

## **Title: Inclusive Development: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach**

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### **Abstract**

The term inclusive development has emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and has been adopted in a series of scholarly and policy documents. Its roots, however, can be traced to different concepts in different disciplines. While some see inclusive development as only combining social aspects with economic growth through political approaches, we define inclusive development instead as focusing on social wellbeing and protecting the ecosystem services of nature through redefining political priorities, especially in the context of the Anthropocene. This term can potentially bridge different disciplines. This article reviews the scholarly and policy literature on the term inclusive development and presents a guiding framework for examining how different disciplines deal with inclusive development.

**Key words:** inclusive development; multi-disciplinary; sustainable development; United Nations

### **Highlights:**

- **Inclusive development implies social, ecological and relational inclusiveness.**
- **Inclusive development has its roots in different disciplinary approaches.**
- **Inclusive development is used to counter exclusive capitalist approaches.**
- **Inclusiveness refers to how *access* to and *allocation* of basic resources is organized.**
- **Development refers to ecological and social wellbeing.**

### **Introduction**

Although the concept of sustainable development has reached centre stage in international scholarly attention [1] and the policy arena [2] with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly [3], the room for trade-offs that this concept allows is intensely debated [4]. While strong sustainable development allows no trade-offs between the social, ecological and economic aspects and between current and future generations [5], experience shows that vested interests can interpret sustainable development to further their own interests leading most often to weak sustainable development in favour of economic growth [6]. The sustainable development concept allows neoliberal capitalists, social wellbeing scholars

and environmentalists to formulate the trade-offs towards their own interests leading to a tug of war between these schools of thoughts [7,8]. Inevitably, if neoliberalism and *laissez-faire* has political and economic weight, the interpretation and implementation of sustainable development leans towards growth first, as is dictated by the market.

This has led to the birth of the concept of inclusive development [9], which had its roots in social justice scholarly papers and social movements, and focused on the participation [10], human rights and social demands of the most marginalized people [11] and communities [12,13]. Second, the poorest and marginalized are also those who depend on natural resources such as land, water, fish and forests [14], while they are also those who are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change [15], land and resource grabbing [16], and run the risk of stranded resources (i.e. that they may not deforest or use their oil resources because of new knowledge regarding the impacts of doing so) [17]. This is a major risk that is exacerbated in the context of the Anthropocene as growing demands of humans leads to large-scale environmental risk and has led to the expansion of the concept to also imply environmental inclusiveness. Third, some scholars and policymakers interpret inclusive development as helping the poor in a patronizing manner; however, others argue that it is much more about empowering the poor through rights, creating equal opportunities and ensuring redistributive justice and thus also requires addressing the political processes that lead to the concentration of power [18]. Thus inclusive development is about social, environmental and relational inclusiveness, and defines development as enhancing ecological and social wellbeing [19] rather than as growth [7]. While others see inclusive development as inclusive growth [23,24], we disagree arguing that ecological and social inclusiveness is significantly more important than economic inclusiveness especially in the context of the Anthropocene [7].

The term ‘inclusive’ has been mentioned 52 times in the UN Global Sustainable Development Report 2015 [20] and represents the effort by social justice and environmental actors to bring the centre of gravity of the trade-offs between social, environmental and economic issues towards social and environmental goals [21]. The underlying argument is that social inequality reduces opportunities for enhancing human wellbeing while reducing the resource base and exacerbating the climate vulnerability of these people. The question is whether governing by SDGs will succeed. Although these goals aim at addressing socio-ecological issues, the actual achievements may be measured through a conservative economic framework, which may emphasize efficiency at the cost of inclusiveness. This leads multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and the International Labour Organization to use ‘inclusive growth’ for advocating a pro-poor perspective [22, 23]. Their inclusive perspective is confined to market participation (by creating jobs for the poor) and efficiency (of economic processes, policies, institutions), and builds further upon an economic paradigm that does not assign value to social or environmental sustainability in its growth models. Only when multiple criteria of development performance are accepted, an inclusive development policy agenda can be grounded in a new economic theory that goes beyond growth [24].

Hence, this introductory paper to our Special Issue on Inclusive Development examines the literature on inclusive development and develops a guiding framework for broadening the inquiry into creating a theory of inclusive development by building on related elements in different disciplines and thematic areas, beyond international development studies.

## **Inclusive Development: Definitions and Contestations**

Inclusive development is a contested term in four distinct ways. The first refers to whether scholars and policymakers choose to use inclusive development (where development is much broader than growth and may even mean a steady state [25] or de-growth), inclusive growth (where there is a focus on both increasing growth and sharing the growth through e.g. employment opportunities for all [26] and redistributive mechanisms), or inclusive wealth (focusing less on flows of income to reproducible stocks in society and includes the argument that investing in growth may come at the cost of wealth [27]).

The second is with respect to the content of development. For many, development is equivalent to increasing GDP. For others [28] development is an ever evolving concept including the satisfaction of basic social and economic human rights, meeting basic human needs [29], reducing poverty, enhancing wellbeing [30], minimizing externalized environmental impacts, focusing on rural development to balance urban development [31], incorporating the ideas of social movements, encouraging participatory development [32], ultimately aiming at enhancing the capabilities and freedoms of people [33] so that inequality is reduced [34] and human progress is enhanced for all [35], and according to people's own priorities for development.

The third is with respect to the content of inclusiveness [36]. Inclusiveness can mean emphasizing the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized people [37]; peri-urban areas, sectors and regions; participation in policy and politics [38] especially with respect to moderately structured and unstructured problems [39]; multiple sources of knowledge including that of indigenous people [40] and a broad education processes [41]; social infrastructure for all [42]; contextual issues [42]; capacity building to enable the marginalized to use their opportunities [43]; the recognition of plural systems of rights i.e. also customary rights, enabling people to help themselves [27, 44]; and the re-distribution of power to allow for redistribution of resources [45]. This has also been expressed in global policy documents as "leaving no one behind" [20].

Finally, there is debate regarding the content of inclusive development as a whole. While some focus exclusively on social and economic inclusiveness [46], others on social and relational or political inclusiveness, we argue, as explained above, that it includes social, ecological and relational inclusiveness [21].

Promoting inclusive development from a relational perspective also implies tackling inequality [47]. Inequality is historically inherited and institutionalized in social rules; but modern policies can also explicitly or implicitly exacerbate inequalities. For example, the privatization of public services can exacerbate the access of the poor to these services at local level; while climate change can exacerbate the vulnerability of the poorest in society. Technologies are also increasingly replacing the jobs of (low) skilled workers.

Many instruments are being promoted as ways to promote inclusive development. These include the adoption of goals [23]; principles; regulatory, economic and suasive instruments that aim inter alia at job creation; infrastructure for provision of basic needs (e.g. food, water, sanitation, roads, public transport, telephone lines)[48]; investing in good government; enhancing human capital; and investing in social security and safety nets.

### **Disciplinary Questions**

Having discussed the recent literature on ‘inclusive development’, we now turn to develop a guiding framework to assess the scholarship on various aspects of social and environmental justice spread through many disciplines (e.g. inclusive economics [49]). Each discipline has developed its theories further and sometimes in relation to specific fields. This framework aims to guide the authors in this Special Issue to develop and engage with the concept of inclusive development by exploring related concepts and developments in their respective fields. This framework draws inspiration from a previous framework developed by the Earth System Governance programme, which elaborated on inclusiveness as Access and Allocation [50] where access refers to being able to secure the minimum resources needed for survival, and allocation refers to the distribution of (property/tenure) rights, responsibilities, and risks in relation to resource and resource use, infrastructures, products, and services in society (see Table 1 for the questions and the authors who have attempted to address these questions).

**Table 1: Multi-disciplinary Guiding Framework for Analysing Inclusive Development (ID)**

Discipline	Inclusive Development			Authors
	Access	Allocation	Development & wellbeing	
Overarching questions	Whether and how basic rights/needs should be met and what are these?	What principles should guide the allocation of resources (including sinks), responsibilities and risks (e.g. climate impacts)?	How is development defined? What is the role of growth, de-growth, wealth in promoting wellbeing?	Gupta & Pouw
	What is the role of science, social actors and movements, and power?			
Political science	Who gets what, when, where, and why?	Who represents the interests or the marginalized? Who resists efforts to guarantee access, and why? Role of state?	How does allocation of resources, responsibilities and risks take place? What factors influence this? What role do power relations play?	Mohan; Brand, Boos & Brad;
Law	What principles are relevant? How can they be implemented?	Is a human rights' approach appropriate and how far can it go? What are the competing approaches?	How do equity principles interact with existing ownership principles in determining allocation?	Arts; Obani
Economics/Finance	What role do economic, financial and legal instruments play?	Can subsidies and incentives deal with the issue of access? How does privatization/ cost-recovery affect access?	Can markets allocate resources equitably and efficiently? Are job markets and financial systems fair? What is the social and ecological responsibility of business?	Corrado & Corrado; Ngepah; Kumar; Likoko & Kini; Kourula, Pisani & Kolk
Sociology	What role does education, social relations and movements play?	How do they influence access, when and under what circumstances?	How do they shape institutions that allocate benefits, risks and burdens? What are the equity outcomes?	Bonal & Fontdevila
Anthropology	How do different societies make sense of their world?	How and why do different cultures deal with access?	How and why do different societies deal with distributive challenges?	Bakker & Nootboom

Gender studies	How does gender stereotypes, differences and discrimination affect ID?	How and why does this affect access?	How and why does this affect distributive justice?	How and why does this affect development/wellbeing; and how can development enhance outcomes for women?	Koralagama, Gupta & Pouw
Environment watersci-	What physical, biological, geological/ chemical characteristic shapes ID?	Are there physical limits to specific resources that hamper access?	Does the natural characteristics of a resource or problem shapes allocation rules?	How and why does the natural characteristics of resources shape definitions of development/wellbeing?	Dos Santos & Gupta; Aros & Ther; Rawat; Luo, Muleta, Hu et al.
Engineering	What role do technologies play in ID?	How, why, and under what circumstances do technologies limit access?	How, why, and under what circumstances do technologies shape distributive issues?	What should be the role of technology in development? Should development shape technology or vice versa?	Siddiqui & Collins

Source: Building on Gupta & Lebel (2010) [50].

## Conclusions

This paper has assessed the state of the literature on ‘inclusive development,’ and has elaborated on a guiding framework for expanding on the concept of inclusive development, by building on related concepts and approaches in different disciplines as well as thematic areas. While historically societies have tended to be more and more unequal, the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have experienced a period in which there has been relatively more equality [36]. However, what is clear is that globally societies have decided to address access issues, reduce inequalities, and promote more inclusive and sustainable societies through the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals. This Special Issue explores how different disciplines and fields can give meaning to the concept of inclusive development.

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