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Social inclusion, poverty eradication and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development

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

Esuna Dugarova

prepared for the UNRISD project on
Post-2015 Development Agenda

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UNRISD

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous research institute within the UN system that undertakes multidisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues. Through our work we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

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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

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<http://undesadspd.org/Poverty/UNDecadefortheEradicationofPoverty/EGMontheImplementationoftheSecondUNDecade.aspx> (accessed in October 2015).

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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

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 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.³ 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.

³ The term “social inclusion” overlaps with the term “equality” but is not the same (Tilly 1999). There are many ways in which people can achieve fuller participation and inclusion, even if they lack an equal share of resources. At the same time, even people at the higher end of living standards may face social exclusion through political persecution or discrimination based on age, gender, sexual orientation or disability (Warschauer 2003).

Since the concept of social inclusion gained prominence following the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) 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. Such an approach has taken place within a particular economic framework that has prioritized market-led efficiency as the outcome, where the primary purpose of including the poor in the development process was to serve the interests of economic efficiency. It has often been presumed that inclusion in terms of social rights would follow from economic participation in labour markets and adequate income. The opportunities, which the excluded often lacked, were defined principally in terms of paid work or income deficits. In line with this, poverty was narrowly seen from an income point of view, despite the WSSD endorsement of the multidimensional nature of poverty. In this situation, economic activity took precedence over political, social, environmental or cultural activity, and exclusion became to be treated as a consequence of poverty. Policies aimed at inclusion thus brought the excluded back towards economic efficiency that focused on improving individual well-being and reducing poverty in its narrow sense, rather than paying attention to social relations that underpin exclusion and the realization of rights related to security and social protection, adequate standards of living, and participation in various aspects of life. In this context, efforts to analyse and measure social inclusion were essentially limited to variables or indicators that reflected an individual’s access to services or resources and as such could provide little explanation regarding the nature of social relations or institutions. Furthermore, the design and implementation of programmes, which was done primarily through targeting and means testing, had a tendency to undermine social community relations instead of creating social inclusion.

Over time, it has become evident that, like other social ills such as poverty and inequality, exclusion is multifaceted; it has multiple causes and takes diverse forms related to age, disability and location, among others. It cannot therefore be addressed predominantly through economic means. Certainly, paid work and income are necessary conditions but not sufficient to achieve an inclusive society. Furthermore, poverty reduction does not automatically lead to social inclusion, as evidenced from the experiences of large emerging countries such as China and India, where poverty was drastically reduced in recent years but inequalities and exclusion of some groups increased (see, for example, Ghosh 2010). While society certainly consists of individuals, individual outcomes in education or health do not necessarily lead to a cohesive society, and policies that work well in one political and social context may not work well in another, nor do they help address unfair or unequal power relations. It is therefore important to adopt a more comprehensive approach to inclusion by implementing policies that are based on the norms of solidarity and reciprocity, promote equality of both opportunities and outcome, and ensure rights-based entitlements to social services. It should also involve the capacity of social groups to participate in society taking into account economic, social, cultural, religious or gender factors (Dugarova and Lavers 2014). 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 maintained and enhanced, while recognizing the importance of societal levels of analysis and not simply economic or individual indicators.⁴

⁴ See UNRISD 2006 and 2010 for this approach. From a gender perspective, for instance, social relations and power structures can contain deeply embedded gender divisions, in a similar way that

From the World Summit for Social Development to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

As part of the implementation of the WSSD Programme of Action, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997–2006), where the eradication of poverty was seen as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind. The scope of the Decade was broad and inclusive, and built upon the Summit’s comprehensive approach to poverty eradication in the context of achieving people-centred sustainable development (UN 1997). Together with poverty eradication and full employment, the promotion of social integration was set by the Summit as a key objective of development. The WSSD Programme of Action warned that the failure to achieve social inclusion would lead to social fragmentation and polarization, widen disparities and inequalities, and put strain on individuals, families, communities and institutions due to the rapid pace of social change, economic activity, and major population dislocations, particularly in areas of conflicts (UN 1995). It was stressed that policies to eradicate poverty, reduce disparities and combat social exclusion required the creation of employment opportunities, elimination of discrimination and promotion of participation as well as harmonious social relationships among groups and nations.

Despite the WSSD call for inclusive development strategies, the concerns of inclusivity were largely neglected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established following the Millennium Summit in 2000. While the contribution of the MDGs to creating a consensus in the global community around the urgency of addressing poverty has been widely acknowledged, none of the eight goals or accompanying 18 targets has had an explicit reference to inclusion, thus undermining its significance in achieving sustainable development. The focus of the goals has been on selected issues and vulnerable groups rather than on broader economic and social transformations, as well as political and social relations that underpin exclusion.

The recognized limits in the MDGs 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 (UN 2005; UNRISD 2010). 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 (UN 2012a). The successful eradication of poverty requires a transformative social contract that promotes an inclusive society supported by institutions, systemic structures and processes that are necessary to enable people to participate in economic, social and political life (UN 2013a).

Further to the resolution adopted at Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has shown a commitment to the creation of a comprehensive institutional framework for sustainable development that integrates the three dimensions in a balanced manner (UN 2012b). The outcome document of the agenda has explicitly called for the promotion of inclusive societies, institutions and decision making (Sustainable Development Goal/SDG 16), and encouraged social, economic and political inclusion of all as a target to reduce inequalities within and among countries (SDG 10). Furthermore, the new agenda has

they reflect class, ethnic or racial divisions. Inequalities are then the consequence of socially constructed power relations, norms and practices. Real social inclusion will therefore require the fundamental transformation of economic and social institutions, including the beliefs, norms and attitudes that shape them, at all levels of society, from households to labour markets and from communities to local, national and global governance institutions (UN Women 2015).

acknowledged the need for inclusive economic growth (SDG 8) and industrialization (SDG 9), while emphasizing an inclusive approach to quality education (SDG 4) and safe human settlements (SDG 11). It is clear that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development presents a significant step forward compared to the MDGs, both in terms of the consultative process and the outcome document. In contrast to the MDGs, the 2030 Agenda has been developed through open and participatory global consultations involving a wide range of stakeholders, and the outcome document on the SDGs has recognized the need to build an inclusive society.⁵ Yet it remains to be seen how this ambition will be translated into action: how inclusive the actual process of implementation will be and whether it will lead to inclusive and sustainable outcomes that the new agenda aspires to.

Review of Progress and Challenges: Country Experiences

Over the past few decades, the economic growth performance of developing countries as a group has substantially improved, with real GDP growth increasing from 4.7 per cent in 1991–2002 to 7 per cent in 2003–2007 and 5.3 per cent in the post-crisis period 2008–2012 (UNCTAD 2014). Compared with the 1990s, recent growth has led to significant reductions in poverty in developing countries. The proportion of people living on less than USD1.25 a day fell from 47 per cent in 1990 to 27 per cent in 2005 and 22 per cent in 2010 (UN 2013b). There has been progress in the spread of democracy, wider recognition of the need to respect rights and diversity, increasing acknowledgment of the concerns of social groups including indigenous peoples, women and people with disabilities, and expanded economic and educational opportunities. Some countries have attained universal health coverage and expanded social protection programmes for the entire population.

Notwithstanding these instances of progress, today we find ourselves in a world that faces multiple crises, uncertainty and instability. Rising inequalities, unemployment and continued informalization of labour have intensified livelihood insecurities and exacerbated exclusion in many parts of the world, thus undermining the progress already made and threatening social cohesion. Furthermore, despite positive results in poverty reduction in many countries, the absolute number of poor people has grown.⁶ For example, in sub-Saharan Africa the number of poor people rose from 289.7 million in 1990 to 413.8 million in 2010 (UNCTAD 2014).

This state of affairs has led scholars and practitioners to argue that economic growth does not automatically translate into poverty eradication, nor does it lead to inclusive development outcomes.⁷ These developments, along with the transformations and

⁵ Another relevant shortcoming of the MDGs is that they have been viewed through the lens of a North-South divide, with poor citizens in developing countries being the primary target. If “leaving no-one behind” is the litmus test of commitment to social inclusion, justice and equity, it should be applied to developed countries as well (Watkins 2013).

⁶ Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, continues to face major challenges in reducing poverty. The sustained growth in GDP that Africa experienced throughout the First UN Decade on Eradication of Poverty had little impact on poverty reduction or on achievement of the MDGs. Strong growth rates were driven by exports of primary commodities and were not accompanied by the significant creation of employment. Investments were made in capital-intensive industries such as mining and energy, to the detriment of the manufacturing sector, whose share of the African GDP and labour force fell during the 2000s (UNCTAD 2014).

⁷ The fact that recent growth in developing countries has not been inclusive can be attributed to the failure of the existing economic model to create sufficient good-quality jobs and the lack—of weakness—of comprehensive social protection mechanisms.

challenges caused by urbanization, technology advancements, demographic shifts and population ageing, increased migration flows, and rise of environmental disasters and conflicts, triggered 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.

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 marginalized groups (ILO 2014a). Relevant examples here include Bolsa Familia programme launched in Brazil in 2003, Girinka programme introduced in Rwanda in 2006, and Productive Safety Net programme developed in Ethiopia in 2005. Bolsa Familia, for instance, has contributed to the social inclusion of families that were constrained by extreme poverty, stimulated improvements in their education and health, while reducing inequality in income distribution and boosting the economy (Campello and Neri 2014). Rwanda's Girinka (One Cow per Family) programme has improved rural livelihoods by providing better nutrition and stable income to poor families through agricultural production (IFAD 2011), and also contributed to rebuilding social relationships within the community. The Ethiopian Productive Safety Net Programme has led to large-scale poverty reduction and food security through labour-intensive public works for households with able-bodied adults and the provision of direct support for disadvantaged individuals including orphans, persons with disabilities and the elderly (Subbarao et al. 2012). The challenge, however, remains how to make sure that these policies and programmes lead to real social inclusion and the poor are not caught in a vicious circle of poverty and social exclusion.

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. In the section below I will discuss some of the main issues related to these areas and provide examples of best practices at the national level that have been implemented during the UN Decades for the Eradication of Poverty.

Universal social protection

Social protection is concerned with preventing, managing and overcoming situations that adversely affect people's well-being (UNRISD 2010). It consists of policies and programmes that provide access to essential social services such as health and education, and ensure an adequate level of security under multiple contingencies of life related to unemployment, sickness, disability or old age. Social protection mechanisms are an important means of reducing poverty and can be a powerful tool to foster social inclusion, as they not only help prevent individuals and families from falling or remaining in poverty but also enable them to realize their rights and ensure their active involvement in societal processes.

While social protection has often been neglected within national and international development policy circles, it is now gaining wide recognition as an essential contributor to inclusive and sustainable development, as evidenced by various social protection initiatives around the world. In some of these interventions, there has been a shift from a narrow approach to social protection that targets specific vulnerable groups

through cash transfers to more comprehensive social policies—such as universal services and legal entitlements—to income transfers—such as social pensions or child allowances. For example, the Universal Coverage Scheme in Thailand introduced in 2001 achieved full health-care coverage in less than 15 years, thus contributing to better health outcomes, reduction of inequalities and substantial decline in poverty. The experience of Rwanda provides another interesting example of a universal and inclusive approach to social protection (box 1).⁸

Box 1: Inclusive health system in Rwanda

Following the genocide in 1994 that had a devastating effect on Rwanda's society and economy, the government launched a consultative process to create a national development plan called Vision 2020, grounded in the principles of people-centred development and social cohesion. Central to this vision was an inclusive health system for all citizens with equity-oriented national policies. In 2003, the government formalized the right to health in the constitution, recognizing that prosperity would not be possible without substantial investments in public health. As a result, premature mortality rates have fallen sharply and life expectancy has doubled since the mid-1990s. After piloting community-based health insurance and performance-based financing systems in several districts, health coverage was expanded in the mid-2000s to cover the whole nation. The experience of Rwanda provides a remarkable example of how a country rebuilt itself within 20 years of the end of a conflict and achieved substantial health gains from universal coverage. Investing in health has further contributed to shared economic growth as citizens live longer and with greater capacity to pursue their lives in a decent way.^a

Source: Binagwaho et al. 2014.

^a The regime of Rwanda is characterized by some as highly constrained in terms of providing adequate space for exercising basic civil and political rights, and in this sense, it is not completely inclusive. In situations where countries have a limited political space, one should recognize that the political system needs time to evolve, and the evolution has to be gradual and well managed (Golooba-Mutebi and Booth 2013).

In some countries, as part of their social protection arrangements, there has also been a focus on active labour market policies and a rights-based approach to social security and social protection. For example, India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, regarded as one of the world's largest rights-based integrated employment and social protection initiatives, is a powerful tool for inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection and democratic governance, thus contributing to the reduction of vulnerabilities and building resources that empower people, particularly women.⁹ In Mozambique, social protection has been seen as an important strategy for the promotion of inclusive development and social justice with significant advances occurring in equality and universality in citizens' access to health and education. Its Basic Social Security Regulation adopted in 2009, for instance, established the social protection rights of vulnerable groups and promotes social and economic inclusion of people living in poverty through labour intensive public works. The experience of Mexico provides a good example of an integrated approach to social protection and realization of citizens' rights (box 2).

⁸ "Inclusive" and "universal" could be seen as interrelated terms in the sense of "leaving no one behind" and treating all citizens equally. However, inclusive programmes do not necessarily mean universal. For instance, the Brazilian Bolsa Familia or Ethiopian Productive Safety Net programmes are designed to include marginalized individuals and households but they are not universal as they target only the poor population. At the same time, while there exist varieties of universalism (Anttonen and Sipilä 2014), universal programmes are generally meant to include everyone; in this sense, they are inclusive of all people regardless of their socioeconomic background, physical abilities, gender and other characteristics. For development to be truly inclusive, policies and programmes should aim to be both inclusive and universal.

⁹ While India's achievement in democratization is widely acknowledged, some remain sceptical about its capacity to accommodate broader social interests to attain inclusive development outcomes (Nagaraj 2012).

Box 2: Integrated Vivir Mejor Strategy in Mexico

The Vivir Mejor (Live Better) Strategy was established as a response to the 2008 economic crisis to alleviate poverty and inequality, while promoting social cohesion and citizens' participation. It is an integrated social policy strategy that pursues a broader approach to social protection, taking into account the entire life cycle of individuals and their families. Key components of the Vivir Mejor strategy include (i) development of basic skills to guarantee equal opportunities in accessing basic social services for poorest families (programmes in this component include Oportunidades, Nutrition Support and Rural Supply); (ii) development of physical and social environment to promote social cohesion (programmes such as Habitat, Recovery of Public Spaces, Rural Housing, and 3X1 Programme for Migrants); and (iii) linking economic and social development to improve access to formal and well-remunerated work (for example, Child Day-care Centres for Working Mothers and Income-Generating Options programmes).^a The experience of Mexico has been recognized for its achievements in social and human development of people living in poverty. It has shown that in order to successfully address poverty and inequality and realize the social rights of people, programmes need to be embedded into a comprehensive national strategy for social policy within an institutional framework.

Source: ILO and UNDP 2011; ILO 2012.

^a For Mexico's childcare expansion see, for instance, Staab and Gerhard 2010.

These and other experiences indicate that comprehensive social protection programmes not only enhance productivity and raise human capital through the provision of income and social services; they also reduce poverty and inequality in its various dimensions and contribute to achieving more socially inclusive societies. Expanding and consolidating gains in these areas remain crucial for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite this important role of social protection programmes, many people in developing countries continue to lack, or have low levels of access to, social schemes and services. It is estimated that nearly 73 per cent of the global population has no access to adequate social protection that would enable people to pursue decent livelihoods (ILO 2014b). Addressing this challenge should therefore be on the priority agenda of governments if they wish to build inclusive societies in the long run.¹⁰

Meaningful participation

Participation can be defined as “the organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control” (Pearse and Stiefel 1979:7–8). It encompasses involvement in various aspects of life, whether social, cultural, economic or political, by all members of society based on equality of rights and opportunities. Meaningful participation is therefore not only about giving disadvantaged individuals or groups a voice at the table; it is about strengthening their capacity to influence decision-making processes and exercise their claims on external actors and institutions that affect their lives. In this sense, participation is a prerequisite for inclusive development.

¹⁰ There is growing evidence that social protection programmes in developing countries are affordable in countries with relatively limited fiscal space if they are well designed and implemented. For example, the budget for the Bolsa Família programme in Brazil was about 0.4 per cent of GDP in 2009 and covered about 13 million families (UNCTAD 2014). While the cost of social schemes can be substantial, and it is necessary to mobilize resources, policy makers should be aware that there is an opportunity cost to not implementing these programmes. For example, the cost of a well-designed and properly implemented social protection programme is low compared with the cost of not providing social protection in terms of poverty, social exclusion, and low achievements in education and productive capacities (European Communities 2010). Moreover, effective social protection can pay for itself over the long term by enhancing the productiveness of the labour force, the resilience of society and tax revenues (ILO 2011a). Policy makers should realize that the more they invest in social protection, the higher the returns for economy and society in general (Hujó and McClanahan 2009).

While the term of participation has been widely assimilated into mainstream development discourse over past three decades, it has often been reduced to consultations with selective stakeholders or other actors in positions of power (Dugarova and Utting 2013). As a consequence, such processes often sideline organized efforts, despite the fact that more collaborative and participatory processes can facilitate the mobilization of resources, the pooling of competencies, and ensuring synergies that otherwise might not exist. One of the key issues here therefore relates to the need to go beyond such a narrow perspective of participation and open up space to a diverse range of voices.

There are three forms of participation that are particularly relevant for inclusive development: (i) resource mobilization at the local or community level; (ii) access and influence in decision-making and governance processes; and (iii) advocacy by civil society networks to (re-)frame policy debates on development priorities and pathways (Dugarova and Lavers 2014). Such processes of empowered participation may challenge existing structures and relations of power, yet they are crucial for both fair decision making and equitable outcomes and are thus central to achieving an inclusive and sustainable development path (UNRISD 2014a).

Brazil and India provide examples of institutionalizing citizens' participation through the constitution, which opens up spaces for people to participate in the formulation, management and monitoring of policies so that they better reflect citizens' needs.¹¹ Many governments have also used affirmative action policies to promote greater access of disadvantaged or underrepresented groups to public institutions and ensure the equal right to participation and representation of all groups. Quota systems, for instance, are often seen as the most effective way of ensuring proportionate representation of disadvantaged groups in the political process. In Chile, persons with disabilities get 10 extra points when applying for public subsidies or housing programmes, while Brazil has quotas for entry into university for black and indigenous people, and several countries in Latin America guarantee political representation by offering a number of seats in the national legislature on the basis of gender, race or ethnicity (Dani and de Haan 2008).¹² Other good examples of enhancing capabilities of marginalized groups through participatory mechanisms at the local level come from the Indian state of Kerala (box 3) and the Mazowe District in Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe (box 4).

¹¹ While the legal foundation is an important mechanism to ensure people's engagement in decisions that impact on their lives, it is insufficient to achieve inclusive outcomes for all participants (see, for example, Coelho et al. 2005). More effective approaches are therefore needed to recognize the diversity, identities and abilities of local actors to participate in these processes and improve institutional arrangements that help them to do so (Gaventa 2002). In the case of women, for instance, even when gender equality laws have been put in place, entrenched inequalities, discriminatory social norms and harmful customary practices can undermine their implementation and positive effects (UN Women 2015). In this situation, transformations in structures and institutions that constrain women's enjoyment of their rights could be triggered by coordinated public action with regard to redressing women's socioeconomic disadvantage; addressing stereotyping, stigma and violence; and strengthening women's voice, agency and participation.

¹² Caution is however needed as to how the affirmative action policies are implemented, as they can alienate other groups and thus run the risk of generating tensions or conflict (UN DESA 2010b).

Box 3: Providing space for participation in Kerala, India

The state of Kerala, India, introduced a poverty eradication programme called Kudumbashree in 1998 that organizes women into a structure consisting of neighbourhood groups comprising families, area development societies at the ward level and community development societies at the municipal level. Kudumbashree office-bearers are elected by local members, and the groups are linked to the state through the institutions of local self-government, which ensures that local development reflects the needs and aspirations of communities. With a network of four million poor women throughout Kerala, the programme has facilitated women's agency through strengthening social ties and created a variety of income and employment schemes. When in 2005, for instance, the state of Kerala sought to implement the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme Act (NREGA), local governments were able to implement the scheme by using the channels that Kudumbashree already established. Kudumbashree groups participated in the planning process and mobilized members to work in the programme. Kerala now ranks first in India in women's participation rates in NREGA. The Kudumbashree programme has thus provided a socio-political space where marginalized women can collectively pursue their needs, have their voices heard and participate in a meaningful way. This mobilization has created the synergy between democratic participation, social inclusion and poverty reduction.

Source: Mukherjee-Reed 2015.

Box 4: Building social capital through farmer organizations in Zimbabwe

In 2000, Zimbabwe experienced a major shift in its rural landscape when land occupation and government-initiated fast track land reform saw the emergence of new communities of black farmers on formerly white-owned farms. With minimalist government support, there has been a vibrant process of participation of small-scale farmer communities in the Mazowe district that ensured service provision through their own initiative. They have been organized in the form of institutions such as health, farm and irrigation committees that provide a range of social services as well as other labour related arrangements. Such institutions embody social capital associated with integration and collective action that strengthen links between people in a group. It is through interaction, reciprocity and communality that these communities have sustained their existence. The challenge for these organizations, however, is how to reconcile different agendas, interests and actors so as to allow the formulation of a common vision. Nonetheless, such farm-level institutions constitute an important source of social cohesion through maintaining order at the farm level and in many ways serve as a valuable asset in the livelihood strategies of farmers.

Source: Chiweshe 2014.

The above examples show how the participation of marginalized and often excluded groups can contribute to poverty eradication and lead to more equitable and inclusive outcomes. Public policy that purports to facilitate participation should thus be concerned as much with civil and political freedoms (such as the right to expression and collective bargaining) that enhance the capacity of disadvantaged groups to organize and mobilize, as with engaging non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society and local people in decision-making processes (UNRISD 2010).

Social and solidarity economy

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) refers to the production of goods and services by organizations and enterprises that put social, and often environmental, objectives before profit; involve cooperative and associative relations and forms of democratic management; and espouse values of solidarity, sharing and caring (UNRISD 2014bc). The crises related to finance, food, poverty and social exclusion have resulted in the emergence of various bottom-up initiatives that are based on the solidarity among different social groups in an attempt to solve their own problems (Favreau and Fréchette 2002). Different actors in development circles have subsequently started to recognize the need to shift from an approach that focuses on assisting the poor and empowering them through productive activities and social organization. This has fuelled the expansion of social and solidarity economy in recent years (ILO 2011b, 2014c).

Relevant to the SSE are also concepts such as Buen Vivir and even happiness that are gaining currency in international development discourse (see, for example, Gudynas 2011; Helliwell et al. 2015). Such perspectives uphold lifestyles associated with non-conspicuous consumption, living in harmony with human beings and the environment, and enhancing people's sense of purpose and belonging.¹³ These initiatives are rooted in the community and are intrinsically inclusive, generating active citizenship by the way in which its members interact. Women's emancipation, religious and racial equality, and respect for diversity are integral parts of these processes. This approach preserves and includes indigenous and traditional cultures in their practices, creates decent work, local ownership and reinvestments within the community (RIPESS 2014).

In recent years, a range of laws have been adopted concerning SSE on a national and sub-national level in France, Mexico, Spain and the Canadian province of Quebec, with some relevant developments taking place in Brazil, Cameroon and Italy. In Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, SSE is seen as part of an institutional framework. This legislative activity and institutional recognition of SSE on a global level is characterized by efforts to construct public policies by incorporating economically dynamic and socially innovative aspects that aim to promote greater cohesion and inclusion (ILO 2014c). These elements are emphasized in Ecuador's national framework for development (box 5).

Box 5: Ecuador's National Plan for Good Living (2013-2017)

In consultation with local people and indigenous communities such as Andeans and Amazonians, the government of Ecuador adopted the concept of Good Living, or "Sumak Kawsa", which became the backbone of the new constitution adopted in 2008 and served as the basis for the National Plan for Good Living for 2009–2013 and for 2013–2017, thus guiding its public policy. While recognizing the importance of increasing productive capacity in the economic development process, it maintains a broader view in which the environment, cultural diversity and social inclusion play an important role. The concept of Good Living presents an alternative to a conventional growth-focused development model, at the core of which is strengthening social cohesion and community values, encouraging the active involvement of citizens in decision making, and the recognizing the rights of Nature. Good Living is seen as the style of life that enables happiness, encompasses respect for cultural and environmental diversity, and is grounded in principles of equality, equity and solidarity. The social and solidary economic system is one of the central pillars that constitutes the new Ecuadorian social contract and is seen as a major instrument to achieve inclusive and sustainable development outcomes. To support these practices, the Ecuadorian government has developed a wide range of initiatives, including the establishment of the National Institute for Popular and Solidarity Economy within the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion.^a

Source: National Secretariat of Planning and Development of Ecuador 2013.

^a While the efforts that Ecuador and some other Latin American governments are putting into social and environmental sustainability are laudable, there exist major challenges in translating these principles into practice. In addition to bureaucratic resistance and powerful forces that oppose such policies, these governments also have to oversee economies locked into models of economic growth, which are often based on the export of primary goods that have perverse social and environmental impacts (Coraggio 2015).

Supporting such forms of economic and social organization can offer significant opportunities for promoting social inclusion, environmental sustainability and economic productivity, which are key for sustainable development. While several governments are beginning to adopt policies and laws that aim to support social and solidarity economy, they often see it as a poverty reduction tool rather than an alternative approach to

¹³ There is an interrelationship between social integration and the environment. On the one hand, different patterns of social relations affected, among others, by demographic shifts, changes in national and international markets, as well as land tenure systems, could in turn affect the ways in which natural resources are utilized by society and the importance attached to environmental conservation. On the other hand, environmental degradation could act on social structures and institutions, inducing changes in productive activities, settlement patterns, social stratification or promotion of social solidarity and collective action (Vivian 1994).

development that can promote environmental justice and social cohesion (Utting 2015). This approach therefore needs to receive far more attention from governments and international organizations.

Concluding Remarks

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. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that these interventions alone would not automatically ensure the desired outcomes. It is necessary to examine social relations within which economy and society are embedded.

The implementation of socially inclusive policies is the responsibility of all societal actors, including governments, civil society, private sector and society at large. It is vital to promote and encourage partnerships between different actors and sectors to implement these policies. Yet it is the role of the state to establish mechanisms that would facilitate the involvement of all these important actors at national and local levels. Comprehensive social policy is one of such mechanisms that promotes sustainable development in which all human beings have a right to a decent livelihood and are allowed to participate on equal terms in decisions-making processes.

At the same time, it is essential to recognize that processes of social inclusion are always locally specific and historically contingent. Each country needs to formulate policies and strategies based on its specific circumstances, resource base, and cultural and institutional set-up. The task is therefore not so much how to expand social inclusion per se, but how to promote a kind of inclusion that favours the creation of a more equitable society.

Finally, while it is necessary to understand the interlinkage between social inclusion and poverty eradication, it is equally important to attain policy coherence that recognizes the need for more integrated approaches to policy design and implementation, promotes complementarities and synergies among policies, while minimizing trade-offs that may undermine progress on core development objectives (Cook and Dugarova 2014). This should be central to achieving sustainable development outcomes in the 2030 Agenda for global action.

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