

# EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS FOR PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of the scientific study is to provide a comprehensive panorama for increasing equality to benefit everyone as a community from a sustainable development and for equal participation and without discrimination for a greater social inclusion.

Equality and social inclusion are crucial indicators of sustainable development, as they reflect a society's ability to provide fair opportunities and resources to all individuals, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status. Equality reduces poverty, prevents social conflicts, and promotes economic growth. Social inclusion removes barriers that prevent marginalized groups from participating fully in society, allowing for the full utilization of human potential. Both are embedded in the Sustainable Development such as Goal, Gender Equality, Reduced Inequalities, and Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. Prioritizing equality and inclusion leads to lower poverty rates, better health outcomes, and higher education levels, ensuring economic growth doesn't leave anyone behind.

In addition to improving outcomes, participation and knowledge in time and place can also increase economic justice, reduce local public risk, foster citizen cooperation and acceptance, and provide information for rational decision-making. Sustainable development is viable and promising. When combined with the voices, assets and skills unique to a community, sustainable development can prove to be a vital instrument in managing resource scarcity and equity concerns.

**Keywords:** Sustainable development, Social inclusion, community, equality, economic growth

## **1. Introduction**

The concept of social inclusion, referred to as social integration or social cohesion, represents a vision of „a society for all“, in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. While definitions of Various concepts have been developed to describe social inclusion, all of which are based on promoting 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 (Esuna; 2015). The concept of social inclusion highlights the intertwined and multidimensional nature of chronic deprivation resulting from social

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exclusion, such as discrimination, which is closely linked to poverty and the problems that accompany it (such as lack of education, poor health and the level of low participation or involvement in the labor market). Also, social exclusion highlights the norms and belief systems that underlie exclusion. (Draft – Social Inclusion Policy Document 2023 – 2027). The involvement of citizens, interest groups and representatives of civil society organizations in decision-making regarding public issues is an approach that stems from the basic principles of democratic order and has been recommended by international institutions such as the European Commission, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Also, this approach is supported by international legal conventions and national legislation. At the same time, the participation of citizens in public affairs also comes as a result of the commitment of the Albanian government within the initiative of the Partnership for Open Government. (Mikova, Alite: 2016)

There was a tendency to: 1. Treat social inclusion as an extended version of „economic“ inclusion; 2. identify exclusion by marginalizing certain individuals or groups based on their race, ethnicity or gender; and 3. focusing on individual well-being in analyzing and measuring social inclusion (Esuna; 2015). Just as diversity is considered a vital asset to achieving social equity, so is inclusion. While diversity and inclusion are critical assets to achieving equality, inclusion extends beyond the concept of diversity (Yeo J. & Jeon SH :2023). Development is unlikely to be sustainable unless it is inclusive. 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 affect their lives. Social policies that promote universal rights-based practices based on rights, equal and meaningful participation, and norms of solidarity and reciprocity, paying due respect to diversity and the environment, are more likely to enable social inclusion (Esuna; 2015).

However, over time, it has become clear that, like social ills like poverty and inequality, exclusion has multiple causes and takes different 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 programs implemented around the world that have emphasized the need to simultaneously promote productivity, poverty reduction and greater inclusion. In some countries, social programs are now evolving towards a framework of social inclusion, which includes: 1. access to basic services, especially in health and education, which requires the active participation of beneficiaries in the relevant programs; and 2. access to economic opportunities with a focus on inclusion in the labor market, with a primary aim to reduce poverty and vulnerability, especially among the most disadvantaged groups. ( Esuna; 2015). The root causes of poverty are generally invisible in standard empirical data and therefore remain largely unexplored in mainstream poverty analysis and not included in poverty reduction strategies. Absence caused by social exclusion usually occurs simultaneously in several aspects; policies that improve only one of these aspects (such as improving access to education) do

not relieve the impacts of other aspects. Individuals and groups participate in society in three interrelated areas of social inclusion: markets, spaces and services. These areas represent both obstacles, but also opportunities for social inclusion. Access to services is essential to improve the conditions under which individuals participate in society, and the opportunity to seek space for participation is essential for inclusion (Draft – Social Inclusion Policy Document 2023 – 2027).

## **2. Social inclusion and sustainable development through public policies**

The reasons for citizens' involvement in decision-making can be different, starting from ideological reasons and ending with practical ones. From an ideological point of view, democracy is a system that relies on the consent of the citizens, for the assurance and preservation of which, the participation of the citizens in political decisions, which play a role and have great consequences in their lives, is necessary. Within the representative system of democracy, the Parliament, which consists of elected representatives, plays a central role in making decisions at the national public level. In order to maintain the sustainability of the system, the government must listen carefully to the demands of citizens for more participation, transparency and accountability, and public institutions must introduce new forms of citizen involvement in policy-making (Mikova, Alite: 2016). necessary to examine the social relations within which the economy and society are embedded. The implementation of inclusive social policies is the responsibility of all social actors, including governments, civil society, the private sector and society in general. It is vital to promote and encourage partnerships between different actors and sectors for the implementation of these policies. However, it is the role of the state to create mechanisms that would facilitate the involvement of all these important actors at the national and local level (Esuna; 2015). On the other hand, sustainable development is widely understood as a concept that is characterized by: the connection of closely between the goals of economic and social development policies and environmental protection; the qualification of environmental protection as an integral part of any development measure and vice versa; and the long-term perspective of both policy goals, which is the intergenerational responsibility of states. The concept of sustainable development in its entirety should be perceived as an anthropocentric and ecocentric nature (Ulrich; 2009). Inclusive social policy is one such mechanism that promotes sustainable development in which all human beings have the right to a decent living and are allowed to participate on equal terms in decision-making processes. At the same time, it is essential to recognize that processes of social inclusion are always locally specific and historically conditioned. Each country must formulate policies and strategies based on its specific circumstances, resource base, and cultural and institutional structure. The task is not so much how to expand social inclusion per se, but how to promote the kind of inclusion that favors the creation of a more equal society. (Esuna; 2015)

***Some of the practical reasons for citizen involvement are:***

Direct communication between decision makers and users of services or beneficiaries of public policies to better understand the needs of citizens or customers; Better public policies that are drawn up on the basis of multiple sources of information and different expertise; Wider acceptance of policies by the public; Increasing public trust in public institutions and the government; More transparency on public decision-making (Mikova, Alite: 2016).

For the successful engagement of citizens in policy-making, it is necessary for the public administration and its staff to have a positive attitude towards participation, as well as to have knowledge and apply important methodological principles for citizen participation. These principles serve as guidelines for public administration during participatory processes. The basic precautions for the successful engagement of citizens in decision-making can be summarized in the following ten points:

1. Convincing public administration officials that the engagement of citizens in decision-making on public issues is really useful.
2. Actively using all current legal tools to allow citizens to exercise their right to participate in public decision-making.
3. Ensuring that the participation process is easily understood by the public, including its objectives, the role of the persons involved, responsibilities, reasons, etc.
4. Sufficient time for the participatory process, such as sufficient and timely extension of the various stages and the entire participatory process, to enable satisfactory dialogue.
5. The objective of the process, e.g. ensuring all information available from the public administration (integrity, objectivity/impartiality, access to all types of information).
6. Allocation of sufficient resources (financial, human, technical and other) necessary to ensure the entire participatory process and make it more efficient.
7. Coordination of participatory processes at all levels and departments of public administration and NGOs in order to achieve maximum efficiency and prevent risks (of job cuts, continuous burden on public administration and citizens, and non- fruitful etc.)
8. Public administration accountability: being open, transparent, and justifying opinions and decisions regarding suggestions/comments received from public administration, citizens and NGOs during the participation process.
9. Monitoring and evaluation of the processes and results of policy-making with the participation of the public administration. The purpose of evaluation is to improve participation and adapt it to changing conditions.
10. The use of active citizens and the dynamics of civil society to promote civic education of the public and improve the quality of decision-making. (Mikova, Alite: 2016)

In the postmodern era, social equity in service delivery appears to be a primary concern. In this cultural environment, decision-making takes a certain degree of innovation, improvisation and risk. Certainly, considerations of social equality in part of public organizations would best occur in this type of cultural environment. One way to

ascertain this type of culture in a public organization is to perform a culture diagnosis. The purpose here is not only to identify the particular culture that is present and its operative values but also the extent to which it is shared by members. The objective of the cultural diagnosis is to determine if there is a negative bureaucratic culture that hinders effective public service delivery and considerations of social equality. Also, a diversity audit can be administered to determine hidden perceptions or confirmed biases for certain groups of individuals (Rice:2003). There is an ongoing controversial discussion in international legal writings about the normative content and status of sustainable development. Some researchers suggest that the concept of sustainable development possesses normative qualities and has already acquired the status of a principle of customary international law, or at least will become such a principle. Sustainable development is therefore still very sensitive to different explanations. Its 'normative language' is vague to the extent that it cannot establish any discernible steering effect on the environmental behavior of states. For these reasons, much speaks in favor of the assumption that sustainable development remains below the threshold of normative quality, which is a prerequisite for sustainable development to attribute the quality of a 'legal' principle. Thus, it is a political ideal rather than a legal principle (Ulrich; 2009).

### **3. Conclusions**

The concept of social inclusion highlights the intertwined and multidimensional nature of chronic deprivation resulting from social exclusion, such as discrimination, which is closely related to poverty and the problems that accompany it. The concept of social inclusion, referred to as social integration or social cohesion, represents a vision of „a society for all“, in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. The involvement of citizens, interest groups and representatives of civil society organizations in decision-making regarding public issues is an approach that stems from the basic principles of democratic order and that has been recommended by international institutions. It is necessary to examine the social relations within which the economy and society are embedded. The implementation of inclusive social policies is the responsibility of all social actors, including governments, civil society, the private sector and society in general. It is vital to promote and encourage partnerships between different actors and sectors for the implementation of these policies. Inclusive social policy is one such mechanism that promotes sustainable development in which all human beings have the right to a decent life and are allowed to participate under equal conditions in decision-making processes. Sustainable development is not itself a norm, it cannot be more than a name for a set of norms. For the successful engagement of citizens in policy-making, it is necessary for the public administration and its staff to have a positive attitude towards participation, as well as to have knowledge and apply important methodological principles for citizen participation. These principles serve as guidelines for public administration during participatory processes.

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