Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion: An Overview

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1. Introduction

The term 'social exclusion' and 'social inclusion' are two terms most widely used in recent years by politicians, social scientists and the public as well. Social exclusion and inclusion are multi-dimensional terms and their definitions, meanings and connotations are context-dependent.[1] 'Social exclusion' as a concept has its origin in Europe, more specifically in France, and therefore the issues addressed in the social exclusion context were specific to Europe. Subsequently, the concept was introduced in India where it has primarily focused on inequalities and exploitation based on membership of particular social groups and is seen in terms of exclusionary processes based on caste, gender, tribe, and religious identities.[2]

While the Constitution of India has been categorical in its emphasis on addressing the issues of marginalized and excluded groups like the dalits, tribals, and other resource-poor groups through exclusive protective and developmental measures, the issue has not received requisite political visibility and academic rigor in the general development discourse. As a result, the issue though crucial have always remained part of a general analysis of caste and class, and the perspectives of these communities have hardly received due recognition in the process of major policy formulation and analysis and the implementation of various protective and developmental measures initiated for them.

The Indian economy has witnessed enormous changes in the past two decades. The overall rate of poverty in the country has declined steadily and the country's Human Development Index rank of 130, places it among the group of countries with medium levels of human development. The country's rank was 135 according to 2014 report (UNDP, 2015). Although the level of inequality has decreased over time, in part as a result of government policies to tackle discrimination and social exclusion, reservations and various empowerment measures access to services and economic opportunities are highly influenced by deep-rooted exclusion and discrimination based on caste, religion and gender.[3]

Figures cannot communicate what 'living in poverty' means or how it affects human dignity.[4] Mehta and Shah has rightly viewed that poverty seems to be disproportionately high among historically marginalized groups such as 'scheduled castes' and 'scheduled tribes'.[5]Thereis, therefore a need not only to recognize the perspectives of these resource-poor communities, but also to include them in the development process. This is where social inclusion comes into play. It is a concept with universal appeal.

In order to promote social inclusion, it is important to understand the processes through which individuals or groups are excluded, as promotion of inclusion can only be possible by tackling exclusion. The process of social inclusion needs to take place simultaneously at multiple levels, from the individual, community and local levels, to the regional and national levels, as social inclusion is a subject which concerns all stakeholders in society. It is a process through which the dignity of each individual is recognized, needs and concerns of all people are reflected, rights of all people are not only guaranteed in legislation, but also respected, and people are able to participate actively in life activities. While social inclusion involves formal (societal) level engagements, ensuring that institutions in society reflect, uphold, respect, and activate the inclusive processes within society, it at the same time, addresses the informal (individual) level of engagements, and as such, perceptions and experiences of individuals, how they think and feel, also need to be taken into account. Social inclusion reflects, on the one hand, an individual's experience of and possibilities for self-actualization, and on the other hand, societal capacities to eliminate causes of exclusion and ensure equal opportunities for all.[6]

2. Social Exclusion

Definition: 'Social exclusion describes a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the household, and in the community'.[7]

Social exclusion is a dynamic process that "precludes full participation in the normatively prescribed activities of a given society and denies access to information, resources, sociability, recognition, and identity, eroding self-respect and reducing capabilities to achieve personal goals".[8]Social exclusion is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Economically excluded citizens do not have access to jobs, to incomes and material resources to function appropriately in society. At the same time, the socially excluded interiorize the distance they feel towards other groups, a distance that may be measured through the level of residential segregation, the probability of belonging to the same social networks, the incidence of intermarrying and degrees of interaction within social organisations.[9]

Social exclusion is understood as the condition (barriers and process) that impede social inclusion. Social exclusion is a process through which individuals or groups are wholly or

partially excluded from fully participating in all aspects of life of the society, in which they live, on the grounds of their social identities, such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, culture or language, and/or physical, economic, social disadvantages. Social exclusion may mean the lack of voice, lack of recognition, or lack of capacity for active participation. It may also mean exclusion from decent work, assets, land, opportunities, access to social services and/or political representation.

Paugam (1996) suggested that social exclusion represents a dynamic process or a "spiral of precariousness", where one form of deprivation leads to one or more other forms of deprivation. Heargues that social exclusion is not simply about precariousness of employment (having insecure job or being unemployment), but the strength of correlation between employment situation and other aspects of economic and social life (e.g. family, income, living conditions, and social networks). The focus on deprivation as a process allows identifying series of factors that contribute to people's exclusion.[10]

In India, social exclusion is commonly used to discuss the social relations and institutions that 'exclude, discriminate or deprive certain social groups on the basis of a broad range of group identities'.[11] The structure of the caste system and the implications of this for employment, education and the rules of social and economic exchange are distinctive in India[12] and exclusion on the basis of caste, tribe, religion and gender is increasingly receiving attention in research and policymaking.[13]

The first and perhaps most disempowering domain of exclusion is economics. On the basis of gender, ethnicity, location, ability and other vectors, individuals and groups are denied access to employment and other sources of livelihood. Gender discrimination is perhaps the most universal form of social exclusion. Many international bodies, governments and development agencies have developed comprehensive guidelines for mainstreaming gender, at national, sector and institutional levels. This is no less the case in the education sector, where it has been gradually realized that not only were girls benefiting less than boys from the expansion of educational opportunities, but also that the education of girls and women is one of the essential strategies for making progress on poverty reduction and needs to be more highly prioritized. It is also necessary to directly address discriminatory attitudes and demonstrate the benefits to every one of educating girls. Meanwhile, attention needs to be paid to ensuring gender equity in the school and classroom.

An entitlement to social services is another key area. This is a denial of the more accepted basic human rights to education and health. Access to reliable, inclusive, and high-quality social services is moreover generally a precondition for access to livelihoods and decent work. Significant differences in access to basic services are also apparent. Households from marginalized communities face higher rates of exclusion from basic social services.[14] Discrimination in the provision of health services on the basis of social identity is also reported .[15]

Political exclusion is a pervasive and crosscutting area of social exclusion. It relates to the political economy of the environment concerned, and to power relations. Social exclusion manifests itself as a denial of access to political processes and representation at the country level, and to a lack of genuine inclusion in decision-making about resource allocation and priority-setting at the community level. Often, the socially excluded do not have political representation, because formal political processes are geared to the interests and views of dominant groups, and informal processes do not accord voice and active, equal participation to the excluded. Exercising political rights requires time and other resources, and where social exclusion overlaps with economic and time poverty, political participation becomes very difficult.

Another domain of social exclusion not generally integrated into the discourse on social exclusion is the issue of entrenched exclusionary patterns of behavior at the micro level – within communities and within families. Prejudice and discrimination within families may be based on gender, age, ability, or sexual orientation, and in communities on these vectors as well as on religion, ethnicity, language, and caste. Examples include hierarchical and gendered intra-household access to food, and family and community violence vis-à-vis minorities. Family and community based exclusion is an area that is not amenable to conventional policy thinking and policy making, since it reaches into the private domain. However, without behavior change towards equality and empowerment for all members of a household or community, economic, social and political inclusion will not materialize.

3. Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is understood as a process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities, for all, regardless of their background, and so they can achieve their full potential in life. It is a multi dimensional process aimed at creating conditions which enable full and active participation of every member of the society, in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic and political activities, as well as participation in decision making processes. It is understood as a process by which societies combat poverty and social exclusion.[16]

Inclusion emphasizes encouraging participation and moving beyond merely appreciating diversity, toward leveraging and integrating diversity into everyday work life.[17]A situation where 'individuals or areas do not suffer from the negative effects of unemployment, poor skills, low income, poor housing, crime, bad health, family problems, limited access to services'.[18]"The process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people disadvantaged on the basis of their identity to take part in society.[19]

Inclusion is a mutually beneficial state for both the community and the individual. When people rely upon each other and the success of their interactions, that responsibility and interdependence creates a commitment to the social processes in a community. The depiction of social inclusion at the local level is useful as it addresses inclusion at a manageable and feasible level. In a smaller geographic

region than the nation, there is much greater opportunity to develop inclusive systems, economically and socially as well as politically.

An inclusive society is a society that over-rides differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography, and ensures inclusion, equality of opportunity as well as capability of all members of the society to determine an agreed set of social institutions that govern social interaction.[20] At the core of most definitions of social inclusion lies the concept of full participation in all aspects of life, while exclusion refers to the conditions (barriers and processes) that impede inclusion. Participation is most significant as it denotes an active involvement in the process, not merely having access to society's activities, but engaging in them, and building and maintaining a social network. Participation also creates a sense of responsibility towards others, a community or an institution, and influences decisions or enables individuals to have access to the decision-making processes. [21]

4. Conclusion

The outcome of social exclusion is individuals' inability to access jobs, decent incomes, education and other training opportunities, as well as social and community activities. Socially excluded citizens have reduced access to power and decision-making bodies and, as a result, often feel powerless and unable to take charge of the decisions that affect their lives daily. The concept of social exclusion offers a framework for understanding and analyzing complex interdependencies between complex life circumstances, social problems and social categories.

Social inclusion gives people the platform to voice in an unhindered way to ensure effective problem solving, decision making, creativity, and enhanced performance in multiple ways. Fostering inclusion is neither easy nor straightforward. Inclusion is not a neutral concept as it involves shifts in decision-making power between the state and local communities and between deferent segments of the community.

In case of various schemes and project implementation, inclusive practices should be adopted to identify vulnerable families and households, especially women and the landless, from their inception so that specific project interventions and instruments could be directly targeted to assist them. Efforts should be made to democratize access to capacity building, opportunity to become mainstreamed into local decision making institutions, direct access to resources (financial, managerial, technical, market access, information) needed to carry out income generating activities (IGAs), and inclusion in the development and management of common property resources (CPRs), thus resulting in equitable sharing of project resources.

Social progress does not necessarily take place at the same time for all members of societies and, as a result, one will always be able to discern social norms pervasive among certain groups in society, but not shared by others although norms shared by a majority will enjoy prominence.

The challenge for policy makers and social scientists is, therefore, to find ways to dissociate the concept of social inclusion from the utopian realm of a "perfectly inclusive" world vision to redefining it as a practical tool used to promote an inspirational yet realistic set of policy measures geared towards a "society for all." This requires a paradigm shift so as to recognize the dignity, value and importance of each person, not only as an ethical norm and moral imperative, but also as a legal principle, a societal goal, and ultimately, practice. "No human being should be condemned to endure a brief or miserable life as a result of his or her class, country, religious affiliation, ethnic background or gender". To this end, social inclusion, as an overarching goal as well as a multi-dimensional process can play a critical role in promoting sustainable human development.[22]

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