Leaving no one behind

Social inclusion programming in South Asia

CHANGE
ALLIANCE
CHANGING LIVES

This resource captures learning and experiences from social inclusion programmes across South Asia, providing insight and practical guidance for development agencies and professionals working on this theme. Information within this resource comes from extensive interviews with members of socially excluded groups, civil society organisations, development professionals, policy makers, academics and the staff of the development agencies Change Alliance and Christian Aid in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan in 2014 and 2015.

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'When we talk about inclusion, we have to ask: what type of society do we want our youth to experience in future? We have to bring people together, to help people choose a discrimination-free society, an equal society.'
Durga Sob, FEDO (Feminist Dalit Organisation), Nepal

Inclusion not exclusion

Since the mid-1990s, development practitioners have recognised social exclusion as a significant framework for poverty analysis with links to the goals of social justice, equity, diversity and protection of rights (Clert 1999).

We all aspire to live thriving and dignified lives as part of a society and nation. The South Asian region is taking great economic strides forward towards fulfilling this aspiration. Yet, some are being left behind in poverty while others prosper, able to access resources and services, and seize new economic opportunities.

Those being left behind are not just random people disadvantaged solely by their circumstances or lack of motivation to achieve. Evidence shows that certain social groups – indigenous peoples, Dalits, women, religious minorities and people with disabilities – are more likely than others to be poor, to have few resources, to lack decent employment and access to basic services, and to be excluded from political participation. When natural disasters hit, they are often the worst affected, further intensifying existing inequalities.

The main cause for such exclusion and disadvantage is their social identity, determined by belonging to a certain caste, ethnic, religious, gender or disability group. These identities are often accompanied by stigma, including notions of 'pollution', powerlessness, segregation and negative stereotypes. The result is discriminatory and unfair treatment of people from excluded social groups, and even violence. More powerful social groups often deny or restrict access to resources and opportunities for these excluded communities, and exploit their labour. Exclusion also may be exacerbated by geographical location due to physical isolation, lack of infrastructure, vulnerability to natural hazards and geopolitics.

The intergenerational damage to individuals and communities such exclusion causes is not only physical deprivation, but also insecurity and lowered aspirations. Excluded groups are deprived of the resources, dignity and social recognition required to participate fully in society. They are the 'last mile' social groups, which fall outside each country's story of growth.

Inclusion is not automatic. It requires conscious, deliberate and well-thought-out action. Holistic group-specific solutions need to place excluded communities at the centre, be designed to address the root causes of exclusion, and ensure inclusion with dignity.

Unless we address social exclusion, we cannot meet the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the goal of reducing inequality between and within countries by 2030. And if the South Asian region cannot meet the SDGs, nor will the world.

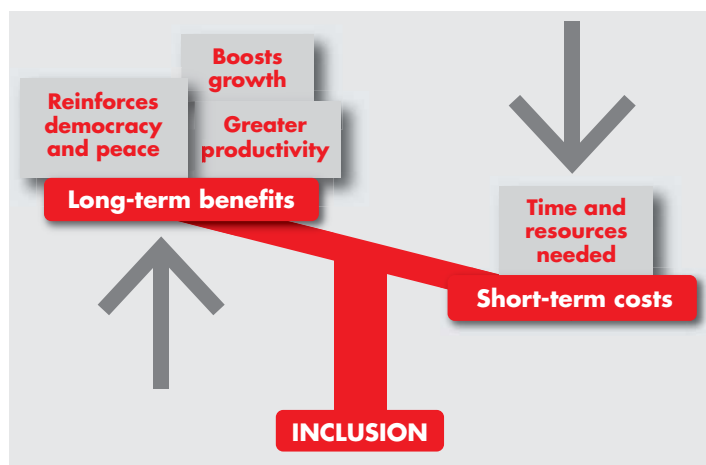Establishing schools as discrimination-free zones in Odisha, India, is a step towards addressing exclusion.

Inclusion benefits all – a pre-condition

India's Planning Commission estimated poverty in 2009-10 at 29.8% of the population. Both rural and urban poverty rates were highest among Scheduled Tribes/Adivasis (47.4% in rural areas and 30.4% in urban areas), Scheduled Castes/Dalits (42.3% and 34.1%) and Muslims (36.2% and 33.9%).

By forming collectives, Adivasi (indigenous) women in India are able to demand a fairer price for their produce and stand up for their rights.

Inequality Adjusted Human Development Index Ranking (out of 188 countries):		Gender Inequality Index Ranking:	
Sri Lanka:	66	Sri Lanka:	72
India:	129	Nepal:	108
Bangladesh:	141	Bangladesh:	111
Nepal:	142	Pakistan:	121
Pakistan:	147	India:	130

Damaged houses post-2015 earthquake in Nepal

23% senior citizens **26% female-headed** **41% Dalits and Janajatis**

Planning Commission of Nepal, Post-Disaster Needs Assessment, 2015

Long-term benefits

Boosts growth: If 68 million more Indian women (who currently form only 24% of the paid labour force) joined the non-farm labour force, India's GDP could be boosted by US$700bn by 2025.[1]

Greater productivity: Scheduled Caste/Dalit and Scheduled Tribe/Adivasi employees of Indian Railways who have attained high-level positions via reserved quotas are positively associated with productivity due to their high motivation to work hard and effectively supervise workers.[2]
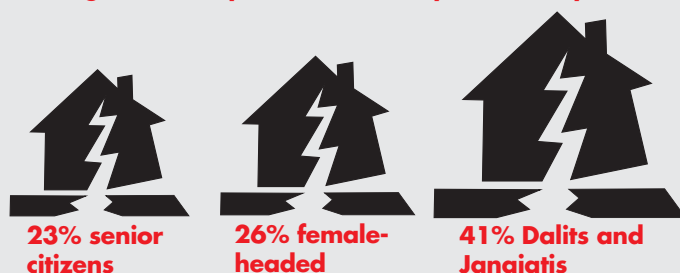
Reinforces democracy and peace: The government of Nepal has recognised that equal and inclusive citizenship is critical to successfully restructuring the state and establishing long-lasting peace after years of conflict.[3]

Short-term costs

Additional investment of time and resources to map exclusion and power relations, and to design specialised programmes for addressing exclusion and promoting inclusion.

Through support groups and collective action, Dalit women are able to access more and better land to farm, and have a voice in their communities.

Key elements of equity and inclusion

Equity means not only ensuring **equal opportunities** for all, but also creating **enabling conditions** by which excluded social groups can make the most of opportunities to develop.

Social inclusion means **recognising, valuing and addressing the diversity of knowledge, skills, needs and experiences** of people, especially vulnerable, excluded social groups, in **ensuring equal access and enjoyment of development and security**. It requires the transformation of unequal power relations between social groups in order to move towards equality for all.

EQUALITY

EQUITY
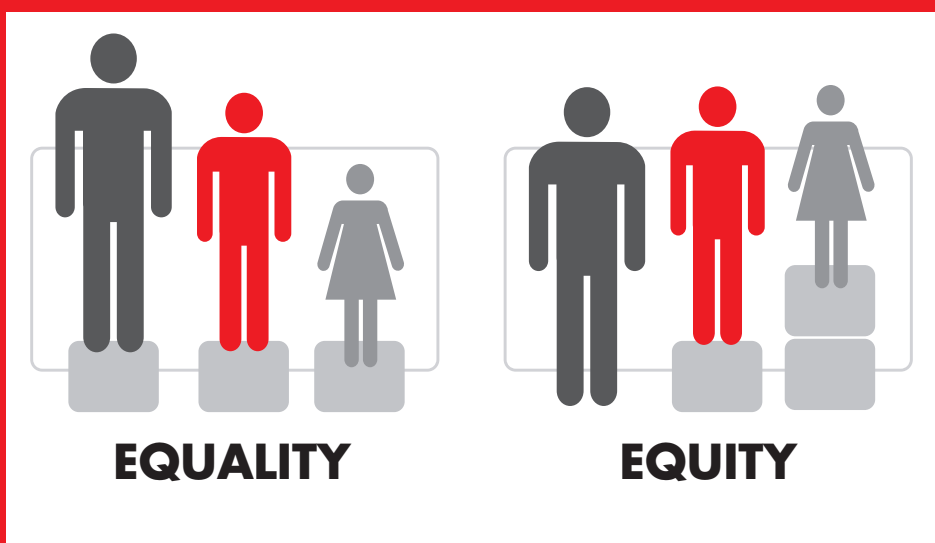
'So long as you do not achieve social liberty, whatever freedom provided by the law is of no avail to you. Social and economic democracy are tissue and fibre of a political democracy.'
Dr B R Ambedkar

Christian Aid/Sam Spickett

Organising children's clubs that bring together different social groups helps to break down barriers and build friendships.

Questions and answers

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A survey among employers in the formal sector in India revealed that employers all believed solely in looking a the merit of applicants. Yet they also believed that merit is distributed along lines of caste, religious and gender divisions.
(Jodkha and Newman, 2007)

1. If we ensure equal opportunities and universal coverage under any programme, won't everyone benefit equally?

There is evidence of extensive discrimination at the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT). Of IIT Mumbai's first year Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and other Backward Class students in 2013-14, 56% felt discriminated against and under extra academic pressure. A recent attempt to expel 73 students, 90% from the aforementioned communities, from IIT Roorkee for underperformance, exposed inherent discrimination and lack of institutional support. The same factors in other academic institutions have led to a high number of suicides among these students in recent years.
('Caste on Campus', Indian Express, 2014; 'Excellence through Expulsions', National Dalit Movement for Justice, 2015; 'Discrimination on the Campus', Thorat, 2016)

2. Isn't social inclusion the same as social integration?

3. Doesn't affirmative action such as reserved quotas for certain social groups deny the merit-based selection of beneficiaries and, therefore, amount to discrimination?

Since 2013, six universities in Bangladesh have introduced quotas for Dalits after dialogue with the National Human Rights Commission and Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement.

Akash Nunja, a Dalit youth from Sreemangal said: 'I had never been out of my district, so how could I imagine being a student at Dhaka University? My family and neighbours inspired me to go for admission. Once I thought it was my destiny to be a tea garden labourer. The quota for Dalits has changed my entire life.'
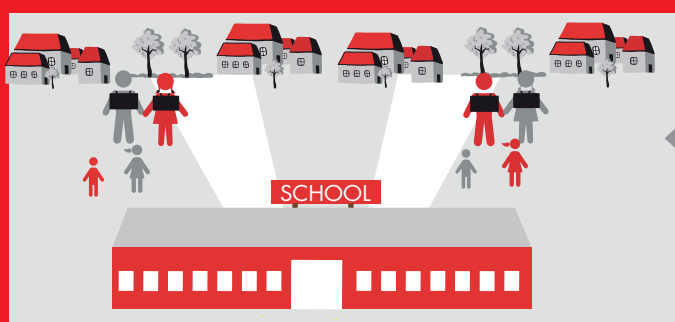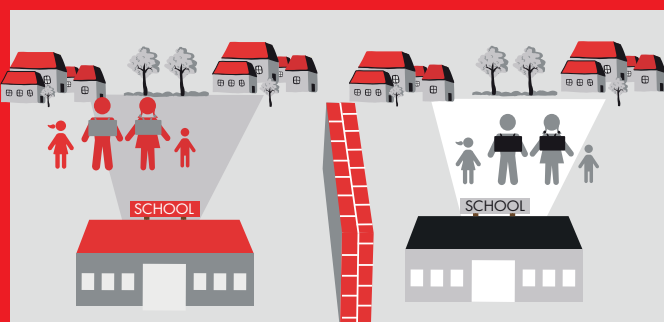
4. Doesn't talking about exclusion and discrimination of different social groups lead to identity-based politics, thereby reinforcing marginalisation and social identities?

5. Doesn't inclusion mean the same thing to everyone? So we just have to ensure excluded social groups have the same as everyone else?

- Limited access by excluded social groups to existing resources connected to their social identity, such as social networks, education levels, political connections and financial security, places them at a disadvantage. **Proactive measures to tackle identity-based discrimination and the unequal distribution of resources and power** will ensure equality in our societies and a level playing field – creating **both equal opportunities and equal conditions for all**.

- Social inclusion **goes beyond closing the development gap** between excluded individuals and others in terms of literacy rates, enrolment in academic institutions, employment, asset ownership, etc. It also **addresses the underlying factors – such as caste, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability – that mediate choices and access to resources and opportunities** for excluded social groups.

- Merit is related to the economic and sociocultural resources and influence a person has, as well as their intrinsic ability. To equalise merit, we need to compensate for historical and continuing discrimination that results in a lack of resource endowments for excluded social groups. Affirmative action measures move us towards a more level playing field where all social groups can equally access opportunities. But we cannot stop there. Access has to be accompanied by measures to promote the recognition of excluded social groups as equals.

- Given prevailing unequal social relations and resources, initially excluded social groups need to organise separately in order to build common goals, leadership capacities and motivation towards changing their circumstances. But inclusion also requires all social groups coming together across identities while acknowledging differences.

- We are all different and have different ideas about what we need to lead dignified lives. Hence, bespoke inclusion measures are required to fulfil the different needs of different social groups.

'There is only one way to look at things until someone shows us how to look at them with different eyes.'
Pablo Picasso

Studies on charity giving reveal that people donate more to help identified individuals than groups. However, this applies only for generic Indian and high-caste recipients, but is absent or even reversed for low-caste recipients (Deshpande and Spears, 2016).

We build empathy for others and combat negative stereotypes often through the close contact of friendship. What would a survey for South Asian countries reveal about our close friendships with people from other social groups?

Christian Aid/Ashish Peter Gomes

Providing women with the resources, skills and support to take on roles as landowners and agriculturalists helps ensure they have a voice and are recognised as equals in their families and communities.

How to 'do' social inclusion programming

Strategic interventions:

- Build assets and economic capacities, and promote engagement in economic production for excluded social groups.

- Enable equal access to land, labour, credit, product and housing markets and digital services. (Eg, engage with government actors to ensure effective implementation of key laws and policies in these areas.)

- Ensure fair distribution of infrastructure and services as well as improved uptake of entitlements to discrimination-free services. (Eg, place livelihood support centres in excluded group localities to create acceptance for their leadership and promote their access.)

- Activate protective and preventive mechanisms against violence, and ensure equal protection of the law. (Eg, promote human rights defenders from excluded groups and monitor implementation of protective laws.)

Practical steps:

- Find appropriate ways **to involve and consult excluded social groups in the design, delivery and monitoring of development programmes** so that their specific concerns (eg, disability-friendly services, discrimination checks) are raised and addressed at all stages.

- **Ensure robust baseline data** capturing levels of access to resources and decision-making bodies as well as social relations; and **develop both quantitative and qualitative targets, indicators and tools to track equality of opportunity** (removal of any legal and other barriers), **equality of conditions** (non-discriminatory access and participation), **equality of outcomes** across social groups and **shifts in social discourse, norms and practices** towards excluded social groups. Progress assessments should include **impact variables** at the **personal level** (eg, are women better able to take family decisions and control their income?) and **institutional level** (eg, increasing police cases filed for violence against excluded social groups).

- Within short-term programme interventions, **ensure a long-term perspective of building sustainable processes** by strengthening the knowledge, skills, capacities and leadership of excluded social groups to exercise citizenship rights; forging strong partnerships with different stakeholders, and establishing formal policies and practices that promote inclusion.

1. Ensure dignified access and control over resources and security

Closing the development gap between social groups in terms of meeting practical needs like employment, education and protection from violence, where emphasis is placed on promoting equal roles and participation of excluded social groups.

Exclu
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2. Build capacity to aspire and drive change among excluded social groups

Working with excluded social groups to facilitate changed perceptions of their social roles and values attached to their skills and capacities. Fostering active citizenship and an ability to access new opportunities counters social stigma, negative stereotypes and discrimination that diminish a person's capacity to aspire, take risks and drive changes in their circumstances.

Strategic interventions:

- Build knowledge and skills on rights and entitlements, including supporting excluded groups in the production of knowledge and access to technology. (Eg, leadership building alongside new skills for landless labourers in agriculture – including niche areas such as organic farming, new technologies and independent market access – to enable them to command higher wages for their labour, and increase their status in their households and community.)

- Enable access to information on opportunities.

- Build transformative leadership. (Eg, promoting an interfaith network of faith leaders, youth and women, the latter equipped with information on peace-building initiatives and skills in conflict transformation and mediation, thereby shifting gender norms that would otherwise not allow women to engage in public life and peace-building.)

- Facilitate the social organisation of excluded groups and build their institutions at all levels from village to district/state/province.

Practical steps:

- Undertake a **participatory power and risks analysis** both before and during a programme to plan steps to mitigate any negative repercussions for excluded social groups caused by shifting social relations and resource distribution.

- Create a **user-friendly and confidential grievance redress mechanism** so people can share and have immediately investigated experiences of discrimination under a programme.

- Establish **conflict resolution mechanisms** and develop problem-solving skills to find win-win solutions to any conflict as much as possible.

Design **bespoke and adaptive social group specific** or **thematic programmes** to address the needs and rights of excluded social groups, including the **internal diversity among these groups**.

Strategic interventions:

- Ensure fair representation and equal participation in decision-making bodies for excluded social groups.

- Create an enabling environment via government institutions, media and the private sector instituting cross-sectoral measures (eg, affirmative action, diversity measures, discrimination checks, public education campaigns, positive media messaging), **incentives and sanctions to promote rights-based values, and equal conditions and opportunities for development**. This includes **wider governance reforms**, like decentralisation, to strengthen accountable governance institutions independent of traditional social power structures.

- Ensure official identification documents for excluded communities, such as birth registration certificates.

Practical steps:

- Build **collaborative relationships between multiple stakeholders at different levels** based on common values and interests so that inclusion is viewed as a win-win situation.

- Identify and **mentor/support champions and catalysts for inclusion** from all social groups, especially youth.

- Measure exclusion through **disaggregated data on excluded social groups**, with gender, age and disability as cross-cutting. Build an evidence base on how exclusion operates and how far inclusion is achieved through **strong management information systems and action research**, necessary for leveraging policy change.

- Strengthen collaborative partnerships for inclusive development by ensuring that, internally, **organisations and institutions are diverse** (see Social Equity Audit Tool)[4] via: (i) **policies and practices** that **encourage social and gender diversity** among staff, board members and management; and (ii) **codes of conduct** and **orientations** on the right to non-discrimination, equity and inclusion for all staff.

- **Build cultural competency to deliver successful inclusion interventions** among organisation and institutional staff via: (i) cultural and self-awareness of beliefs and attitudes about different social groups; (ii) knowledge of beliefs, experiences, values and influences of different target groups in a development programme; and (iii) skills to effectively use interventions sensitive to contextual and social factors.

3. Create an enabling environment via inclusive institutional measures

Promoting changes to formal structures and institutions by making laws, policies, budgets and programmes more inclusive in terms of addressing discrimination and enabling excluded social groups to enter into institutions or access resources. This is complemented by harnessing the active participation of the private sector and media for inclusion.

4. Create social conditions for sustained change

Creating shared spaces for excluded and included social groups to interact in order to transform social relations. These interactions allow us to examine how privilege and oppression operate, and critically question the truth of discriminatory beliefs and practices that appear to be natural and given. People then can become motivated to build alternative shared values and trust with excluded social groups.

Strategic interventions:

- **Create and facilitate common spaces for interaction between excluded and included social groups.** (Eg, children's clubs that bring all children together to play.)

- Celebrate diversity, including by acknowledging excluded social group members as holders of knowledge and skills.

- Engage in public education campaigns using creative mediums on constitutional values, including equality and non-discrimination, and what they mean for the average citizen.

- Work with young people to generate discussion and build perspectives on inclusion.

(Eg, curriculum that uses psychosocial approaches and experiential learning models wherein young people explore and confront their identities, status and their worlds where exclusion and social boundaries operate. This will be through processes of action and reflection – mixing classroom discussions and real-world experiences in excluded communities.)

- Engage progressive faith leaders in discussions around social norms.

- Promote more socially responsible media reporting, by offering training or orientation sessions for journalists.

Critical questions when designing inclusion programmes:

- What are the gaps in resources and opportunities between excluded social groups and others, and the dynamics of social relations leading to exclusion?

- What are the gaps in information that lead to the invisibility of certain social groups and their specific needs?

- Who does the programme/service target, and which social groups are at risk of being left out?

- How, why and by whom are these groups likely to be excluded?

- What additional criteria – geographical, social group, vulnerability – would ensure excluded social groups are not left out of the programme/service?

- What are the different and common roles, skills and interests of different social groups in the household and local economy, politics and society, which could be levers for cooperation and change?

- What are the innovative pathways for ensuring sustainable processes of inclusion?

'We need to focus on pro-poor growth, which means closing the gap by increasing the income of the poor and excluded groups at a proportionately higher rate. This requires economic instruments that are biased towards these social groups.'
Prof S K Thorat, Indian Council for Social Science Research

Christian Aid/Susan Barry

Ultimately, inclusion brings benefits to everyone in terms of development, growth, peace and prosperity.

'Development organisations could be more effective if practitioners became aware of their own biases and if organisations implemented procedures that mitigate their effects.'
World Development Report, 2015

Conclusion

The creation of an inclusive society involves everyone. Inclusion starts with acknowledging that our societies operate on unequal playing fields that advantage some and disadvantage and exclude others. It requires us to reach excluded social groups through group-specific strategies and interventions. Ultimately, inclusion brings benefits to everyone in terms of development, growth, peace and prosperity, enriching our society by providing a greater range of talents and perspectives.

'The challenge is to create an enabling environment for inclusion. This means not only a struggle to make laws and policies in conformity with the constitutional right to non-discrimination, but also to address exclusion at the level of traditions and culture.'
Sajid Qaisrani, Sungi Development Foundation, Pakistan

Christian Aid/Simon Williams

Supporting excluded women to speak out and engage in collective action to secure their rights is vital.

Endnotes

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Tribal women in Assam, India. Claiming land rights for tribal women is a way to address access to livelihoods.