

AMPLIFY RIGHTS NETWORK

FIGHTING FOR BODY RIGHTS SINCE 1933

**Case study – Intersectional feminist
perspectives in practice**



INTRODUCTION

The Amplify Rights Network (ARN) is a network of ten (10) diverse community based and national Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) actors in Liberia advocating to advance SRHR for all. They work together to provide a platform for information dissemination, sharing experiences, evidence, good practices, and learnings on SRHR, initiate and participate in national collective advocacy strategies, contribute to national debates, and develop consulted and commonly agreed positions and advocacy strategies around SRHR-related issues. As one of the leading SRHR networks within Liberia, the ARN also focuses on supporting communities, key populations, and other marginalized groups in advocating for the advancement of SRHR for all. Member organizations of the ARN work with diverse groups of people across various contexts. These groups include girls, women, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ individuals, as well as urban, rural, and slum communities.

The ARN member organizations are:

1. Community Healthcare Initiative (CHI), serving as the Chair.
2. West Point Women for Health and Development (WPWHD), co-Chair.
3. Youth Alive Liberia (YAL)
4. Paramount Young Women Initiative (PAYOWI)
5. Civil Society Human Rights Advocacy Platform (CSO Platform)
6. Inclusive Development Initiative (IDI)
7. Women in Media Development (WIMDEV)
8. Rural Women Rights Structure (RWRS)
9. Liberia's Initiative for the Promotion of Rights, Identity, Diversity, and Equality (LIPRIDE)
10. Consortium for Strengthening Abortion-Related Research Capacity and Evidence in Liberia (CoSARL)

RFSU hosts the ARN network Hub and coordinates the Network. This entails sharing knowledge and information, supporting member organizations and contributing to the implementation of activities, facilitating the liaison with donors, mapping competencies in the network and monitoring and evaluation the work of the network.

COLLECTIVE WORK

The collective work of the AR network is grounded on:

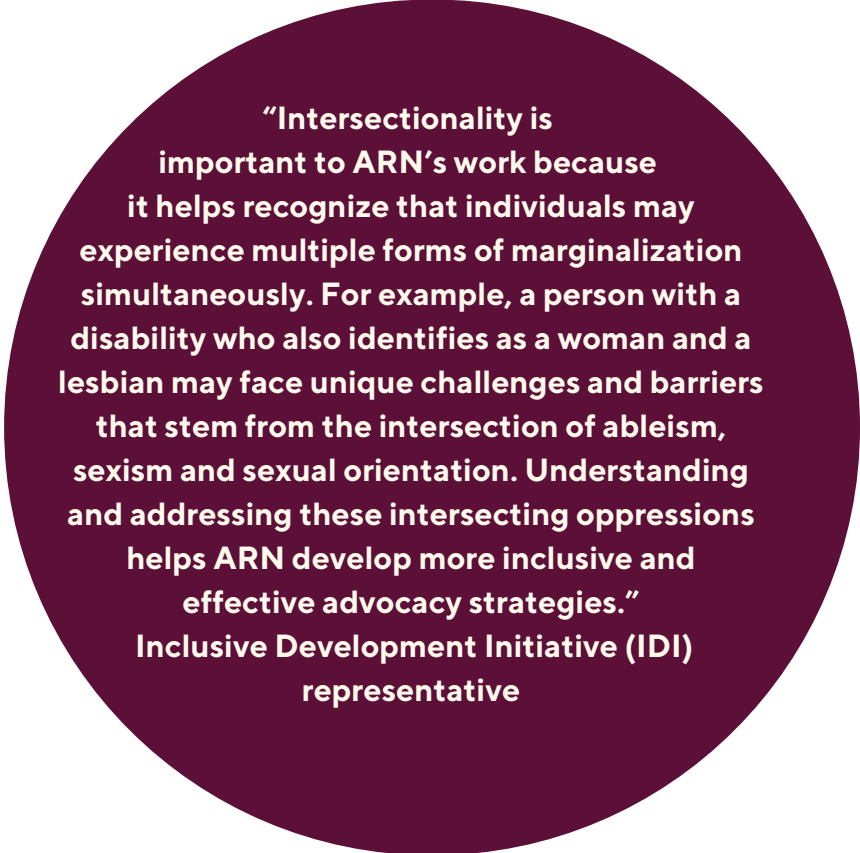
1. The diversity of its membership: ARN comprises member organizations that represent a wide range of communities. This diversity ensures that the network's advocacy efforts are informed by the experiences and perspectives of various groups including marginalized groups experiencing intersecting forms of oppression.
2. A commitment to an intersectional analysis: ARN acknowledges that individuals experience oppression and discrimination along multiple axes, including gender, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status, and geographic location among others.

3. It's engagement with different contexts: ARN works with individuals and communities from diverse contexts, including urban, rural, and slum communities. This engagement acknowledges the unique challenges and vulnerabilities faced by marginalized groups in different settings and seeks to address their specific needs and concerns.
4. It's partnership model: ARN collaborates with a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, government agencies, media outlets, research institutions, and human rights CSOs. These partnerships enable ARN to leverage resources, expertise, and networks to advance its intersectional advocacy goals and amplify the voices of marginalized communities.
5. Inclusive decision-making: ARN promotes inclusive decision-making processes that prioritize the voices and experiences of marginalized communities. By ensuring that diverse perspectives are represented in its leadership and decision-making structures, ARN strives to address the complex and intersecting forms of oppression faced by marginalized groups.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Although intersectionality is a newer framework that the network is integrating into its work, ARN members recognize intersectionality as:

1. A framework to understand the complexities of oppression and discrimination of different groups such as rural women, persons with disabilities or impoverished youth.



"Intersectionality is important to ARN's work because it helps recognize that individuals may experience multiple forms of marginalization simultaneously. For example, a person with a disability who also identifies as a woman and a lesbian may face unique challenges and barriers that stem from the intersection of ableism, sexism and sexual orientation. Understanding and addressing these intersecting oppressions helps ARN develop more inclusive and effective advocacy strategies."

Inclusive Development Initiative (IDI) representative

2. A guide for inclusive advocacy efforts that avoid siloed approaches and build solidarity among diverse communities, thus supporting the development of more inclusive, equitable, and effective interventions that address diverse needs and experiences.

“People living with HIV often face multiple forms of discrimination based on intersecting factors such as gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and disability. Intersectionality helps us to recognize and address these intersecting forms of discrimination, ensuring that our programs and advocacy efforts are inclusive and responsive to the diverse experiences of our constituents.”

**Youth Alive Liberia (YAL)
representative**

“This allows us to approach issues from multiple angles and consider a wide range of viewpoints, which enriches our understanding of complex social issues and strengthens the quality of our advocacy and programming efforts.”

**Civil Society Human Rights
Advocacy Platform on Liberia
representative**

3. A framework that allows members to adopt more inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches to data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

“ By considering the intersecting identities and experiences of research participants, we can produce research findings that accurately reflect the realities of diverse populations in Liberia. An intersectional approach to research also allows us to generate evidence that can inform policy and advocacy efforts aimed at improving access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare services, including safe and legal abortion care.”

Consortium for strengthening abortion related research capacity and evidence in Liberia representative

STRENGTHENING THE LENS OF SRHR IN LIBERIA

An example of the ways in which the ARN partners have brought forward important intersectional analysis of their context is the conference “Strengthening the Lens of SRHR in Liberia” that the Network organized and hosted between May 26–28, 2023. This Conference was a joint effort with ARN, the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU), and other SRHR actors in Liberia. It brought together 700 attendees. The Conference brought together diverse stakeholders, including government officials, civil society organizations (CSOs), youth, community, religious and traditional leaders, policymakers, government officials, business leaders, healthcare service providers, members of the security apparatus, academics, international organizations, UN agencies, development partners, activists, and other distinguished individuals to raise awareness, foster productive discourse and advocate for comprehensive SRHR reforms in Liberia.

The SRHR conference fostered engagement and dialogue among different stakeholders and rights holders. It provided various educational platforms, including discussions, panels and presentations tailored to different age groups and contexts. The event aimed to a) raise awareness on SRHR in the country, and b) identify key issues for strengthening the local SRHR agenda through advocacy and clarification of complex issues.

The first day of the Conference entitled “Upholding Rights and Choices,” focused entirely on setting the stage. This included providing an overview of the SRHR challenges faced by diverse groups in Liberia, creating spaces for right holders and service providers to learn, unlearn and discuss these issues.

The second day entitled “Strive to look Forward with a Reflection on the Past,” provided right holders with the platform to engage with a range of stakeholders. Strategic stakeholders were identified and selected from the Government, development partners, private sector, international organizations, and SRHR experts to reflect on their SRHR journey, present evidence and data to identify opportunities and specific funding needs to reach those furthest behind.

The third day of the convening entitled “Raise Collective Voices and Demand Rights,” started off with a 1-hour walk where sexual and reproductive health and rights were brought into the public eye. Participants took to the streets and walked as a united front. The conference culminated with a Joint Position Statement and Call to Action for upholding rights and choices.

A HISTORIC SPACE

ARN members recognize the “Strengthening the Lens of SRHR in Liberia”, conference as a historic moment in the country’s advocacy work on SRHR issues and as a prime example of how ARN members worked together to highlight the intersecting forms of discrimination faced by marginalized communities, including women, youth, LGBTQI people, persons with disabilities, and individuals living in slum communities, and in urban and rural areas.

Conversations about the intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression faced by marginalized communities were central to the event. The conference spotlighted the pressing needs of persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups from various contexts and intersecting identities, recognizing these needs as fundamental human rights issues deserving urgent attention and action. These complex challenges were underscored throughout the different sessions and in the Joint Position Statement and Call to Action.

The Conference marked a significant shift from previous SRHR conferences, when it came to the public recognition of the LGBTQI community. The community was publicly acknowledged and its members were recognized as individuals entitled to fundamental human rights, instead of being labeled as HIV victims or part of the key populations. Their voices, needs and concerns were integrated into the broader call for action.


The conference also made important strides when it came to accessibility as it was the first national conference to use sign language. Sign language interpretation services facilitated the active participation and direct advocacy of youth and people with hearing impairments. The conference served as a platform for individuals with various disabilities, from different contexts including rural and urban settings, to have their voices heard and their concerns addressed as an essential part of the SRHR agenda.

CHALLENGES WITH CROSS-MOVEMENT WORK

Reflecting on the success of this first Conference, the different layers to cross-movement intersectional work, and the ways in which this type of work requires intentional and iterative process of learning, ARN members highlight the following challenges:

Representation and prioritization:

Balancing diverse agendas and at times diverging priorities when engaging in cross-movement intersectional work is complex. Different movements have distinct goals, strategies, and timelines, which can pose challenges in finding common ground and coordinating collective action and collaborating effectively. As shared by the Civil Society Human Rights Advocacy Platform on Liberia representative: “Balancing the need for inclusivity with the need to address specific issues faced by different marginalized groups can be a challenge. This involves considering how to ensure that our advocacy efforts are broad enough to encompass the diverse needs of various communities while also recognizing and addressing the unique challenges experienced by specific populations.”



“Negotiating and reconciling these differences while ensuring that all voices are heard can be a complex process.”

Women in Media Development (WIMDeV) representative

Potential for conflict:

Members also highlighted the fact that given the multitude of intersecting identities and issues within the Network, reconciling differing viewpoints and priorities can be complex and requires careful negotiation and dialogue. Elements identified as contributors to conflict within and between movements included: differences in interests, agendas, ideology, strategy, and approach as well as competing priorities.



“Balancing competing priorities and agendas within cross-movement coalitions can be challenging. Finding common ground and consensus on shared objectives while respecting the autonomy and integrity of each movement requires negotiation and compromise.”

**Civil Society Human Rights Advocacy
Platform on Liberia representative**

Cultural and religious diversity.

It was identified by the Initiative for the Promotion of Rights, Identity, Diversity, and Equality (LIPRIDE) that Liberia's cultural and religious diversity adds another layer of complexity to cross-movement intersectional work. ARN must navigate sensitivities and differences in belief systems while advocating for inclusive and rights-based approaches that respect the dignity and autonomy of all. This challenge becomes more pronounced when advocating for specific communities such as the LGBTI community. Engaging with diverse cultural and religious perspectives while advocating for human rights and equality has been critical. Women in Media Development also recognized that communication barriers such as language differences, cultural norms, and technological limitations can impede cross-movement intersectional work.

Navigating power dynamics within and between different ARN member organizations.

It was recognized by members that intersectional work requires acknowledging and navigating power dynamics within and between different movements and that these differences in power expressed through the different access to resources, visibility, or institutional support, can lead to unequal power dynamics that can marginalize certain voices or perspectives.

Lack of knowledge on specific realities.

ARN members work with diverse constituents, and while some of them may be more familiar with the realities, needs and demands of different populations, gaps are also present. For example, as shared by the representative of the Inclusive Development Initiative : “Many members of ARN may not have a comprehensive understanding of disability rights and the unique challenges faced by people with disabilities. There is a need for continuous education of members to understand the importance of creating

inclusive environments that accommodate diverse abilities and ensure equal participation for all individuals, regardless of their disability status.”

Reliance on donor funding and power dynamics between donors and grantees.

“CSOs frequently rely on donor funding from international development agencies, bilateral donors, foundations, and multilateral institutions to finance their projects and activities. While external funding can provide critical support, it also creates dependency dynamics and vulnerability to fluctuations in donor priorities, funding cycles, and geopolitical dynamics. Donor funding often comes in the form of project-specific grants or contracts, which are tied to specific outcomes, deliverables, and timelines. This project-based funding model can incentivize short-term thinking, program fragmentation, and an emphasis on donor-driven priorities over long-term strategic planning. But we know that awareness for change of mindset and advocacy for inclusive policies and change is a long-term process and requires resources.”


Youth Alive Liberia (YAL) representative

“Sustaining cross-movement intersectional work over the long term can be challenging, particularly in the face of shifting priorities, funding fluctuations, and organizational turnover. Building sustainable partnerships, securing long-term funding, and investing in capacity building are critical for maintaining momentum and achieving lasting impact.”

Women in Media Development (WIMDeV) representative

Intersectional work is resource intensive.

Engaging in cross-movement intersectional work often requires significant resources, including funding, staff time, and organizational capacity. Securing adequate resources and support for inclusive programming and advocacy can be a persistent challenge.



“Limited resources may constrain the ability of organizations to participate fully in collaborative efforts, hindering the effectiveness and sustainability of cross-movement initiatives.”

Rural Women Rights Structure (RWRS) representative

Evaluating change.

As recognized by the representative of Community Health Care Initiative (CHI), evaluating the impact of intersectional work is complex. Measuring progress in addressing intersection forms of discrimination and inequality is not easy for funders or civil society organizations.

LESSONS LEARNT

Despite the challenges described above and the recent formation of the ARN, there are multiple lessons learnt around cross-movement intersectional work that the Network members have. They highlight the importance of:

- Recognizing that developing an intersectional framework and practice is an iterative process. It requires flexibility and adaptation, being open to feedback, critique, and new ideas, and willingness to adjust one's approaches and strategies based on the evolving needs and realities of the communities served. Building trust and solidarity across diverse movements requires time, effort, and commitment.
- Reflecting critically on power dynamics within movements and organizations. Intersectionality requires challenging power dynamics and hierarchies within society and within our own organizations and movements. This involves examining how privilege and oppression operate within different contexts and working to redistribute power in more equitable ways. Addressing privilege, oppression, and systemic inequalities that may exist in structures and practices within organizations and movements by centering the leadership and expertise of marginalized communities.
- Taking time to understand how intersecting identities and systems of oppression shape individuals' experiences and access to rights; without this understanding demands and programs fall short in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable populations.
- Considering questions of representation and voice within advocacy efforts. This involves reflecting on whose voices are being centered in our work, whose perspectives may be missing or marginalized, and how we can ensure that the voices of those most affected by systemic injustices are amplified.
- Striving to create inclusive spaces where diverse voices are heard, valued, and respected. Establishing inclusive spaces for dialogue, acknowledging historical tensions or conflicts, and actively listening to the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups are essential for fostering mutual respect and understanding.
- Actively seeking input and feedback from individuals with intersecting identities to ensure that their perspectives are heard and valued. Fostering relationships and partnerships with organizations and communities representing diverse identities and experiences is central.
- Investing time in learning about intersectionality and its principles and familiarizing oneself with the work of scholars and activists who have pioneered intersectional approaches to social justice and equity.
- Investing in leadership development, and capacity building initiatives that elevate the voices and agency of marginalized leaders within organizations and movements
- Recognizing the strength and power of collective action in addressing intersecting forms of oppression and advancing systemic change. Collaboration with stakeholders from different backgrounds to co-create inclusive and equitable solutions to social challenges is key.

CONCLUSION

The reflections and lessons learnt that ARN have identified through the interviewing process upon which this case study is based highlight the collective knowledge that members hold around cross-movement intersectional work. Despite intersectionality being a newer framework for the Network, an intersectional analysis has been embedded in the ways that members think of power, representation, strategy, resources and collective power. Their reflections offer important clues for other organizations interested in intersectional work that brings together diverse movements and organizations.