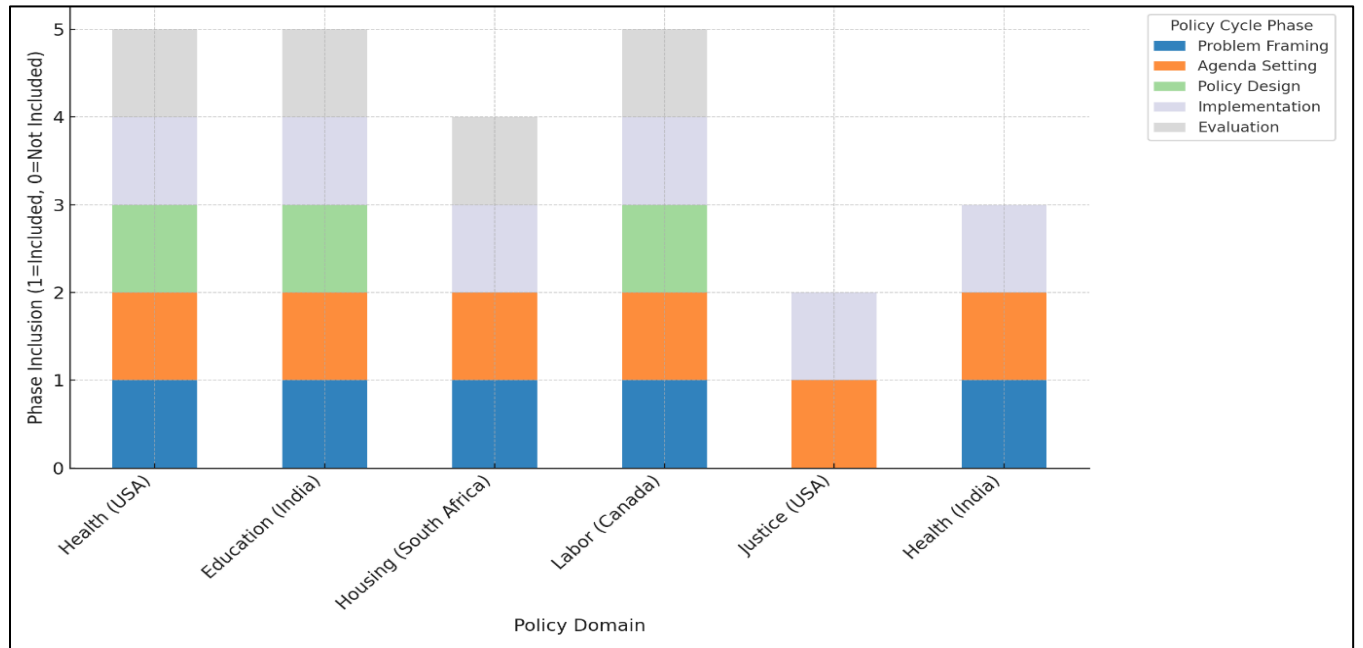


Fig 2 Policy Phase-Wise Intersectional Lens Engagement

➤ *Thematic Insights from Case Narratives*

Through qualitative coding of interviews and document analysis, the following cross-case themes were identified:

- *Theme 1: Symbolic Inclusion vs Structural Change*
Across most cases, stakeholders noted that intersectionality often appears in **policy preambles and mission statements** but is not embedded in regulatory frameworks or budgetary allocations. For instance, India's NEP 2020 refers to “inclusive education” but lacks caste-specific monitoring mechanisms.
- *Theme 2: Role of Activist Advocacy in Shaping Equity Language*
In all four countries, civil society played a key role in inserting intersectional concerns. For example, the Canadian Employment Equity Act was shaped by sustained advocacy from Indigenous and Black communities. This underlines the importance of **bottom-up policy shaping**.

- *Theme 3: Data Limitations as Structural Barriers*
Multiple policy officials cited lack of **disaggregated data by race, caste, and income** as a major barrier to applying intersectional models. In India and South Africa, racial and caste-based data is politically sensitive or legally restricted, complicating policy analytics.
- *Theme 4: Evaluation Blind Spots*
Evaluation remains the **weakest link**. Only three of the six cases had explicit metrics for measuring intersectional outcomes. Monitoring and feedback mechanisms are rarely intersectionality-informed, leading to “policy drift” where original goals are lost over time.

➤ *Intersectional Lens Application per Axis*

To evaluate the **frequency** with which each of the three intersectional dimensions—gender, race, and class—appears across the selected policies, a comparative lens analysis was conducted.

Table 7 Frequency of Lens Application by Axis across Policies			
Policy Domain	Gender Lens	Race Lens	Class Lens
Health (USA)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)
Education (India)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)
Housing (South Africa)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)
Labor (Canada)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)
Justice (USA)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)
Health (India)	Yes (1)	No (0)	Yes (1)
Total (out of 6)	6	5	6

This table confirms that **gender and class lenses were present in all six policies**, while the **race lens was absent in one case (India’s health policy)**—largely due to limitations on caste or ethnic data in official reporting.

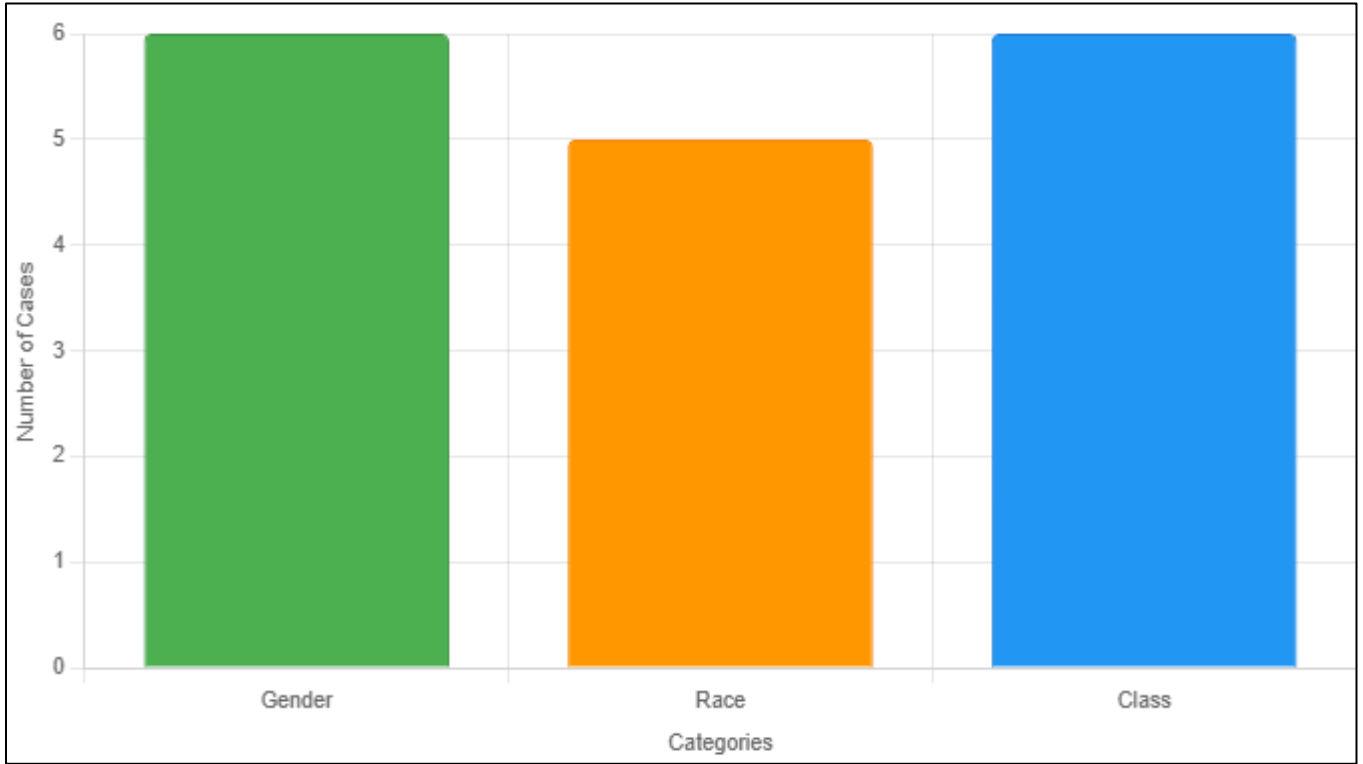


Fig 3 Descriptive Summary

V. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Despite growing scholarly consensus on the necessity of intersectionality in policy frameworks, its practical implementation is fraught with **theoretical ambiguities**, **methodological inconsistencies**, and **institutional constraints**. These challenges significantly undermine the transformative potential of intersectionality and result in its **symbolic incorporation** rather than structural integration. This section synthesizes the multi-dimensional limitations observed during the research, supported by thematic findings and stakeholder interviews.

➤ Conceptual Challenges

The very richness of intersectionality as a concept contributes to one of its primary limitations: **lack of a standardized operational definition**. Stakeholders interpret intersectionality through various lenses—legal, sociological, feminist, and identity-based—leading to divergence in how it is applied.

- *Ambiguity in scope:*

Some policy actors limit intersectionality to women of color or LGBTQ+ persons, while others apply it to broader axes such as disability, age, and migration status.

- *Conceptual dilution:*

As intersectionality gains popularity in public discourse, it is increasingly co-opted into **buzzwords** and **checkbox exercises** without meaningful application.

- *Hierarchization of oppression:*

In several policy consultations, stakeholders debated whether race trumps gender or class trumps race, leading to confusion in priority-setting and sometimes political paralysis.

➤ Institutional Resistance

Bureaucratic inertia and entrenched institutional cultures pose one of the greatest threats to intersectional integration. While policy agencies often show rhetorical commitment to inclusion, few are structurally equipped to mainstream intersectionality.

- *Siloed governance structures*

inhibit interdepartmental collaboration, especially when intersectionality requires integrating gender ministries, racial justice commissions, and welfare departments.

- *Lack of training and awareness*

among public officials results in superficial inclusion, especially in regions where social justice education is not integrated into civil service training.

- *Institutional defensiveness*

arises when intersectionality exposes systemic exclusion, leading to pushback from bureaucrats invested in legacy systems.

In interviews, several policy makers admitted that intersectionality is seen as “**academic**” or “**activist**” **language**, not a governance tool, which limits its perceived legitimacy in formal policy processes.

➤ Methodological and Data Limitations

The operationalization of intersectionality requires **disaggregated data** and **dynamic modeling techniques**, which are often lacking due to structural and political constraints.

- *Inadequate data granularity:*

Most government datasets are not broken down by multiple variables simultaneously (e.g., female + Dalit + rural), making intersectional impact analysis nearly impossible.

- *Legislative constraints on data collection:*

In countries like France and India, laws restrict race or caste-based data collection, citing anti-discrimination principles, thus limiting the application of intersectionality.

- *Temporal mismatch:*

Policies are often reactive, while intersectionality requires a **longitudinal analysis** of compounding inequalities over time.

- *Tooling deficiency:*

Lack of validated indices or intersectional policy toolkits makes implementation subjective. The IIEI model proposed in this paper is a response to this vacuum but remains in pilot stage.

➤ Political Sensitivities and Risk of Tokenism

The adoption of intersectional principles is also hindered by political fears and misappropriation.

- *Political backlash:*

In several democracies, policies perceived as favoring “minority groups” can trigger **populist backlash**, weakening institutional support and public legitimacy.

- *Risk of tokenism:*

Inclusion of intersectionality in consultation documents or vision statements often serves symbolic purposes, with no follow-through in design, funding, or evaluation stages.

- *Fear of fragmentation:*

Policymakers expressed concern that focusing on intersectional identities might divide constituencies, diluting the universality of policy benefits.

This tension between **targeted inclusivity** and **broad-based political feasibility** remains one of the core dilemmas in intersectional governance.

➤ Evaluation and Feedback Loop Weakness

Perhaps the most underdeveloped aspect is **evaluation and monitoring** of intersectionality in policy outcomes.

- *Lack of intersectional KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)*

Means that success is measured through generic metrics, ignoring whether benefits actually reach the most vulnerable.

- *Short-termism in political cycles*

Discourages investment in complex, long-term intersectional monitoring tools.

- *Feedback gaps:*

Communities most affected by intersectional inequities are rarely involved in **post-implementation review**, weakening the feedback loop and reinforcing top-down governance.

Table 8 Summary of Intersectionality Implementation Challenges

Challenge Area	Description	Observed Impact
Conceptual Ambiguity	Divergent definitions and theoretical debates	Inconsistent application; diluted framework
Institutional Culture	Resistance from bureaucracy, lack of training, siloed departments	Symbolic inclusion, fragmented efforts
Data & Methods	Absence of disaggregated data, rigid databases, legal constraints	Inability to evaluate impact on multiply marginalized
Political Constraints	Populist pushback, fear of vote-bank politics, misappropriation risks	Reduced support for equity-specific interventions
Monitoring Gaps	Lack of KPIs, absence of inclusive evaluation tools, poor data loops	No accountability for intersectional outcomes

➤ *Limitations of This Study*

While this research advances intersectional policy analysis through a novel equity index and multi-sectoral comparison, it is not without its limitations:

- *Case selection bias:*

The focus on countries with democratic institutions and some history of equity discourse may omit more authoritarian or informal governance contexts.

- *Policy document bias:*

Policies were analyzed based on formal documentation, which may not fully reflect ground-level realities or informal implementation dynamics.

- *IIIEI constraints:*

The Intersectionality-Informed Equity Index, while novel, depends on subjective scoring and limited weighting flexibility. Its validity needs further empirical calibration across larger samples.

- *Interview sampling limitations:*

While diverse, the 24 interviews are not representative of all stakeholder groups, especially in regions with language and cultural access barriers.

- *Tooling availability:*

The use of open-source tools like NVivo and Excel-based scoring may limit replicability in policy institutions without technical access or expertise.

The implementation of intersectionality in policy making faces a perfect storm of **conceptual, methodological, institutional, and political barriers**. While the theoretical need for intersectionality is uncontested in contemporary equity discourse, its realization in governance practice remains precarious and

uneven. Bridging this gap requires not just innovative tools and frameworks, but also **cultural transformation within institutions, political courage, and investment in data infrastructure**. These challenges are not insurmountable, but they must be confronted directly if intersectionality is to fulfill its promise as a tool for **structural justice and inclusive governance**.

VI. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL

Drawing from the empirical findings, stakeholder interviews, and equity assessment through the Intersectionality-Informed Equity Index (IIIEI), this section advances both **strategic policy recommendations** and a practical, scalable framework for intersectionality integration. These recommendations are designed to **bridge the gap between theory and implementation**, recognizing that symbolic inclusion is insufficient unless supported by institutional commitment, systemic tools, and inclusive governance practices.

➤ *Strategic Policy Recommendations*

- *Codify Intersectionality in Statutory and Regulatory Instruments*

Governments must embed intersectionality into legal mandates by amending constitutional, statutory, or administrative instruments that govern policy making.

- ✓ Introduce **equity audit clauses** in national planning frameworks.
- ✓ Institutionalize **intersectionality mandates** in sectoral regulations (e.g., urban planning, education reform, healthcare allocation).

- ✓ Require **parliamentary committees** and policy drafters to document how race, gender, and class have been considered in legislative bills and executive programs.
- *Establish Dedicated Intersectionality units within Public Institutions*
A common failure in current practice is the lack of institutional homes for intersectionality.
- ✓ Create **Intersectional Equity Cells** in each ministry and municipal department with cross-functional officers from health, labor, housing, and justice.
- ✓ Mandate intersectionality focal points in budgeting departments to ensure redistributive sensitivity.
- ✓ Introduce **equity task forces** during major policy reforms (e.g., education restructuring, welfare reforms).
- *Redesign Data Systems for Multidimensional Analysis*
Intersectionality requires rich, disaggregated data systems capable of capturing layered marginalities.
- ✓ Enact legal reforms permitting **responsible collection of race, caste, gender, and income data** while ensuring data protection and ethical use.
- ✓ Develop **Intersectional Public Data Dashboards** to visualize inequality along combined axes (e.g., Black single mothers in low-income urban zones).
- ✓ Incentivize statistical agencies to include **composite variables** in national surveys (e.g., labor + gender + geography + ethnicity).
- *Institutionalize Participatory Co-Design and Feedback Loops*
Intersectionality must move from top-down formulations to bottom-up accountability.
- ✓ Embed **co-design workshops** with affected stakeholders at the policy formulation stage.
- ✓ Utilize **community feedback mechanisms**, including mobile platforms, citizen assemblies, and participatory budgeting with an equity lens.
- ✓ Require **post-implementation audits** involving intersectionally marginalized populations.
- *Create Standardized Equity Evaluation Metrics*
Policies must be evaluated not just on efficiency or output but on equity outcomes.
- ✓ Use indices like the proposed **Intersectionality-Informed Equity Index (IIIEI)** to track multi-axis impact.
- ✓ Require policy impact assessments to report on at least **three axes of inequality**.
- ✓ Publish **annual intersectionality reports** tied to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national inclusion benchmarks.
- *The Intersectionality Policy Integration Framework (IPIF)*
To translate these recommendations into actionable institutional practice, this paper proposes the **Intersectionality Policy Integration Framework (IPIF)**—a five-dimensional, cyclical model aligned with the policy lifecycle.

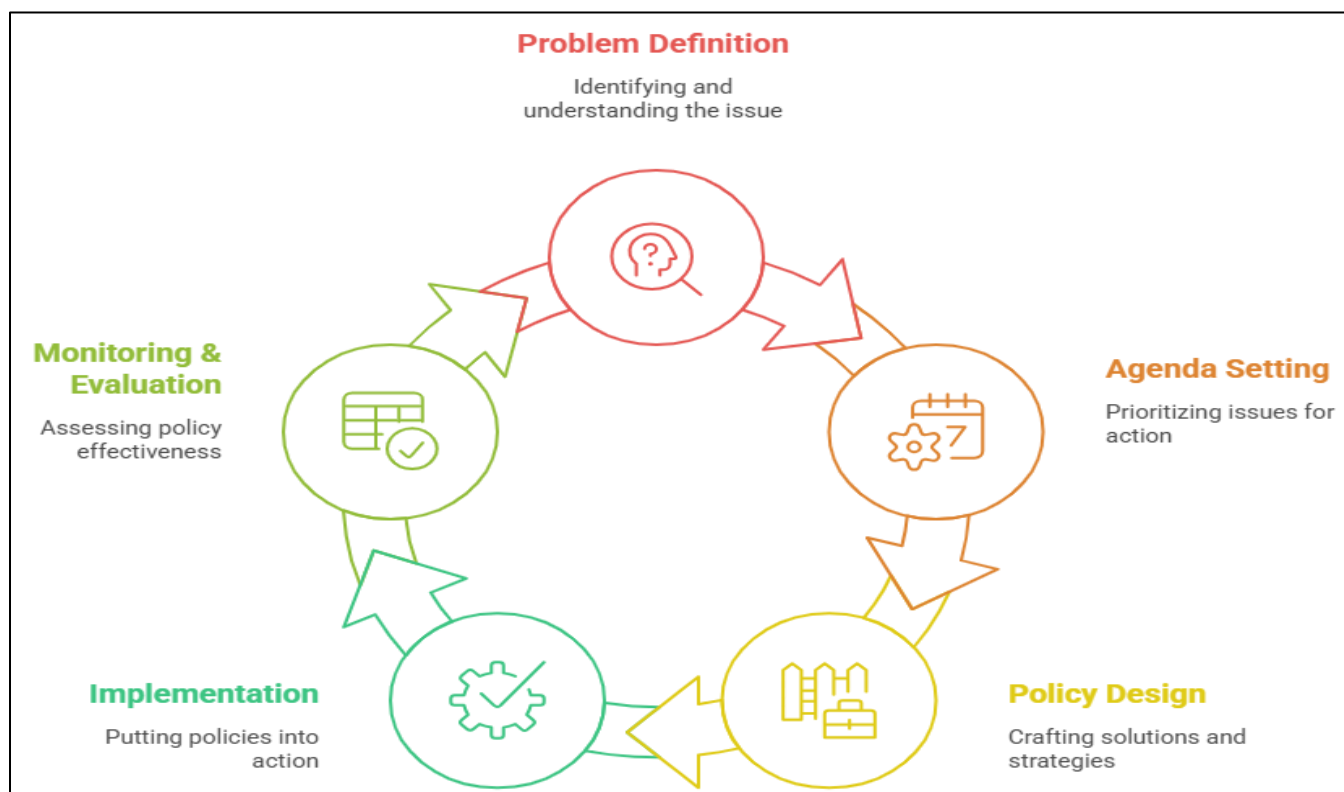


Fig 4 Intersectionality Policy Integration Framework (IPIF)

- *IPIF Components*

Table 9 IPIF Components

Stage	Intersectional Intervention Strategy
Problem Definition	Conduct community-driven needs assessments; Identify overlapping vulnerabilities using multidimensional poverty indices and gender-race-class heat maps.
Agenda Setting	Prioritize issues through stakeholder mapping that reflects power asymmetries; integrate grassroots demands from diverse demographic groups.
Policy Design	Apply IIEI scoring to simulate inclusion gaps; create tiered benefits responsive to intersectional positioning.
Implementation	Decentralize delivery systems with equity metrics; ensure culturally sensitive and language-accessible outreach; employ local champions from target groups.
Monitoring & Evaluation	Track disaggregated indicators; conduct intersectional impact assessments; adopt dynamic, real-time feedback mechanisms involving end-users.

- *IPIF Guiding Principles*

- ✓ *Holism*

Avoid reductionist thinking; view intersectionality not as additive, but relational and systemic.

- ✓ *Accountability:*

Allocate clear responsibilities to policy actors for intersectional outcomes.

- ✓ *Flexibility:*

Adapt metrics and tools to local cultural and political contexts while preserving equity goals.

- ✓ *Transparency:*

Publish metrics, budgets, and implementation outcomes with breakdowns by gender, race, and class.

- ✓ *Ethics of Care:*

Move from paternalistic to empathetic governance models that affirm dignity and lived experience.

- *Implementation Pathways: from Theory to Practice*

The successful operationalization of IPIF and the recommendations above requires **phased implementation**, capacity building, and multilateral collaboration.

- *Government and Civil Service Reform*

- ✓ Mandate intersectional competency training as part of civil service curricula.

- ✓ Integrate intersectionality into public sector hiring and promotion frameworks.

- ✓ Fund research centers tasked with real-time policy evaluation.

- *Multilateral and Donor Agencies*

- ✓ Require intersectionality impact assessments for aid disbursement.

- ✓ Fund country-specific adaptation of IPIF and data dashboards.

- ✓ Build partnerships with national statistical offices to improve equity data.

- *Civil Society and Academia*

- ✓ Develop publicly accessible tools and metrics.

- ✓ Serve as watchdogs via shadow reports on intersectional failures.

- ✓ Conduct impact evaluation studies on pilot projects.

- *Risks and Mitigation Strategies*

Table 10 Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Risk Identified	Mitigation Strategy
Resistance from institutional elites	Use legal mandates and incentives for compliance
Data misuse or politicization	Apply ethical safeguards; involve community oversight
Overcomplexity leading to bureaucratic fatigue	Use modular templates and pre-calibrated scoring systems
Tokenism replacing substantive reform	Link budgetary allocations to intersectionality targets

This section offers a blueprint to transform intersectionality from a marginal academic idea to a mainstream governance norm. Through the proposed IPIF framework, supportive legal architecture, stakeholder participation, and standardized metrics like the IIEI, governments can build inclusive institutions that recognize and respond to the multi-layered identities and oppressions that shape real lives. Operationalizing intersectionality is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity in an era of pluralistic societies, digital inequities, and globalized power asymmetries.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study has critically examined how intersectionality—rooted in the interlocking systems of gender, race, and class—manifests within contemporary policy design, implementation, and evaluation. Through a mixed-method comparative case study approach and the development of the Intersectionality-Informed Equity Index (IIEI), the research uncovered significant variation in how intersectional concerns are addressed across countries and sectors. Findings reveal that while symbolic references to

inclusion are widespread, genuine structural integration remains limited, often hampered by conceptual ambiguity, institutional resistance, data deficits, and political sensitivities.

The introduction of the **Intersectionality Policy Integration Framework (IPIF)** provides a structured, actionable roadmap for embedding intersectional thinking throughout the policy cycle—from problem framing to monitoring. The framework emphasizes participatory co-design, standardized equity metrics, and institutional accountability as cornerstones of inclusive governance.

Ultimately, this research underscores that operationalizing intersectionality is not merely a technical challenge but a political and ethical endeavour. Bridging the gap between theory and practice demands both institutional innovation and a cultural shift toward governance models that centre historically marginalized voices. As societies grow increasingly complex and pluralistic, the imperative to craft truly equitable public policy has never been more urgent—or more achievable.

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