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Social Inclusion, Poverty Eradication and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Esuna Dugarova

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UNRISD, Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0)22 9173020
Fax: +41 (0)22 9170650
info@unrisd.org
www.unrisd.org

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Acronyms

GDP	Gross domestic product
ILO	International Labour Organization
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme Act
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSE	Social and solidarity economy
UN	United Nations
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development
USD	United States dollar
WSSD	World Summit for Social Development

Acknowledgements

Summary

The concept of social inclusion, also referred to as social integration or social cohesion, represents a vision for *"a society for all", in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play* (Report of the World Summit for Social Development, 1995). While various definitions have been developed to describe social inclusion, they all have been grounded in the promotion of a normative vision of society, in which individuals, groups or institutions are interconnected within a wider social system, and their relationships are maintained and enhanced in a harmonious way.

This paper refers to social inclusion as a goal, process and outcome. As a universal goal, it aims to achieve an inclusive society that entails respect for human rights, cultural diversity and democratic governance, and upholds principles of equality and equity. As a process, it enables citizens' participation in decision-making activities that affect their lives, allowing all groups to take part in this process, especially marginalized groups. As an outcome, it ensures the reduction of inequalities, elimination of any forms of exclusion and discrimination, and achievement of social justice and cohesion.

Since the concept of social inclusion gained prominence following the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995, there has been a tendency to (i) treat it as an expanded version of "economic" inclusion; (ii) identify exclusion with the marginalization of certain individuals or groups based on their race, ethnicity or gender; and (iii) focus on individual well-being in analysing and measuring social inclusion. Over time, however, it has become evident that, like other social ills such as poverty and inequality, exclusion has multiple causes and takes diverse forms related to age, disability and location, among others. It is therefore important to adopt a more comprehensive approach to inclusion.

Furthermore, there has been a renewed interest in social inclusion, with a number of policies and programmes having been implemented around the world, which highlighted the need for the simultaneous promotion of productivity, poverty reduction and greater inclusiveness. The recognized limits in the Millennium Development Goals have generated calls for more transformative and universal policies that are better integrated across social, economic and environmental domains within a more coherent development framework. The Second UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008–2017) has further reiterated the need to address social exclusion and called for more inclusive approaches to overcome poverty in its multiple dimensions.

In some countries, social programmes are now evolving towards a social inclusion framework, which incorporates (i) access to basic services, particularly health and education, requiring the active participation of beneficiaries in relevant programmes; and (ii) access to economic opportunities with the focus on inclusion in the labour market, with an overarching goal to reduce poverty and vulnerability, particularly among the most disadvantaged groups.

This paper argues that there are three key interrelated areas that are critical for poverty eradication and inclusive development, which include (i) universal social protection; (ii) meaningful participation; and (iii) social and solidarity economy. It discusses some of the main issues related to these areas and provides examples of best practices at the national level that have been implemented during the UN Decades for the Eradication of Poverty.

The paper concludes that it is unlikely that development will be sustainable unless it is inclusive. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development thus needs to be an inclusive plan of action, pursuing the goal of leaving no one behind in a way that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to participate in the processes that impact their lives. Social policies that promote practices based on universal rights-based entitlements, equal and meaningful participation, as well as norms of solidarity and reciprocity, while paying due respect to diversity and the environment, are more likely to enable social inclusion. It is therefore necessary to move away from the use of social inclusion schemes as remedial action towards making them an intrinsic part of broader and coherent development strategies. Government interventions in the form of enhancement of productive capacities, improved access to quality social services, adequate social protection and decent work are crucial to achieving socially inclusive, broad-based and sustainable development.

Under this approach, social policy should be concerned not only with the welfare and rights of an individual but also with supporting social relations, institutions and structures through which the welfare of individuals in their households, communities and nations could be sustained and improved, while recognizing the importance of societal levels of analysis and not simply economic or individual indicators.

The Concept of Social Inclusion

The concept of social inclusion, also referred to as social integration or social cohesion, represents a vision for *"a society for all", in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play* (UN 1995). Social inclusion has been defined as a process in which those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources that are needed to fully participate in societal activities (Frazer and Marlier 2013).[1] In this process, adequate income and employment have been treated as key means to tackle social exclusion, poverty and inequality. Social inclusion has also been seen as a foundation for shared prosperity that characterizes the process of improving abilities, opportunities and dignity of the disadvantaged through access to markets, services and spaces (World Bank 2013). The notion of space in relation to inclusion has been examined for the African continent, where regional disparities are seen as a major obstacle to structural transformation (AfDB 2013; AfDB et al. 2015). Spatial inclusion has been defined here as a goal of connecting people to assets and goods regardless of their location and is argued to be critical for poverty eradication and inclusive growth in the region (AfDB et al. 2015). Social inclusion has also been referred to as the endpoint of overcoming social exclusion, where social exclusion is characterized by the "involuntary exclusion of individuals and groups from society's political, economic and societal processes, which prevents their full participation in the society in which they live" (UN DESA 2010a:1).[2]

While the terms "social inclusion", "social integration" and "social cohesion" are related concepts that tend to be used interchangeably, they do not necessarily mean the same thing. Social integration has been treated both as a goal which aims for a more stable, safe and just society for all, and as a process which entails the participation of stakeholders in decision making that affects their lives (UN 1995). Some have also used the term "social capital" in discussions of social inclusion, to describe networks with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups (OECD 2007). In contrast to social integration, social capital is seen as a means to an end rather than an intrinsic goal. The notion "social ethics" is also sometimes used in relation to these concepts underline the importance of the community of values and solidarity (see, for example, UN ECLAC 2007).

The related concept of social cohesion, while traditionally encompassing shared values or a sense of belonging, has over time expanded towards integrating a wider variety of conditions, interests and identities that exist in societies (Rawls 2002). Some, for instance, have used this concept to promote a society that offers opportunities of upward

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[1] Social exclusion is not coterminous with poverty (see, for example, Gore and Figueiredo 1997; Hickey and Du Toit 2007), as it is possible to be excluded without being poor, or to be poor without being socially excluded, as evidenced by the Indian caste system, or from discriminated minority groups such as the Chinese in Southeast Asia or the Jews in Europe for many centuries (Fischer 2011).

[2] One should also distinguish between voluntary and involuntary social exclusion (Barry 2002). Not everyone necessarily wishes to participate in key activities of society, and some individuals or groups may voluntarily choose to exclude themselves; for instance, a recluse might prefer solitude to human company; certain social or religious groups might emphasize their exclusivity; or the wealthy might lock themselves away in gated communities (Le Grand 2003). In this case, any move to include these groups in societal activities would be against their expressed will and would likely involve some measure of coercion. In this sense, voluntary social exclusion is not necessarily unjust or inequitable because it arises from a conscious choice. In fact, in some situations, people could prefer their "outsider status", as it allows them to define their own values and priorities (Kabeer 2000). However, voluntary social exclusion may be problematic if an individual fails to make a relevant decision that could have negative implications for his/her long-term future, or if the decision damages other people's welfare despite increasing that of the individual (Le Grand 2003). For instance, gated communities could deprive others of what might have been communal facilities and are therefore detrimental to social integration.

social mobility (OECD 2012). For others, it has ensured that all citizens have access to fundamental social and economic rights (Council of Europe 2001). In its regional approach to social cohesion, UN ECLAC (2007, 2010) has incorporated subjective information by emphasizing not only the relationships between the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that involve equity, political legitimacy, institutional factors and values, but also citizens' reactions and perception of how such mechanisms operate.

While all these concepts have been developed from somewhat different perspectives, they have nonetheless been grounded in the promotion of a normative vision of society, in which individuals, groups or institutions are interconnected within a wider social system, and their relationships are maintained and enhanced in a harmonious way.

In discussing social inclusion, one should also be aware of the multispectral nature of "inclusion": inclusion of *whom* (for example, social groups or communities), inclusion of *what* (goods, services, resources), inclusion *into what* (labour market, welfare system or space, whether physical, political, social or cultural), *how* (equally, fairly, voluntarily or involuntarily), for *what purpose* and on *what terms*. Caution is needed regarding the terms on which social inclusion is carried out. Many impoverished and exploited people are in fact included, but on highly adverse terms. In this situation, social inclusion may not be automatically beneficial for the poor, nor is it necessarily wanted by them (Hospes and Clancy 2011). For example, the terms of contract farming arrangements may involve inclusion in value chains that could be detrimental to farmers and result in "adverse incorporation" (Hickey and Du Toit 2007; McCarthy 2010). Furthermore, certain patterns of social inclusion can promote inclusion in economic and political systems that are exploitative, repressive or ecologically unsustainable (Wolfe 1994), or can lead to an unwanted imposition of uniformity (Hewitt de Alcántara 1994) that may undermine a way of living of indigenous peoples, minorities and other social groups and suppress cultural diversity.

If the goal of social inclusion is to achieve a society for all, then it can be seen as an absolute phenomenon. At the same time, inclusion can also be relative in the sense that people, no matter how difficult their situation is, are involved into a broader network of social relations. Thus the problem arises not so much because they are unintegrated into wider social systems, but because present patterns of inclusion promote unjust or destructive outcomes in some situations (Ghai and Hewitt de Alcántara 1994). The challenge for policy is then to ensure that patterns of human relations in a society promote fair opportunities and guarantee equitable outcomes for all.

In this paper, I refer to social inclusion as a goal, process and outcome. As a universal