



**United Nations**

Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs

CEPA strategy guidance note on  
**Promotion of social equity**

April 2022

The [United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration \(CEPA\)](#) has developed a set of principles of effective governance for sustainable development. The essential purpose of these voluntary principles is to provide interested countries with practical, expert guidance on a broad range of governance challenges associated with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. CEPA has identified 62 commonly used strategies to assist with the operationalization of these principles. This guidance note addresses the promotion of social equity in public policymaking, which is associated with the principle of leaving no one behind and can contribute to strengthening the inclusiveness of institutions. It is part of a series of such notes prepared by renowned experts under the overall direction of the CEPA Secretariat in the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

In reading this guidance note, individuals in government ministries and agencies who are less familiar with the topic will be able to understand the fundamentals. Those who have perhaps taken initial steps in this area with limited follow-through or impact will be able to identify how to adjust elements of their practice to achieve better results and to better embed and institutionalize the strategy in their organizations. Those who are more advanced in promoting social equity will be able to recognize the practices which contribute to its success.

## Understanding the strategy

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The promotion of social equity is one of the strategies for leaving no one behind, and can be understood as fairness, justice and greater equality for all in society.<sup>1</sup> Achieving equity relies on an active commitment to these aims through the country's formal and informal institutions, or articulated in a country's constitution, and applied to the formulation and implementation of public policy, finance and budgeting, and in the administration of programmes executed or funded by the State.

Equity is undermined where inequality is high. People may face economic inequalities; inequalities in social, economic and political rights; or inequality in political power. These matter for social equity and need to be addressed if social justice is to be achieved.<sup>2</sup> Intersecting inequalities are particularly harmful to social equity and capture the combination of multiple forms of disadvantage that can affect people.<sup>3</sup> An example is a poor, indigenous woman, living in a remote, internally displaced people's camp. She is likely to experience the negative consequences of gender and racial discrimination, layered with the impact of geography, socio-economic status, governance, and vulnerability to shocks.<sup>4</sup> These factors reinforce each other and have negative consequences for her experience of daily life, her access to services and her well-being outcomes.

Many people experiencing intersecting inequalities have low levels of capabilities, asset holdings and agency because of the discrimination and exclusion that they have experienced. This can magnify the deprivations they face, constrain their life chances, and negatively affect their ability to assert their rights. As a result, they can be among the furthest left behind, limiting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>5,6</sup>

Governments around the world have committed to the pursuit of greater equality, including through commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda represents a transformative development agenda and is a universal call to reduce inequalities (Goal 10). The SDGs are ambitious in their scope, with a number of goals having a strong focus on inclusion and reducing inequalities. The drive for social equity provides a cross-cutting theme

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, R., M. Coll Besaand, N. Matin and M. Davis, 2017, [Understanding social equity and sustainability interactions in the Sustainable Development Goals: Gender differences in food security](#). Stockholm Environment Institute. Discussion Brief.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, 2015, [Concepts of Inequality Development Issues No. 1](#). Development Policy and Analysis Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

<sup>3</sup> Norton, A., C. Mariotti, A. Shepherd and N. Kabeer, 2014, [What can be done to address intersecting inequalities? Social justice post-2015](#). ODI Briefing No. 93. London: ODI.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), 2019, [Leaving No One Behind: A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams](#). Washington: UNSDG.

<sup>5</sup> UNSDG, 2021, [Universal Values - Principle Two: Leave No One Behind](#). United Nations website. (2 August 2021).

<sup>6</sup> A comprehensive overview of inequality can be found in Bucelli, I. and A. McKnight, 2021, [Mapping Systemic Approaches to Understanding Inequality and Their Potential for Designing and Implementing Interventions to Reduce Inequality](#). LSE Working Paper 62. London: LSE.

that helps countries develop coherent action across the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. The 17 SDGs are integrated and action in one area will affect outcomes in others. Countries have committed to ensure that no one is left behind in the quest to eradicate poverty, hunger, and discrimination against women and girls, and the achievement of good health and well-being, quality education and decent work, among other goals.

Leaving no one behind is the central promise of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Countries have committed to prioritizing progress across all the SDGs for those who are ‘furthest behind’<sup>7</sup> by reaching the poorest of the poor and combatting discrimination and inequalities within and between countries. Eradicating inequalities within and between countries also need to be addressed.<sup>8</sup> This requires moving beyond assessing average and aggregate progress, towards ensuring progress for all population groups at a disaggregated level.

### Levers to promote social equity

Delivering improvements in social equity requires a cross-governmental commitment, underpinned by adequate budgetary allocations to pro-poor spending that supports the well-being of poor people, by mitigating harm, enabling livelihoods, improving access to goods and services and enabling poverty escapes. Priorities are likely to include measures that seek to equalize access to goods, services and markets by reducing discrimination and other barriers; to drive up inclusion; to address exploitation made possible by power asymmetries; and to counter poverty and other inequalities in well-being. Restoring peace and security to conflict-affected areas is a priority but can be attempted alongside other interventions.

A cross-government strategy to deliver social equity would be multi-faceted. Such a strategy would require fiscal and monetary policies with equity at their heart that support jobs-rich ‘growth from below’<sup>9</sup> through enabling smallholder agriculture and small enterprise and using public spending to deliver health and education services free at the point of delivery. Equitable policies would provide an income floor and appropriate interventions throughout people’s life course via a package of integrated social protection measures, risk mitigation and by challenging discrimination and exclusion through legislation and public information campaigns, including in the areas of gender equity and disability rights.

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), [‘The SDGs in action: What are the social development goals?’](#) UNDP website. (2 August 2021).

<sup>8</sup> UNSDG, 2021, [Universal Values - Principle Two: Leave No One Behind](#). United Nations website. (2 August 2021).

<sup>9</sup> The term ‘growth from below’, coined by the Chronic Poverty Advisory Network, refers to growth derived from job-rich growth in the enterprises and livelihoods of poor people, stimulated by the small and often informal investments made by individuals and households rather than the ‘growth from above’ normally promoted by governments, which involves large, formal investments. See Shepherd, A., K. Bird, L. Dacorta, V. Diwakar, A. Dubey, S. Gelb, F. Golooba-Mutebi, M. Günther, A. Lenhardt, G. Mwabu, G. L. Scott and P. Shaffer, 2019, [Growing equitably, sustainably and leaving no one behind: a policy agenda for developing countries/for the poorest](#). CPAN. London: ODI.

### Promotion of equitable fiscal and monetary policy

Delivering greater social equity may require adjustments to trade rules and other agreements affecting the relationships between countries. Inequalities in political power and influence can be an obstacle to promoting equity. Macro-economic policies can exacerbate inequalities and some assume that these can then be mitigated by effective social policy.<sup>10</sup> However, this is not necessarily the case and macro-economic policy should instead be made with an awareness of the likely direct and indirect effects on equity and poverty.

Decision-making should, furthermore, integrate an awareness that any policy intervention to shift one macroeconomic variable has impacts on other macroeconomic variables, making trade-offs necessary. However, where there is a clear commitment to equity, fiscal and monetary policies can be devised that ensure that allocations are made to those activities most likely to improve equity.<sup>11</sup>

Some of the measures in place to address poverty and inequality will be to reduce market failures by, for example, improving access to market information; improving the access that poor producers, workers and consumers have to markets; and by careful regulation. Other measures will compensate for the negative consequences that unregulated markets can have on those that engage with them on adverse terms. And others still will seek to address the intersecting inequalities that poor people experience, despite the interventions made to address social equity.

Measures to achieve SDG 8 and its targets on decent work and economic growth can also result in social equity. However, there is something of a gap in policy making in this area, and relatively few effective policies have been developed and implemented to date.

Measures to improve access to (well-functioning) markets should enable smallholder agricultural producers (among others) to ‘move up the value chain’ and produce higher value products for national and international markets. It should also enable workers to obtain higher return work and consumers to purchase a wider range of goods and services. Where individuals have the assets and capabilities to support their agency in market interactions, engaging in well-functioning markets should (in theory) drive up their well-being. However, to be effective in supporting equity outcomes, measures to improve market access must be complemented with others which ensure an enabling environment, promote climate-resilient practices and provide access to appropriate technology and financial services. Where poor people lack the assets, capabilities and agency to engage in markets on good terms, or where markets are structured such that they exploit those with weak negotiating power, regulatory

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<sup>10</sup> Shepherd, A., K. Bird, L. Dacorta, V. Diwakar, A. Dubey, S. Gelb, F. Golooba-Mutebi, M. Günther, A. Lenhardt, G. Mwabu, L. Scott, and P. Shaffer, 2019, ‘[Chronic Poverty Report 4: Growing equitably, sustainably and leaving no one behind: a policy agenda for developing countries/for the poorest](#)’ CPAN. London: ODI.

<sup>11</sup> Lustig, N., 2020, [The Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\), Domestic Resource Mobilization and the Poor](#). G20 INSIGHTS. Policy Brief.

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instruments are needed in combination with interventions to improve their agency and support equity and social transformation.

#### **Public investment in basic services**

Increased spending on public services, free at the point of delivery in health and education, when coupled with careful monitoring of performance and outcomes has the potential to build capabilities. This is particularly the case where services deliver a progressive improvement in outcomes, so that children from poor families can complete secondary school and acquire the skills needed in the labour market; poor people can access not just good quality preventative health services but also receive accurate diagnosis of any illness and be referred to secondary and tertiary services; and where these services are good quality and accessed free at the point of delivery.

These measures are in line with the achievement of SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 and 10 and their associated targets. Improved outcomes in social equity depend on health and education services being designed carefully to meet local needs, and particularly the needs of the poorest and most excluded. Maintaining a consistent approach to budgeting, coupled with accountability to the intended beneficiaries and careful monitoring of disbursements, performance and delivery down to the community level can deliver improved performance and outcomes.

#### **Strengthening of social protection programmes**

Poverty and hunger, covered in SDGs 1 and 2, are other examples and causes of social inequity. The structural factors driving poverty mean that even where equality of access to services, resources and opportunities is assured, equality of outcomes does not rely solely on differences in levels of effort. Effective social protection programmes, outlined in several SDGs including 1, 5 and 10, which combine universal and life-course based measures with poverty-targeted measures can prevent destitution, enable households to build an asset base, and invest in human capital formation. Where transfers provide risk mitigation and an income floor by being adequate, appropriate, reliable, timely and sustained for a suitable duration, and where they are accompanied by appropriate complementary measures, they can enable even very poor households to move out of poverty, thereby reducing income inequality and improving social equity. This is particularly true where complementary measures ensure a suitable enabling environment as well as supporting empowerment and the building of capabilities.

#### **Promotion and enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies**

Managing the macroeconomy for equitable outcomes and improving the funding of public services are necessary but not sufficient to deliver social equity. Equity of opportunity can only be ensured by eradicating discrimination. Many of the barriers people face in accessing services, resources and opportunities are not simply accidents of fate or driven by resource constraints. Rather they result from laws, policies and administrative practices that, whether

by design or inadvertently, disadvantage particular groups and result in various forms of exclusion or adverse inclusion.<sup>12, 13</sup> Anti-discrimination legislation and public information campaigns, coupled with affirmative action programmes (where necessary) can, over a period of decades, reduce exclusion, shift social norms and stimulate transformative social change.<sup>14</sup>

## Public sector situation and trends

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ODI's Leave No One Behind (LNOB) readiness index<sup>15</sup> analyses three key dimensions:

- *Data* – is the country undertaking high quality, nationally representative household surveys to identify those at high risk of being left behind?
- *Finance* – is the government investing adequately in education, health and social protection?
- *Policy* – does the country have the key policies in place to address the needs of those at risk of being left behind, specifically women's access to land and employment and universal access to health?

The results indicate that, in 2021, 75 out of 159 countries<sup>16</sup> were 'ready' to meet their LNOB commitment, while 65 were 'partially ready' and 8 were 'not ready.'<sup>17</sup> Most high-income countries and upper-middle-income countries have achieved 'ready' status. Around a third of lower-middle-income countries are 'ready', but very few low-income countries are 'ready'; most are only 'partially ready'. The LNOB *outcome index* uses four SDG indicators that have inherent equity considerations. Based on that metric, 72 countries (45 percent) are already 'on track' and another 41 countries (26 percent) have made 'partial progress' towards achieving their LNOB commitment.

### Progress in delivering social equity

Delivering social equity is a broad agenda. Selected indicative themes have been identified for reporting: progress in gender equity, reducing income inequality and eradicating poverty, improved access to social protection, reduced income inequality, improved education and skills, and improved health outcomes.

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<sup>12</sup> Silver, H., 2015, [The Contexts of Social Inclusion](#). UNDESA Working Paper No. 144.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank, 2021, [Social Inclusion](#). Web based resources.

<sup>14</sup> Marcus, R., A. Mdee and E. Page, 2017, [Do anti-discrimination measures reduce poverty among marginalised social groups?](#) Expertgruppen för biståndsanlys (EBA) Rapport 2017:02.

<sup>15</sup> The ODI 'leave no one behind' (LNOB) indices assess and monitor the extent to which national systems, institutions and practices across 159 countries are set up and are ready to meet commitments enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

<sup>16</sup> These 159 countries account for 89 percent of the global population.

<sup>17</sup> Chattopadhyay, S. and H. Salomon, 2021, ['Leave no one behind' indices 2020](#). ODI Working Paper. London: ODI.

### Progress in gender equity<sup>18, 19</sup>

**Legal reform** to support gender equity has occurred in many countries. However, remaining discriminatory laws still affect billions of women and girls, restricting their freedom to make decisions about marriage or divorce, and negatively impacting gender equity in child custody, getting a job or starting a business.

**Violence against women** remains widespread, with one in five women globally having experienced sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) from an intimate partner in the past year. Around three quarters of countries now have legislation in place against SGBV; however, implementation is spotty.

**Economic empowerment** is an important tool in achieving gender equity and while 62 percent of women are active in the paid labour force (compared to 93 percent of men), progress in labour force participation has stalled over the last 20 years. Of the women who are employed, over 50 percent are employed in the informal economy earning low wages and lacking social protection, with unpaid care and domestic work compromising women's ability to earn an income and accumulate assets. However, legislative progress is being made with many countries passing and implementing laws for women's economic empowerment, and a reduction in the pay gap becoming more evident between 1995 and 2015.<sup>20</sup>

**Power and decision-making** remain overwhelmingly dominated by men and while women's representation in parliaments has more than doubled, on average, from 11 percent in 1995, men still hold three quarters of seats. In 2020, men held 73 percent of management positions.<sup>21</sup>

### Progress in poverty reduction

The World Bank estimates that global poverty decreased up until 2017 but that this reversed from 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>22</sup> Over the past quarter century unprecedented progress had been made in reducing poverty, with a steady reduction in extreme poverty beginning in the 1990s. Globally, extreme poverty fell by an average of about 1 percent per year between 1990 and 2015, but between 2013 and 2015 the rate of decline fell to just 0.6 percentage points per year and by 2017, progress had begun to stall.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> United Nations, 2020, [Women and Girls – Closing the Gender Gap](#). New York: United Nations.

<sup>19</sup> A lack of disaggregated data, analysis and reporting on disability limits the ability of this guidance note to report on progress in disability inclusion, measures to ensure equity for child-headed households and other drivers of exclusion.

<sup>20</sup> Kring, S. A., 2017, [Gender in employment policies and programmes: What works for women?](#) ILO EMPLOYMENT Working Paper No. 235. Geneva: ILO.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations, 2020, [Women and Girls – Closing the Gender Gap](#). New York: United Nations.

<sup>22</sup> World Bank, 2021, [March 2021 global poverty update from the World Bank](#). Washington: World Bank.

<sup>23</sup> World Bank, 2021, [Reversals of Fortune. Poverty and Shared Prosperity: 2020](#). Washington, World Bank. Revised 2021.

Poverty has also become more concentrated, with over 40 percent of poor people living in economies affected by fragility, conflict and violence in 2021. This figure is expected to increase to 67 percent by 2030, despite these economies being home to just 10 percent of the global population.<sup>24</sup>

Looking forward, conflict, climate change and the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic are likely to have a substantial impact on poverty trends. Up to 132 million more people may become poor by 2030 because of climate change<sup>25</sup> with a further 100 million more due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many people in this latter group of new poor (80 percent) are likely to come from middle income countries.<sup>26</sup>

### Reduced income inequality

Governments can reduce inequality through careful use of policy instruments and public spending. The Commitment to Reducing [Inequality](#) (CRI) Index assesses a country's performance by how much its government sets aside in the annual budget for each of 18 key indicators.<sup>27</sup> Analysis from this index shows that many countries around the world are making substantial progress in inequality. In Latin America, the governments of Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay have worked to reduce inequality through redistributive expenditure and (in some) by increasing minimum wages. South Africa has a highly progressive tax regime, scoring ahead of all other countries around the world<sup>28</sup> though this is yet to translate into marked reductions in income inequality. Among lower middle-income countries, Guyana has made progress on inequality by spending 17 percent of its national budget on education and 12 percent on health and has a progressive tax structure as well as progressive policies on trade unions and women's labour rights, and Armenia has very strong and progressive social spending. Namibia is one of the highest-ranked African countries in the Index and is fifth among middle-income countries. Despite being one of the most unequal countries in the world, its high CRI score reflects the commitment of the Namibian government to reducing inequality, particularly through its high levels of social spending (with secondary education free for all students) and some of the most progressive taxation policies.<sup>29</sup>

Many low-income countries have also demonstrated a strong commitment to tackling inequality. For example, the governments of Ethiopia and Mozambique are putting a fifth of their budgets into education, to fund free primary schooling. Zimbabwe spent nearly a third of its budget on education in the three years before 2017, indicating both the national

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<sup>24</sup> World Bank, 2021, [Poverty Overview](#). Washington: World Bank.

<sup>25</sup> World Bank, 2021, [Reversals of Fortune. Poverty and Shared Prosperity: 2020](#). Washington: World Bank. Revised 2021.

<sup>26</sup> World Bank, 2021, [Poverty Overview](#). Washington: World Bank.

<sup>27</sup> Oxfam and Development Finance International, 2017, [Inequality Index](#). [www.inequalityindex.org](http://www.inequalityindex.org)

<sup>28</sup> South Africa nevertheless has the highest levels of income inequality in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 63 ([World Population Review](#)), suggesting a significant disjuncture between its tax regime and its impact on income and wealth inequality.

<sup>29</sup> Oxfam and Development Finance International, 2017, [Inequality Index](#). [www.inequalityindex.org](http://www.inequalityindex.org)



commitment to education and resource scarcity. Niger and Liberia both appear in the top third of the Index, performing well on labour rights and minimum wages, with Liberia having introduced a Decent Work Law and the world's highest minimum wage compared to GDP per capita.

### **Improved education and skills**

Years of schooling completed by the average adult in a low or middle-income country more than tripled between 1950 and 2010 – from 2.0 to 7.2 years. This rate of improvement is historically unprecedented. A number of low-cost interventions can be effective in reducing drop-out rates and increasing the number of years that children remain in school. In Kenya, merit-based scholarships have been shown to increase the number of years that girls remain in school and their enrolment in secondary school, with the scholarship being split between direct payments to the girls and their parents. In the Dominican Republic, boys from poor households who were given information about the positive returns to education were found to be more likely to remain in school. In India, giving girls bicycles increased secondary school enrolment.

### **Improved health outcomes**

Access to medical care is hampered by low levels of provision, with doctor-patient ratios in Africa averaging one doctor per 3,324 people, compared to one per 293 people in Europe.<sup>30</sup> These constraints are compounded by a limited health infrastructure, inadequate referral systems, and the impact on patients of direct health care costs and out-of-pocket expenditures. These costs have a direct impact on health outcomes and have contributed to dramatically reduced life expectancy for both adults and children. Maternal mortality is a sensitive indicator of both gender equity and health service provision, capturing access to health and the quality of both preventative and curative care. It is 14 times higher in developing than in developed countries.<sup>31</sup> However, global estimates indicate a declining trend in maternal mortality, with a 38 percent reduction in the maternal mortality ratio from 342 per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 211 per 100,000 live births in 2017.

Investments in public health are improving access to health services in several countries. For example, Rwanda has implemented health insurance with exemptions for the poorest and enhanced state investments in primary care.<sup>32</sup> In Cambodia, state investments in primary care are biased in favour of the poor, with investments to provide both the built infrastructure and improved access to services, with the development of a good network of health clinics close

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<sup>30</sup> Abdul Jameel Latif Health, 2020, [Improving healthcare access in developing markets](#). Dubai: AJLH.

<sup>31</sup> Abdul Jameel Latif Health, 2020, [Improving healthcare access in developing markets](#). Dubai: AJLH.

<sup>32</sup> Bird, K. et al., 2020, [Understanding poverty trends and poverty dynamics in Rwanda](#). CPAN report for DFID-Rwanda. London: ODI.

to where poor people live, alongside free health care for those identified as coming from the poorest households.<sup>33</sup>

## Methods of implementation

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Greater social equity and inclusion can generate a stream of intrinsic and instrumental benefits, with intrinsic benefits accruing to an individual and instrumental benefits being potentially experienced by their children, household, community or society.

Policies to increase social equity include much of the business of government. If designed and delivered in the right way, the policies and programmes under most ministries can make a useful contribution. For this reason, it is useful to find suitable entry points and priorities. One of the ways to achieve the overarching principle of leaving no one behind is to actively promote social equity in public policymaking and administration. The following is adapted from the guidance provided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to ensure that no one is being left behind:<sup>34</sup>

Government actors should work together to implement the following four-step process:

- Step 1: Who? Identify who is left behind
- Step 2: Why? Analyse and prioritize
- Step 3: What? What should be done?
- Step 4: How? Implement and monitor effective policies and programmes

### **Step 1: Identify who is being left behind**

This requires government actors to:

Gather and analyse relevant data and information revealing gaps and trends in SDG implementation between sub-populations and/or geographic localities (paying attention to the major dimensions of discrimination and exclusion, to poverty, disadvantaged groups, and human rights). Seek diverse feedback and input from stakeholders, including groups and populations left behind.

Integrate quantitative and qualitative data to deliver robust evidence, ideally using longitudinal data to understand changes over time, plus information from a range of sources including from national statistics, research studies, national human rights institutions, international

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<sup>33</sup> Bird, K., V. Roth and V. Diwakar, 2019, [Resilience and sustained poverty escapes in Rural Cambodia](#). CPAN report for USAID. London: CPAN.

<sup>34</sup> Adapted from UNSDG, 2019, [Leaving No One Behind: A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams](#). Washington: UNSDG.

human rights mechanisms, International Labour Organization (ILO) supervisory bodies, and civil society organizations, including women's organizations and/or community-level data.

Develop a joined-up analysis and identify the furthest behind by combining evidence from a wide range of sources (such as, national data, evidence on poverty dynamics, food security, intersecting inequalities, development, human rights, conflict, politics, risks and shocks, and humanitarian analysis).

### **Step 2: Impact on well-being? Analyse and prioritize<sup>35</sup>**

This requires government actors to:

Identify which groups experience below average levels of well-being (including in food security, intersecting inequalities, housing, access to water, health and education outcomes, occupation, civic engagement, human rights and political participation). Those groups or geographic areas with severe or multiple deficits should be flagged.

Assess the gap between outcomes and the national average, across the selected indicators, in order to identify where remedial attention should be directed.

### **Step 3: What should be done?**

Developing the right policy mix to deliver on LNOB will improve social equity as such policies overlap substantially. Achieving these dual goals depends on effective prioritization and sequencing, and this in turn relies on evidence-based policymaking and budgeting processes. While there is no blueprint for action, a lot is known about the actions and decisions that drive social equity and inclusion.<sup>36</sup>

A policy framework for the structural transformation necessary for greater equity will include a progressive fiscal policy, where the revenue side is based on a system of progressive taxation and the expenditure side is designed around coherent progressive goals. It is crucial that taxation is progressive and does not include, for instance, Value Added Tax (VAT), as such consumption taxes tend to be highly regressive. All fiscal systems are capable of reducing income inequality. However, in a number of countries fiscal systems have been found to increase poverty. This is primarily as a result of the collection of consumption taxes.<sup>37</sup> The

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<sup>35</sup> Adapted from UNSDG, 2019, [Leaving No One Behind: A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams](#). Washington: UNSDG.

<sup>36</sup> Shepherd, A., K. Bird and M. S. Sarwar, 2019, [Leave No One Behind: Priority actions for governments in the first 1000 days](#). CPAN Challenge Paper. No 41. February 2019. London: ODI.

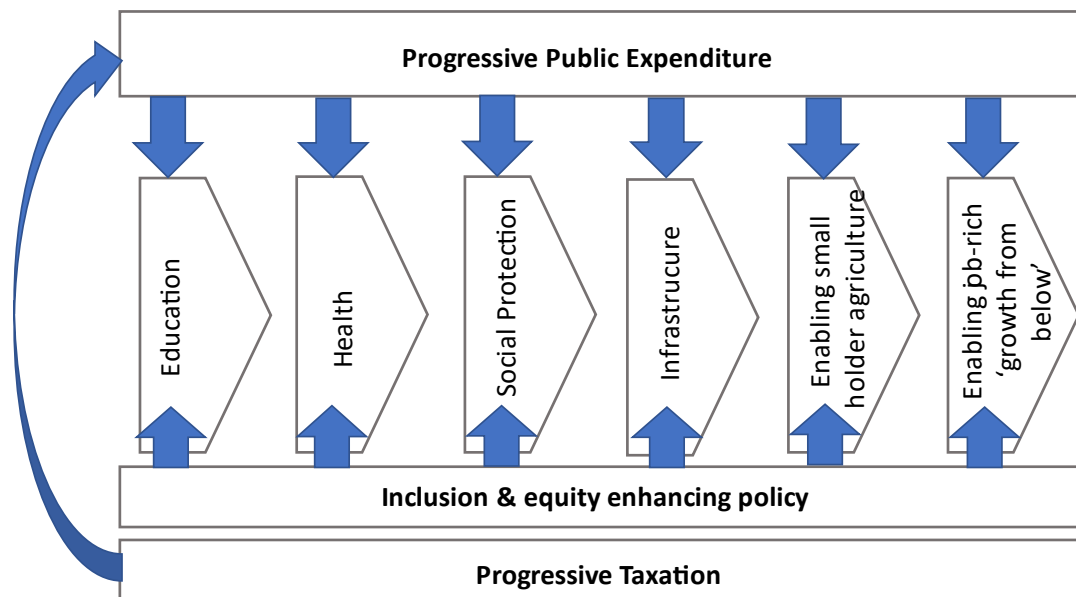
<sup>37</sup> Lustig, N., 2020, [The Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\), Domestic Resource Mobilization and the Poor](#). G20 INSIGHTS. Policy Brief.

newly added SDG 10.4.2 indicator tracks the redistributive impact of fiscal systems and can be used to assess progress as systems are reformed to become more progressive.<sup>38</sup>

Structural transformation to deliver equity also requires prioritised public expenditure on universal education and health provision, a comprehensive approach to social protection, investments in infrastructure (including access to information and communication technologies) and the enabling of both smallholder agriculture and job-rich ‘growth from below’ (see figure 1 below). This should, of course, be funded through progressive taxation and supported through inclusive and equity-enhancing public policy. These points are expanded on in the section below.

The relationship between taxation and expenditure is shown in Figure 1, which illustrates the importance of progressive taxation in enabling progressive public expenditure and the role of inclusive policy in the key pillars of education, health, social protection, infrastructure, enabling smallholder agriculture, and enabling job-rich ‘growth from below’. Of course, as we have stated elsewhere, peace and security are preconditions for creating an equitable society and are a priority in fragile, insecure, and conflict-affected environments.

**Figure 1. Policy framework for structural transformation**



<sup>38</sup> This indicator was proposed by CEQ Institute, Oxfam and the World Bank and was officially approved to be included in the SDG monitoring system in 2020. It allows systematic analysis of fiscal policies, accompanied by country-level scrutiny of the impact of the different components of the fiscal system. See Lustig, N., C. Mariotti and C. Sánchez-Pàramo, 2020, [The redistributive impact of fiscal policy indicator: A new global standard for assessing government effectiveness in tackling inequality within the SDG framework](#). World Bank Data Blog (11 June 2020).

#### **Step 4: How? Monitor the effectiveness of current policies and programmes**

Dynamic outcome monitoring to assess progress in social equity and inclusion can identify specific policies associated with increasing equity and inclusion, and monitor policy implementation and explore effectiveness by geographic area and by reach to specific income and categorical groups. Policy impact can be assessed using policy markers to ensure that the intended impact is being felt by people previously left behind. Monitoring can also capture exclusionary processes (intersectionality, breadth/depth, change over time) through the combined use of qualitative and quantitative data. Policy and programme planning and evaluation can be enhanced by disaggregated data that identifies entry points for inclusionary interventions.<sup>39</sup> This suggests that this monitoring role should be placed at the heart of government and feed into policy and budget review processes.

#### **Practical guidance: policy tools to enable inclusion and social equity in the context of the SDGs**

Making and implementing effective policies to deliver social equity is more likely where evidence-based decision-making occurs in the context of open and transparent governance.<sup>40</sup> Robust and disaggregated data provides clarity on who is being left behind, how and why.<sup>41</sup> Good national household surveys help deliver disaggregated national data but can be challenging to sustain in some low income and fragile states. Where data is poor, policymakers can compensate by using digital data and participative approaches to policy formation, while working to build better data systems.

Evidence based decision-making can enable the development of a transformative policy agenda which provides a mix of universal and targeted interventions. Figure 2 shows that these need to occur alongside enabling political change, constitutional reform, increased political participation and social mobilisation, and the relationships between these different components.

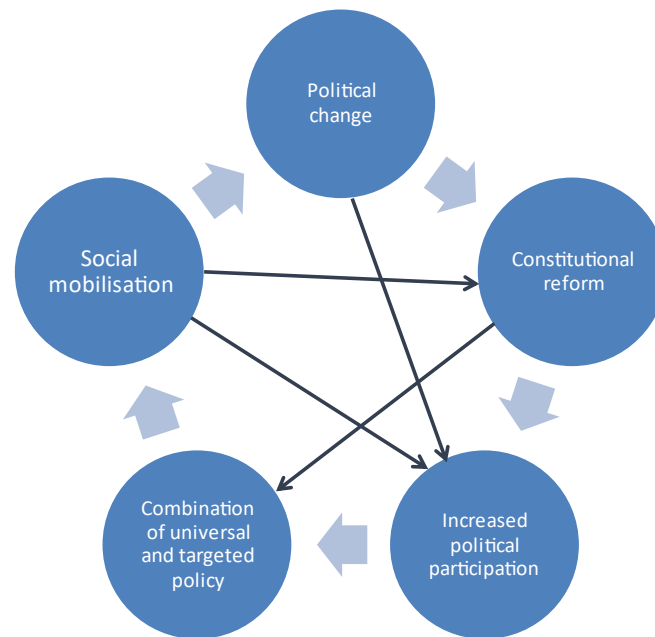
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<sup>39</sup> Labonté, R., A. Hadi and X.E. Kauffmann, 2011, [Indicators of Social Exclusion and Inclusion: A Critical and Comparative Analysis of the Literature](#). Exchange Working Papers. Volume 2 Number 8. Globalization and Health Equity Research Unit, Institute of Population Health, University of Ottawa.

<sup>40</sup> Participation, accountability, transparency and inclusion are principles of good governance that improve development outcomes. Waddington, H., J. Stevenson, A. Sonnenfeld and M. Gaarder, 2018, [Participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability \(PITA\) to improve public services in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic review](#). *Campbell Systematic Reviews*. Vol. 14:1, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/18911803/2018/14/1> (1-6).

<sup>41</sup> UNSDG, 2021, "[Universal Values Principle Two: Leave No One Behind](#)." United Nations website. (2 August 2021).

**Figure 2: Essentials for equitable transformation**



Source: Adapted from Paz Arauco et al., (2014) Addressing intersecting inequalities post-2015. London: ODI.<sup>42</sup>

### Universal policies and interventions for equity and inclusion

Universal policies that are designed with the needs of left behind groups at their centre can be highly effective in helping to deliver equity. These might include education, health, and age-based social protection services. Where such policies have been designed to meet the needs of the poorest and most excluded people they will generally be of great benefit to the wider population as well. In some country contexts, universal interventions are more strongly supported by the country's middle classes and political elite. This leads to them being better funded and more effectively implemented than targeted interventions.

National social protection policies can integrate universal and targeted measures. The key stage in identifying what works in a particular country context is to design, implement, and evaluate social protection pilots. The information generated by the evaluation of such pilots can contribute to an open public discussion and ensure widespread acceptance of the programme's final design. This stage can be followed by appropriate adjustments and expanded funding to allow for national roll out.

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<sup>42</sup> Paz Arauco, Veronica, Haris Gazdar, Paula Hevia-Pacheco, Naila Kabeer, Amanda Lenhardt, Syeda Quratulain Masood, Haider Naqvi, Nandini Nayak, Andy Norton, Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal, Elisa Scalise, Andrew Shepherd, Deepak Thapa, Sukhadeo Thorat, D. Hien Tran, Leandro Vergara-Camus and Tassew Woldehanna, 2014, Addressing intersecting inequalities post-2015. London: ODI.

Other policies, which inform the enabling environment for agriculture, such as job-rich ‘growth from below,’ including growth in the rural non-farm economy, can also have a significant impact on equity. For this reason, progressive taxation<sup>43</sup> and macroeconomic management that supports stability, while enabling pro-poor and equalizing investments, can make an important contribution to achieving equity.

These universal policies should be complemented with specific sector-focused and targeted policies. Reforms can also create a level playing field for all groups and geographic areas, with anti-discrimination policies in place to ensure equity in business, finance, labour, infrastructure and housing. Inclusive policy processes, with safe spaces for engagement and purposeful interactions with the interlocutors of the poorest, most discriminated and most marginalized groups are highly effective and the implementation of resulting policies can be supported by human rights-based budgeting that is equitable and includes expenditure tracking.

### Sector-focused interventions

Policies and programmes delivered across government can be pro-poor and improve equity and inclusion, if they are designed, funded and implemented with this in mind. Supporting synergistic links between interventions can lead to positive outcomes (e.g., social protection and health, education and social protection, education and enterprise development, infrastructure and market development for the non-farm rural economy). Due to space constraints, we focus here on enhancing capabilities through investments in education and health.

**Priorities for education** include expanding pre-primary provision and ensuring the inclusion of previously excluded children.<sup>44</sup> This is because of the cost-effective impact that such investments have in making children ‘education ready’, reducing inequality in both education access and outcomes and delivering measurable benefits in life-long earnings, thereby reducing poverty. It is equally important to enable previously excluded children to progress through the school system by driving up education outcomes and eliminating barriers to inclusion. A priority here is to ensure universal free primary and secondary education (including the removal of petty fees), supported by school feeding programmes and cash transfers to support the retention of girls, in particular, from the poorest families.<sup>45</sup>

Targeted education bursaries, for example, can be used to fund the secondary school education of girls from poor rural families. These can increase the transition from primary to secondary education and reduce drop-out rates, increasing completion rates and gender equity in outcomes. This increases young women’s access to the formal labour market and their wage

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<sup>43</sup> Lustig, N., 2020, [The Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\), Domestic Resource Mobilization and the Poor](#). G20 INSIGHTS. Policy Brief.

<sup>44</sup> Shepherd, A., K. Bird and M. S. Sarwar, 2019, [Leave No One Behind: Priority actions for governments in the first 1000 days](#). CPAN Challenge Paper. No 41. February 2019. London: ODI.

<sup>45</sup> Evans, D. K., C. Gale and K. Kosec, 2021, [The Educational Impacts of Cash Transfers for Children with Multiple Indicators of Vulnerability](#). Center for Global Development. Working Paper 563, March 2021.

rates, raising life-long earnings. Extending education contributes to delaying the age of a first pregnancy and marriage and strengthens a woman's agency and her negotiating power, making it more likely that she will be an equal decision maker within the household and less likely that she will experience persistent SGBV. Educated women tend to have fewer children, with positive impacts on maternal and infant mortality, the ongoing health of her children and on household poverty levels. The children of women who have completed secondary education are more likely to be vaccinated and receive a balanced diet and appropriate health care. They are also more likely to be educated, with positive implications for their well-being and poverty status as adults. Educated women are better able to contribute to their community's governance and to economic growth with local and national level consequences.

Greater use of mother languages in early grades with later transition to national languages has a powerfully inclusive effect, enhancing classroom participation and learning, decreasing attrition and increasing family and community engagement in a child's learning.<sup>46</sup> Too often physically and mentally disabled and mentally ill children have been excluded from education and reversing this can have a powerful effect on outcomes for them and their families. Finally, alternative basic education, with bridges into mainstream education, national testing and certification can ensure that children who have dropped out of school, for whatever reason, get a second chance to complete their education and benefit from economic opportunities. This is particularly important for children from the poorest households, those whose education has been disrupted by conflict and insecurity or early pregnancy and those impacted by Covid-19-related interruptions.<sup>47</sup>

**Health-related shocks** are significant drivers of impoverishment. Conversely, having reliable access to good quality curative and preventative health services, including maternity and neo-natal care, is hugely protective.<sup>48</sup>

A priority to enable the health sector to support equity is the reform of funding mechanisms for health services, so they can be free at the point of delivery or, where this is not possible, accessed through insurance with subsidies for the poorest. Investing in training and supervision systems for health workers could stop the stigmatized treatment of some poor and minority patients, which has led to their exclusion from medical services. Extending reproductive and sexual health services would benefit women and girls and have wider benefits for society. Priorities would be to deliver informed choice in contraception, regular

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<sup>46</sup> UNICEF, 2016, [The impact of language policy and practice on children's learning: Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa](#). UNICEF.

<sup>47</sup> See the [Chronic Poverty Advisory Network Poverty Monitors](#) and Lustig, N., G. Neidhöfer and M. Tommasi, 2021, Growing Educational Gaps in Latin America: How to Avoid the Most Lasting Scar from COVID-19. Policy Brief, The Future of Work in the Global South.

<sup>48</sup> The [Chronic Poverty Advisory Network's work exploring the factors driving changes in poverty status](#) has found that health shocks are often an important driver of downward mobility and can cut short a household's escape from poverty, driving even non-poor households into poverty.



consultations during pregnancy and trained midwife services for all births, with a focus on reaching women in poverty.

### Targeted interventions

Enabling job-rich economic growth that includes the poorest can contribute to achieving greater equity in the distribution of economic resources through poverty eradication and reduced inequality. This growth agenda requires the development and implementation of cross-ministerial plans emphasizing enabling inclusive agriculture (particularly smallholder agriculture) alongside creating healthy conditions for the non-farm economy (especially rural). Enabling ‘growth from below’ in combination with ‘growth from above’<sup>49</sup> is more likely to generate employment and income growth across all income groups, thus contributing more to equity than generic growth policies.

Implementation will require governments to use all available policy instruments to improve the quality and quantity of work for the poorest people, including an income floor through labour intensive public works. This can be complemented by a social protection system that provides income security to everyone at every stage of the life cycle. It will also require the development of a national banking framework to enable (and promote) the development of a diverse, competitive and gender-aware financial sector, that reaches all geographic areas and population groups within the country. This should offer low entry cost and accessible financial services including savings, current accounts, credit and insurance products (including weather insurance for farmers), flexible approaches to collateral (social collateral, livestock as collateral), microfinance, and mobile banking, while ensuring savers’ deposits are safe.<sup>50</sup> It should also be regulated as necessary to ensure access and the absence of predatory and impoverishing patterns of lending, as well as in recognition of the particular challenges related to risk and seasonality that the agricultural sector faces.<sup>51</sup> Governments should also ensure energy and connectivity for all through regulation, policy and investment<sup>52</sup> because of the enabling impact that access to a reliable energy supply and to the internet and telecoms can have on farm and off-farm income, inclusion and well-being outcomes.<sup>53</sup>

Enabling growth needs to be complemented by interventions that support the very poorest and most marginalized. Some are unable to work due to age, chronic illness or disability but others remain severely poor even when engaging in economically productive activities or are pushed into poverty by shocks or adverse social and economic relations. These people need

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Growth from above’ refers to growth stimulated by large, centralised policies and investments.

<sup>50</sup> CPAN, 2019, [Growth: 4<sup>th</sup> Chronic Poverty Report](#). London: CPAN, ODI.

<sup>51</sup> CPAN, 2015, ‘Financial inclusion policy guide: enhanced resilience through savings and insurance via linkages and digital technology’. Policy Guide 6. London: CPAN, ODI.

<sup>52</sup> CPAN, 2019, [Growth: 4<sup>th</sup> Chronic Poverty Report](#). London: CPAN, ODI.

<sup>53</sup> CPAN, 2013, [Energy Policy Guide: Harnessing the power of energy access for chronic poverty reduction](#). London: CPAN, ODI.

multidimensional support, including social protection, to enable accumulation and sustained movement out of poverty.

Addressing discrimination<sup>54</sup> can be part of a process of transformative social change, driven in part by social justice-oriented political parties in the political domain. Where social movements are weak, progress can be made in the context of a legal framework that counters discrimination and defends equity. A first step is to ensure that a country's constitution, laws and policies are non-discriminatory (such as labour markets, housing, etc.). This is more likely to occur where groups that are marginalized and discriminated against have effective political representation by social justice-oriented political parties.<sup>55</sup> However, it is important to note that in some country contexts improved political representation for marginalized ethnic and racial groups has occurred alongside income gains being captured by a small elite from the designated group, the co-option of leadership and a dulling of urgency around racialized social justice issues.<sup>56</sup> This does not mean that progress is impossible, but that persistence and a comprehensive strategy are both required.

Many constitutions around the world do not simply seek to counter discrimination but go further in requiring the promotion of equity and equality. However, legislation alone is not enough, and effective implementation requires ensuring that everyone has equal access to legal redress. This depends on legal, policy and institutional measures, including strengthened accountability through justice systems and social accountability mechanisms. Practical measures can include an equitable system of legal aid or legal advice and a network of paralegals.

Key steps in addressing discrimination are to provide access to public services equally to all, without distinction of any kind. A useful first step is universal birth registration, to ensure that everyone has the documentation to support their rights to access public services. The state can support inclusion in the labour market by promoting public sector workforce diversity and prohibiting discrimination in public service delivery. Multilingual service delivery and accessibility standards and gender-responsive budgeting are also important measures in ending discrimination and ensuring equity.

South Africa, which is seeking to reverse the impact of decades of institutionalized racism, now has a constitution that clearly states the right to equality of opportunity and provides strong protection against discrimination. This is supported by anti-discrimination legislation, including the Employment Equity Act (1998) and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention

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<sup>54</sup> Shepherd, A., K. Bird and M. S. Sarwar, 2019, [Leave No One Behind: Priority actions for governments in the first 1000 days](#). CPAN Challenge Paper. No 41. February 2019. London: ODI. UNSDG, 2019, [Leaving No One Behind: A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams](#). Washington: UNSDG.

<sup>55</sup> Marcus, R., A. Mdee and E. Page, 2017, [Do anti-discrimination measures reduce poverty among marginalised social groups?](#) Expertgruppen för biståndsanalys (EBA) Rapport 2017:02.

<sup>56</sup> Marcus, R., A. Mdee and E. Page, 2017, [Do anti-discrimination measures reduce poverty among marginalised social groups?](#) Expertgruppen för biståndsanalys (EBA) Rapport 2017:02.

of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000),<sup>57</sup> which prohibit unfair discrimination on a number of grounds, including race, gender and disability. The 2000 Act also seeks to ensure access to justice through the designation of Equality Courts to address equality infringements, discrimination and hate speech.<sup>58</sup> Affirmative action in employment, business, education, health and housing can also serve to counteract discrimination and inequality, but this needs to be implemented in such a way as to avoid benefits solely accruing to the elites within particular groups.<sup>59, 60</sup>

This provides an example that could be adapted to local conditions. In countries with a functioning and accessible legal system, it is possible to both criminalize discrimination and place an obligation on the state to promote social equity. However, where the legal system is weak and/or access is poor, the best approach may be to institute public information campaigns that seek to reduce discrimination and exclusion. These can shift attitudes incrementally, particularly when coupled with a negotiated approach to norm change and working with local leaders.<sup>61</sup> Affirmative action and quotas can also support equity and the inclusion of previously excluded groups. However, such interventions in labour markets or higher education based around ethnic, racial or caste designations can entrench divisions and can easily be manipulated to promote racist agendas<sup>62</sup> and so need to be designed and implemented with care, with incrementally increasing targets set for improved equity outcomes and complementary measures to ensure that individuals from marginalized groups can benefit from the core policies (for example, financial support for poor students, so that they can benefit from reserved places in higher education, and/or measures to prevent the concentration of benefits among a small elite from the target population).

Gender equity can be enabled by diverse policy instruments and interventions, spanning the revision of the constitution through to ensuring that women have equal access to education and the labour market. Due to space constraints, this guidance note focuses on women's rights to inherit and own property, because asset ownership is important in supporting women's agency, which in turn plays a vital role in enabling women to achieve equity. Legal and associated institutional reforms in women's access to land tend to be strongly resisted and are

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<sup>57</sup> Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000 (Act No. 4 of 2000).

<sup>58</sup> South Africa, Republic of, 2020, [National Action Plan \(NAP\) to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance](#). Pretoria, Republic of South Africa.

<sup>59</sup> Marcus, R., A. Mdee and E. Page, 2017, [Do anti-discrimination measures reduce poverty among marginalised social groups?](#) Expertgruppen för biståndsanalys (EBA) Rapport 2017:02.

<sup>60</sup> Ratuva, S., 2013, ["Black empowerment" policies: Dilemmas of affirmative action in South Africa](#). In *Politics of preferential development: Trans-global study of affirmative action and ethnic conflict in Fiji, Malaysia and South Africa* (pp. 219–240). ANU Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46n2xc.12>.

<sup>61</sup> Bird, K., 2018, [Practical measures to enable the economic empowerment of chronically poor women](#).

CPAN/ODI Working Paper. ODI Working Paper No. 529. London: ODI

<sup>62</sup> For example, "(A)ffirmative action can create new dimensions of inclusion and exclusion, since affirmative action policies act as gateways to resources." (Marcus, R., A. Mdee and E. Page, 2017, [Do anti-discrimination measures reduce poverty among marginalised social groups?](#) Expertgruppen för biståndsanalys (EBA) Rapport 2017:02.)

usually implemented very slowly. However, progress can be made, and reforms supported by training for the judiciary and public awareness and behaviour change communication campaigns can ensure implementation. Where land is scarce, legal, institutional and market reforms can enable the development of rental markets (including by making land ownership secure for landlords). Innovative approaches can also support landless households access productive assets through collective land ownership or land redistribution, for example where tiny plots of previously unused land are given to landless women.<sup>63</sup>

Whatever reforms are put in place to support gender equity, progress can be supported by gender budgeting and equity budgeting alongside policy champions working with domestic social movements to promote change and challenge patriarchal forces that seek to counter social transformation.

### Institutional framework

Appropriate frameworks and the establishment and strengthening of just and equitable institutions to engage with a wider network of stakeholders are of paramount importance to the realization of social equity and leaving no one behind. Effective and inclusive institutional frameworks establish the roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved in delivering systems to ensure social equity and allow social partners to engage with each other. Social equity programmes are often implemented in the absence of an appropriate legal framework, or funded through external sources, and may be subject to political or economic changes, weakening the commitment to social equity. Institutions for social equity should be established and defined by law, supported by a long-term strategy, and reinforced by an appropriate and adequately funded long-term framework. They should also have women and minority groups represented in their governance structures, provide widespread access to information about available programmes, and establish accessible complaint and appeal mechanisms. Specific institutions may be established for different groups that experience discrimination or that are in danger of being left behind. For example, Kenya's National Gender and Equalities Commission seeks to ensure equality and freedom from discrimination and has a wide remit covering women, youth, persons with disabilities, children, older people, minorities and marginalized groups.<sup>64</sup>

### Indicators used by countries

In this section we outline the indicators used by countries to assess progress in achieving equity and inclusion.

#### Equity indicators

Equity indicators developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) cover poverty, income inequality, gender ratios, pensions and social

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<sup>63</sup> Landesa, <https://www.landesa.org/what-we-do/>

<sup>64</sup> Kenya's National Gender and Equalities Commission, <https://www.ngeckkenya.org/>

spending.<sup>65</sup> These could be adapted to suit country-level data availability and contexts and expanded to cover equity in access to goods and services (such as, health, education, electricity, telecoms, water and sanitation), key dimensions of discrimination and exclusion (such as, disability, ethnicity, religion and caste), and equity in different parts of the distribution (such as the Palma ratio<sup>66</sup> and the median poverty indicator).<sup>67</sup>

### Inclusion indicators

There is no universally accepted measure of exclusion/inclusion, as there is no clear ‘threshold’ below which an individual or household is socially excluded or above which they can be considered to be included.<sup>68</sup> However, the Laeken Exclusion Indicators were endorsed by the European Union in 2001 and are widely recognized (see Table 1). They have the closest fit for advanced economies and need considerable adaptation for low-and middle-income contexts. Nevertheless, they are useful for inclusion here as they provide an example of inclusion indicators that have achieved political buy-in from parties across the political spectrum.

**Table 1. Laeken exclusion indicators (European Union)**

Dimension	Indicator
<b>Primary indicators</b>	
At-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers	Share of persons living in households with an income below 60 percent of the national median income (detailed by age and gender, most frequent activity status, household type, tenure status and illustrative values of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold)
Material deprivation	Multidimensional measure of poverty based on households lacking three of the following 9 items: 1. coping with unexpected expenses; 2. able to afford one week’s annual holiday away from home; 3. avoiding arrears (in mortgage or rent, utility bills or hire purchase instalments); 4. a meal with meat, chicken, fish, or vegetarian equivalent every second day; 5. keeping the home adequately warm; 6. owning a washing machine; 7. owning a color TV; 8. owning a telephone; 9. owning a personal car <sup>69, 70</sup>
Persistent risk-of-poverty rate (60 percent median)	Share of persons living in households with an income below the 60 percent risk-of-poverty threshold in the current year and in at least two of the preceding years (including gender breakdown)

<sup>65</sup> OECD, 2011, [Society at a Glance Asia/Pacific 2011](#). Paris: OECD.

<sup>66</sup> Engberg-Pedersen, L., 2013, [Inequality is not only about poverty](#). The Broker. April 2013.

<sup>67</sup> Lenhardt, A. and A. Shepherd, 2013, [A new ‘median’ inequality indicator, designed to support poverty eradication](#). The Broker. April 2013.

<sup>68</sup> CEPA, 2019, [‘Principles of effective governance for sustainable development’](#) Secretariat of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration. New York: CEPA. October 2019.

<sup>69</sup> These indicators were selected to suit the cultural and economic context of relative poverty in the European Union and might need adjustment for application in a non-OECD setting.

<sup>70</sup> Guio, A. C., E. Marlier, D. Gordon, E. Fahmy, S. Nandy and M. Pomati, 2016, [Improving the measurement of material deprivation at the European Union level](#). *Journal of European Social Policy*. 26 (3), pp. 219-233.

Relative median at-risk-of-poverty gap	Difference between the median income of persons below the low-income threshold and the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, expressed as a percentage of this threshold (including gender breakdown)
Regional cohesion	Coefficient of variation of employment rates
Long-term unemployment rate	Total long-term unemployed population ( $\geq 12$ months, ILO definition) as a proportion of the total active population (including gender)
Persons living in jobless households	Persons aged 0-65 living in households where no one is working as a proportion of persons living in households eligible to work
Early school leavers not in education or training	Share of total population of persons aged 18-24 having achieved ISCED level 2 <sup>71</sup> or less and not attending education or training (including gender breakdowns)
Health exclusion (1)	Unmet health needs
Health exclusion (2)	Number of physician visits in the past year
<b>Secondary indicators</b>	
Income poverty	Differentiated by different categories such as household types, work intensity of households, activity status and accommodation tenure status
Low educational qualifications	Persons with low educational attainment <sup>72</sup> and low reading literacy performance
Material deprivation	Severity of deprivation for deprived population

Source: Developed in Belgium in the early 2000s. Adapted from Labonté, Hadi, and Kauffmann (2011), based on Scutella, et al. (2009).

A useful first step in identifying indicators for low- and middle- income contexts are the indicators of multidimensional deprivation developed by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). These include indicators of income poverty; material deprivation; lack of education; lack of productive role; poor health; and poor housing (with supporting indicators including access to justice; social and political participation; civil rights; security and justice; well-being; information and communications; mobility; and leisure and culture).<sup>73</sup> The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative developed the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index that has been in use since 2010 to report on multidimensional poverty in over 100 developing countries.<sup>74</sup> It complements traditional monetary poverty measures by capturing the acute deprivations in health, education and living standards that a person faces simultaneously.

<sup>71</sup> Equivalent to lower secondary education.

<sup>72</sup> Educational attainment rate of ISCED level 2 or less for adult education by age groups (25-35, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64) (including gender breakdown).

<sup>73</sup> UNDESA, 2016, Leaving no one behind: The imperative of inclusive development. More information can be found at: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/full-report.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> OPHI, [Global Multidimensional Poverty Index](#).

## Case studies

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### Cross-cutting interventions: Addressing ultra-poverty and multiple deprivations

The state seeks to coordinate civil society action in Bangladesh by balancing the desire for oversight with the wish to enable a vibrant non-governmental organization (NGO) sector. A high-profile example of Bangladesh's civil society is the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee's (BRAC) ultra-poor graduation programme,<sup>75</sup> which is described as a targeted, time-bound, holistic, sustainable and sequenced set of interventions. It focuses on a very specific target group, the ultra-poor (people living on half or less of the extreme poverty line of USD1.90 a day) and seeks to enable beneficiaries to build their capabilities and assets and thus secure resilient livelihoods, allowing them to 'graduate' from poverty in a sustained way.

The approach has been tested in different country contexts and has applicable lessons for more broadly targeted policies and programmes seeking to make households and individuals 'development ready', or in other words to bring their capabilities and assets up to a threshold from which they will be able to benefit from development policy and untargeted services and economic measures.

BRAC developed the programme in response to a growing awareness that its programmes commonly failed to benefit the poorest people, either because they were excluded or because the interventions were inappropriately designed to meet their needs.

BRAC's graduation scheme has four pillars: (1) social protection, (2) livelihood promotion, (3) finance, and (4) social empowerment. Participants receive support from the programme for 24 months. All four pillars are closely integrated and complement each other, leading to strong outcomes at the household level including increased or improved assets, food security, savings and financial inclusion, health outcomes, social integration and productive skills.

Health care, financial, and social empowerment interventions run throughout the 24-month programme, whereas the livelihood promotion and consumption support interventions are sequenced. The cash stipend provided under the consumption support component is one of the early interventions, lasting no more than six months. Technical training and coaching, part of the livelihood promotion pillar, are provided early in the programme, followed by the asset transfer and then refresher training. The training focuses on 'the life and technical skills, knowledge and leadership needed to be self-reliant so they can meet their own basic needs, improve their communities and build better futures for themselves and their children'.

Graduation is considered to have occurred when the participating household's social and economic metrics across a number of domains reach a pre-set threshold over the 24-month programme period. Criteria depend on the social and geographic context of the programme. In Bangladesh, core criteria include:

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<sup>75</sup> Source: BRAC, 2021, [What is graduation?](#) BRAC, Dhaka (14 August 2021).

- Secure income: at least three sources of income
- Asset holdings: Asset value doubled since initial transfer
- Food security: Household consumes nutritious meals at least twice a day with protein (meat/fish/egg) at least once a week
- Gender equity: Participant engages in household decision-making (e.g. asset purchase)
- Housing quality: Improved quality of housing (e.g. corrugated roof)
- Social inclusion: Attends social or community events
- WatSan: Access to sanitary latrine and clean drinking water
- Social measures: School-aged children attend school; no under-age marriages; use of family planning

The BRAC scheme provides some useful lessons:

- Multi-component interventions are needed to enable the ultra-poor to exit poverty (including a mix of income and non-income components)
- Long-term, sequenced interventions are needed
- Beneficiaries need an adequate transfer of resources to build resilience
- To address social and financial exclusion participants need to build assets and capabilities
- Mentoring support is important to build capabilities and agency
- A supportive policy and enabling environment enhances results (including access to finance, mainstream development programmes, and government-led social protection programmes)
- Some households may fall back into poverty and there is a need to identify how best to ensure the sustainability of poverty escapes<sup>76</sup>

### Targeted intervention: Financial inclusion

In Pakistan, the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is the country's largest cash transfer programme (by number of beneficiaries and volume of payments).<sup>77</sup> The State Bank of Pakistan, along with international donors, has played an important role in creating an enabling environment for digital transfers from the government to transfer recipients, including through:

- Branchless banking regulations in 2008. Though the central bank gives branchless banking licences only to banks, it has supported and encouraged a range of business model arrangements. Three mobile network operators now own microfinance banks.

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<sup>76</sup> Misha, F.A., W. Raza, J. Ara and E. Van de Poel, 2014, [How far does a big push really push? Mitigating ultra-poverty in Bangladesh](#). ISS Working Paper, No. 549. Rotterdam: International Institute of Social Studies.

<sup>77</sup> Source: Consultative Group to Assist the Poor, 2013, 'An Overview of the G2P Payments Sector in Pakistan'. Washington, DC: CGAP, in Smith, W., L. Scott and A. Shepherd, 2015, [Financial Inclusion Policy Guide: Enhanced Resilience through Savings and Insurance via Linkages and Digital Technology](#). Policy Guide. Chronic Poverty Advisory Network, ODI, London.



- Gradually reducing the Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements for low-balance accounts, making it easier for poorer customers to open an account. This has included allowing banks to open accounts for BISP beneficiaries without the normal verification process, so that fees can be waived.
- Waiving fees for ATM withdrawals for BISP beneficiaries at all banks.
- Launching a National Financial Literacy Programme to promote financial literacy among the general public at the national level. The programme delivers knowledge about basic financial concepts such as budgeting, savings, investments, debt management, financial products and branchless banking.

Some limitations are driven by the need to update the data used for targeting, which is a decade old, and the outdated information held by the National Socio-economic Registry. However, the program is extending flexible payments and mobile banking and reducing financial exclusion, including for poor and rural women.

### **Building the assets of the poorest in Rwanda<sup>78</sup>**

The government of Rwanda has made substantial investments in education and health, with improved universal provision coupled with targeted measures to ensure improved access for the poorest. Investments in education and health are supported by the nationwide social protection scheme targeting both the poorest people and providing categorical support to vulnerable older people and those unable to work due to disability or chronic illness. The program seeks to provide a safety net to prevent the destitution of Rwanda's most vulnerable citizens. It provides a comprehensive support system for people in the lowest well-being category by waiving fees for the national health insurance scheme and for state secondary schools.

The government introduced free universal primary education in 2003, followed by free lower secondary education in 2009 and free upper secondary education through the Seven Year Government Programme (2010-2017). The government is now working on improving education quality by reducing class sizes through 'double-shifting' (two classes per teacher per day). Additional measures include streamlining English language teaching and raising the qualification levels of teachers; improving the specialization of primary teachers; reducing the number of core subjects taught at primary level thus increasing the hours per subject taught and strengthening the system of capitation grants to allow schools to function more effectively.

The state run Mutuelle de Santé health insurance scheme seeks to provide universal access to health care in Rwanda by providing payment exemptions for the poorest and subsidies for the less poor to access public health services. Challenges include targeting errors found elsewhere in Rwanda's social protection system. However, it is notable that health shocks are not in the

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<sup>78</sup> Bird, K., et al., 2019, [Understanding poverty trends and poverty dynamics in Rwanda: Qualitative Report](#). Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPAN) Working Paper. ODI: London.

top five drivers of poverty.<sup>79</sup> This contrasts with many other low- and middle-income countries.

The government aims to tackle income poverty through the Vision 2020 Umurenge Program (VUP) cash for work scheme and by providing direct support for those recognised by the state as unable to work. It also seeks to extend financial inclusion (VUP finance) and improve the life chances of young people (through microfinance loans for poor youth and other measures). These interventions are accompanied by the Girinka (One Cow per Poor Family) Program, a government funded and nationally implemented asset-building programme modelled on traditional livestock lending and sharing mechanisms, where a target beneficiary is given a cow. Once the beneficiary has passed the first calf to the next beneficiary on the list, the livestock becomes formally theirs. The programme is highly effective in enabling poor recipient households to move out of poverty over the medium term.<sup>80</sup> The Girinka Program has been adapted to distribute goats and sheep to poorer and land-scarce households. However, regulations requiring zero grazing and that all cows are kept in a byre limit the poorest households (landless, labour scarce) to own cattle.

Challenges with targeting and the low level of cash transfers mean that this multisectoral approach has attracted criticism. Reforms are attempting to address the challenges, though targeting issues remain. Nevertheless, it remains a rare example of a nationwide government program seeking to provide multisectoral interventions to enable the poorest to build assets and capabilities to enable poverty escapes.

## Peer-to-peer learning and research

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This section presents an overview of peer-to-peer learning and research networks that member countries can access to support their implementation of the policy tools outlined above. (The list was derived from a comprehensive web-based search and consultation with development professionals but may contain gaps.)

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<sup>79</sup> Shepherd, A., A. Simons and K. Bird, 2020, [Rebooting Rwanda's poverty reduction after a slow down](#). London: CPAN, ODI.

<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the Girinka Program was consistently ranked as one of the top three poverty interrupters in focus group discussions with women and men across six study sites in 2019 and when discussing changes in poverty over three different periods (2010/11, 2013/14 and 2016/17). This is despite strongly contrasting landscapes across the study sites. Bird, K. et al., 2020, [Understanding Poverty Trends and Poverty Dynamics in Rwanda](#). London: CPAN, ODI.

**Table 2. Selected practitioner networks**

Network	Members	Notes
The <a href="#">Africa Evidence Network</a> (AEN)	Network of over 300 policymakers, researchers, and practitioners	Aims: to provide credible and timely evidence for government officials and to build policymakers' capacity to use evidence effectively.
<a href="#">Civicus</a>	A global alliance of more than 9,000 civil society organizations and activists in more than 175 countries	Aim: to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world. This includes work on inclusion and government accountability.
<a href="#">International Gender Champions</a> (IGC)	A network of leaders from over 60 countries, including heads of international organizations, permanent missions, and civil society organizations	A leadership network bringing together decision-makers working to break down gender barriers and make gender equality a reality.
<a href="#">Global Coalition to End Child Poverty</a>	Over 22 members including UNICEF, IDS, ODI, OPHI, Plan International and Save the Children.	A global initiative to raise awareness about children living in poverty and support global and national action to alleviate it. Members work together to eradicate child poverty, deprivation and exclusion.
<a href="#">Southern Voice</a>	50 think tank members in Africa, Asia, and Latin America ( <a href="#">Membership list</a> )	Southern Voice is a network of think tanks active in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Their <a href="#">website</a> and a short <a href="#">YouTube video</a> provide a brief overview of their remit and coverage.
<a href="#">Twende Mbele</a>	Network of African government evaluators, NGOs, academics, and international development partners	Aim: to improve government performance, impact citizens and accountability; share experiences; and build a partnership to enable collaboration on developing and implementing monitoring and evaluation systems.
<a href="#">PEP Network</a>	Widespread network of researchers and research organizations across the Global South	International network of researchers in the Global South working on economic and development issues. They seek to influence policy and debate through effective dissemination of solid evidence.
<a href="#">United Cities and Local Governments</a> (UCLG)	Over 240,000 towns, cities and regions; over 175 local and regional government associations; and international development partners including the EU, World Bank, ILO, OECD and UN Habitat.	UCLG is a global network of cities and local, regional, and metropolitan governments and their associations. It has a clearly articulated LNOB agenda and works through collaboration, dialogue, cooperation, and knowledge-sharing.
UNDP and UNSDG Acceleration Toolkit	United Nations Member States	Aim: to support countries in designing policies and programmes to achieve the SDGs, including through the identification of “SDG accelerators”, which are catalytic policy and/or programme areas that can generate benefits for multiple SDGs. The toolkit is web-based and provides analytical tools and advice over a range of sectoral and cross-cutting themes. <sup>81</sup>

<sup>81</sup> UNDP and UNSDG, 2020, [SDG Acceleration Toolkit](#). Washington: UNDP and UNSDG.

**Table 3. Selected international research networks**

Network	Members	Notes
<a href="#">Africa for Results</a> (Afrik4R)	Community-based network of government officials, parliamentarians, the private sector, and civil society	Afrik4R aims to support 18 countries in Africa and two regional economic communities (COMESA and UEMOA) integrate Management for Development Results (MfDR) tools into good governance.
<a href="#">African Community of Practice</a> (AfCoP)	Over 4,000 members from 41 African countries and around the world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge platform – bilingual (French, English)</li> <li>• Strategic focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enabling effective delivery of continental development priorities, with an emphasis on MfDR</li> <li>○ Supporting countries to achieve tangible development results</li> <li>○ Enhancing private sector and civil society sector capacity to contribute to sustainable development</li> <li>○ Leveraging knowledge and learning to increase development effectiveness</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<a href="#">CAMFED</a>	Active in Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, as well as Australia, Canada and the United States	CAMFED is a pan-African movement focusing on the way that girls’ education is delivered.
<a href="#">Chronic Poverty Advisory Network</a> (CPAN)	An international network of researchers, advocacy organizations, implementing NGOs and government practitioners from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, DRC, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Philippines, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.  Hosted at ODI, London.	<p>Focus on tackling chronic poverty, preventing impoverishment, and sustaining escapes from poverty on the road to zero extreme poverty and deprivation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-quality evidence-based mixed methods research, including on poverty dynamics, impact of Covid-19 on the poorest, intersecting inequalities, bottom up growth, education, health, discrimination, conflict and insecurity, governance, LNOB</li> <li>• Policy advice</li> <li>• Policy monitoring</li> <li>• Policy-focused national and international dissemination and engagement</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Commitment to Equity Institute</a> (CEQ Institute)	Initially focused on Latin America, now covers 63 countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe.	Works to reduce inequality and poverty through comprehensive and rigorous tax and benefit incidence analysis, and active engagement with the policy community.
<a href="#">Disability Inclusion Helpdesk</a>	Funded by DFID. Led by Sightsavers, with ADD International, BBC Media Action, BRAC, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), International Disability Alliance (IDA), Humanity & Inclusion, Leonard Cheshire Disability, Light for the World, Sense, and Social Development Direct.	Focus on disability inclusion. Research-based resources and helpdesk.

<p><a href="#">Multi-Actor Network on inequality</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO), European Union (EU)</li> <li>• German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany</li> <li>• King’s College London (KCL), United Kingdom</li> <li>• Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Switzerland</li> <li>• University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa</li> <li>• The United Nations University – Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT), the Netherlands</li> <li>• Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Germany</li> <li>• Collaboration with LSE, London</li> </ul>	<p>This knowledge-sharing platform provides a close and effective network to work toward reducing inequality. The platform aims to develop and enhance the application of knowledge and information on inequality in policies, strategies and projects in international cooperation.</p> <p>The network provides advice, toolkits and clear step-by-step guides for inequality diagnostics, using inequality indicators, the project cycle, poverty analysis, conflict reduction, equity budgeting, targeting for poverty reduction, etc.</p> <p>The network also provides online training on inequality aimed at practitioners in policy and programme development (1) LNOB; (2) poverty; and (3) inequality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ LNOB <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Targeted interventions</li> <li>- Universal policies and programmes</li> <li>- Enabling/ supportive environment</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Poverty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inclusive economic growth</li> <li>- Access to assets and markets</li> <li>- Social security</li> <li>- Access to basic services and rights</li> <li>- Good governance and empowerment of the poorest</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Inequality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Universal access to basic services</li> <li>- Make tax system progressive</li> <li>- Focus state expenditure on policies that improve equality/equity</li> <li>- Implement and enforce minimum wage</li> <li>- Public investment to encourage job-rich growth</li> <li>- Establish public works schemes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><a href="#">Poverty Reduction, Equity and Growth Network (PEGNet)</a></p>	<p>Based at Kiel Institute with over 100 individual and institutional members including ODI, DIAL (Développement, Institutions et Ajustement à Long terme), the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (based in Cape Town)</p>	<p>Network of researchers focusing on poverty, inequality and growth in developing countries. Links to German and international development policy bodies.</p> <p>Aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of virtual research communities</li> <li>• Joint activities, e.g., conferences and seminars, joint research projects</li> <li>• Exchange ideas between researchers and development practitioners</li> <li>• Conduct joint programme and project evaluations</li> <li>• Feed research results into policy formulation processes</li> </ul>

## International development cooperation

Delivering greater social equity and inclusion commonly requires change to policies, programmes, budgeting, and implementation mechanisms. Cross-government policy innovation is frequently needed to deliver improved equity, with engagement at all levels of government. As a result, there are numerous entry points for timely and appropriate technical support. Technical assistance may focus on policies and interventions with a primary objective

of enhanced social equity and inclusion or may aim to ensure that equity and inclusion goals are woven into the design of other policies and interventions. The diversity of technical advice available to governments is illustrated here with a few examples of technical support.

**Social protection:** The 2014–2019 European Union Social Protection Systems Programme (EU-SPS, co-financed by the OECD and the Government of Finland) supported low- and middle-income countries to build sustainable and inclusive social protection systems. It sought to (1) develop appropriate methodologies and tools to assess the social protection policies, programmes and capacities in ten selected partner countries; (2) enhance administrative and technical capacity in the partner countries to support the development of affordable, sustainable and inclusive social protection systems; and (3) generate evidence-based knowledge on the effectiveness of social protection in reducing poverty and vulnerability, addressing inequality and promoting social cohesion.<sup>82</sup>

**Gender equality in education:** UN Women brings together the United Nations’ work on gender equity under one umbrella. Zeroing in on gender equity in education, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) works with communities, governments and partners to remove barriers to girls’ education, prioritizing interventions that enable all girls to complete their secondary education.<sup>83</sup> UNICEF combines technical assistance and direct funding of interventions to:

- tackle discriminatory gender norms and [harmful practices](#) that prevent girls’ access to school and quality learning;
- support governments to ensure that budgets are gender-responsive and that national education plans and policies prioritize gender equality;
- help schools and governments use assessment data to eliminate gender learning gaps;
- promote social protection measures, including cash transfers, to improve girls’ transition to and retention in secondary school;
- focus teacher training and professional development on gender-responsive pedagogies;
- remove gender stereotypes from learning materials; and
- address other obstacles, like distance-related barriers to education, re-entry policies for young mothers, and menstrual hygiene management in schools.

**Poverty reduction:** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) offers technical assistance to enable economic growth and poverty reduction through their Policy Support Instrument. This is targeted at low-income countries and provides advice and support without a borrowing arrangement. It helps countries design effective economic programmes and signals the IMF’s

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<sup>82</sup> OECD, 2019, [Lessons from the EU-SPS Programme: Optimising the role of development partners for social protection](#). OCED Development Centre.

<sup>83</sup> UNICEF, 2021, [Girls’ education: Gender equality in education benefits every child](#). UNICEF. (17 September 2021).

endorsement of policy robustness to donors, multilateral development banks and markets. Funding is initially for one to four years and can be extended to a maximum of five years.<sup>84</sup>

A wide range of policies and interventions contribute to equity, among them those that support economic inclusion and poverty reduction. Aid for trade contributes through building the capacity to trade and, depending on the programme's design, can have a beneficial impact on equity (through a focus on gender equity and women's economic empowerment and youth) and pro-poorest growth (through enabling micro-enterprises to join high value supply chains. Technical assistance in export development programmes has been found to be successful and, in general, these programmes induced a stronger export performance in the targeted sectors.<sup>85</sup>

**Anti-discrimination and inclusion:** UKAid and the Foreign Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) have disability inclusion as part of their core strategy. An example of their work in this area is the Disability Inclusive Development (DID) Programme (2018–2024),<sup>86</sup> which will implement a series of small-scale interventions focusing on increased access to health care and education, improved livelihoods and reduced stigma and discrimination. These will have the dual objective of delivering a better quality of life for persons with disabilities while creating a solid evidence base on what delivers positive results at scale. The programme will seek to change practice by informing governments and the global community.

Addressing discrimination, poverty and intersecting inequalities (including those based on disability and gender) are often *cross-cutting issues* in policy and programmatic design and bilateral and multilateral donors commonly provide technical assistance to support governments in achieving their goals in these areas.

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<sup>84</sup> IMF, 2020, [Policy Support Instrument \(PSI\)](#). IMF Fact Sheet.

<sup>85</sup> For more, see [WTO on Aid for Trade](#).

<sup>86</sup> For more information about this programme see [Sightsavers](#).

## **CEPA strategy guidance note**

### Promotion of social equity

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