Social Inclusion - Reader

Illustrative definitions

Social inclusion " The process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society" and "The process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society" (World Bank, 2013, pp. 3-4).

"Social inclusion is a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights"(Commission of the European Communities, 2003, p. 9).

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In the policy discourse, efforts to promote social inclusion have arisen from concerns over social exclusion. For the purpose of the present report, social inclusion is defined as the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights. Thus, social inclusion is both a process and a goal.

In the present report, it is contended that promoting social inclusion requires tackling social exclusion by removing barriers to people's participation in society, as well as by taking active inclusionary steps to facilitate such participation. As a political response to the exclusion challenge, social inclusion is thus a more deliberate process of encompassing and welcoming all persons and embracing greater equality and tolerance. It should be noted that fostering social inclusion may or may not increase the capacity of people to live together in harmony. Societies that are otherwise cohesive may exclude some sectors of the population (United Nations, 2010).

Similarly, social inclusion is not the same as social integration, even though the two terms are at times used interchangeably. Social integration and social inclusion should, however, contribute to making societies more cohesive. Although the present report touches on some aspects of social cohesion and social integration and examines indicators that are relevant to both concepts, its focus is on the elimination of social exclusion and the promotion of social inclusion.

Where a conceptualization of inclusion does appear in the social exclusion literature, it is often only indirect. Frequently, for example, it appears in invocations of 'normal' social expectation/participation or, more commonly,' mainstream' applied to various things that people are understood to be excluded from: labor market, economy, society, culture, citizenship, etc. The meaning and location of the mainstream is routinely taken to be self-evident. As this implies, social inclusion is most commonly defined only *negatively* – as whatever is *not socially excluded*. For this reason, much of the discussion of social inclusion is conceptually dominated by exclusion – social exclusion is the datum point against which social inclusion is both empirically measured and conceptually defined (Cameron, 2006:397).